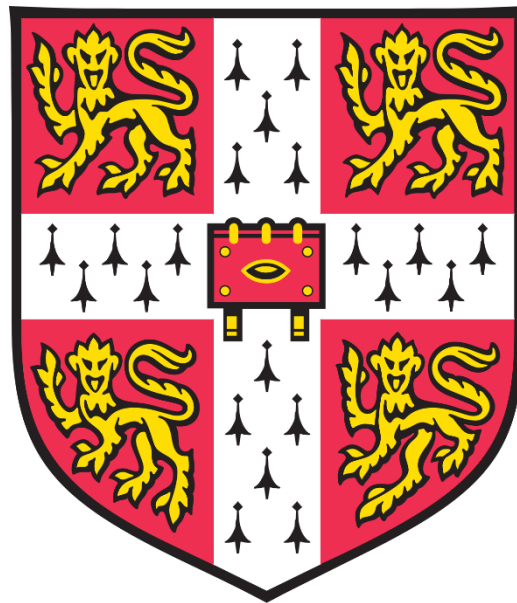


Recovering *Requeche* and Classifying *Clasificadores*:
An Ethnography of Hygienic Enclosure and Montevideo's
Waste Commons

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This dissertation centres on Montevideo's political and moral economy of discards as experienced through the lives and labour of waste-pickers around Uruguay's largest landfill, Felipe Cardoso. These workers are known as *clasificadores* [classifiers] in recognition of their role separating whatever can be recovered from the waste stream from that which cannot. Drawing inspiration from their labour, this thesis explores how waste-pickers have themselves been classified by the state, and analyses the classification of discards carried out by municipal authorities. Conducted from a base next to the landfill as a resident of the COVIFU housing cooperative, 12 months of continuous fieldwork and several subsequent visits consisted principally of participant observation conducted with neighbours who worked the waste stream at nearby dumps, recycling plants, and informal yards.

The burgeoning field of discard studies and the social science of waste has in recent years moved beyond a focus on waste as simply an object of social construction and human classification. This thesis builds on this literature by recognising the agentive role of the non-human in consecrating materials not only as waste, but also as a 'commons'. A central idea is that Montevideo's waste stream is comparable to the historic English commons in several key regards. These include the manner in which disputes over property status centre on use/ access rather than exchange/ ownership; the customary rights which are claimed by vulnerable subjects; and the provision of a refuge from wage labour. A central disciplinary contribution is forged by combining a renewed ethnographic interest in the commons with a historical perspective and the insights of the anthropology of infrastructure, kinship, and materiality. The commons that emerges is neither romantic nor post-capitalist but a vital, temporarily de-commodified space that thrives in the shadow of municipal infrastructure.

The thesis is structured by the relationship between Montevideo's waste commons and its attempted enclosure. Chapter two weaves ethnography of private and public sector waste managers with the history of municipal waste disposal in the city. It pinpoints technologies of containment and elimination as integral to a policy of 'hygienic enclosure' deemed necessary to limit waste's capacity for hygienic and aesthetic chaos as part of attempts to grasp an ever-elusive infrastructural modernity.

Chapter three moves from enclosure to the commons. It draws on ethnography conducted at the Felipe Cardoso landfill and explores waste-picker resistance to attempted hygienic enclosure before turning to historical comparison with the English commons. Chapter four narrows in on two material encounters – with melted ice-cream and plastic potatoes – that draw attention to the ways that particular materialities and affordances of what *clasificadores* call *requeche* (leftovers) prefigure both their emplacement in the waste stream and their extraction from it. *Clasificador* praxis is also shown to

disturb the boundaries of the landfill as well as those separating subjects from objects and rural from urban commons.

Chapter five returns to infrastructure, demonstrating how waste sustains relations of care while also being 'reversed' by the social infrastructure of *clasificador* kin-based labour. The final chapter draws on ethnography conducted at Montevideo's Aries recycling plant, arguing that recent government waste policy blends *clasificadores'* value-based approach to the waste-stream with a Catholic orientation towards the accompaniment of the poor. In privileging jobs for *clasificadores*, the state maintains a link between waste and vulnerability but encloses only a fraction of waste-pickers in hygienic plants. Simultaneously, it transforms waste from a commons into a municipal resource, thus dispossessing a large majority of waste-pickers who remain in the informal sector.

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution.

The total length of the dissertation is 79, 418 words

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home together in the shadow of Felipe Cardoso. “Fancy coming out and living next to a dump for a year” is not a question usually answered in the affirmative, but Mary has never been shy of adventure, and fully embraced what was in many ways an idyllic life in the housing cooperative. Several neighbours said that it had taken Mary to turn a house into a home and I shudder to think what the house or fieldwork would have been like without her. I probably still wouldn’t have gotten round to buying a toilet seat! Needless to say, Mary has also provided the most consistent and important opinions as this thesis has taken shape.

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I only hope that this thesis can do justice to the support and love of this wonderful group of people that I have had around me over the last years.

Chapter One

Introduction : “*La basura es de los pobres!*”- “Rubbish belongs to the poor!”

“*La basura es de los pobres!*”. I first heard this slogan filling the air with its clamour when, in 2014, I attended one of several road blocks organised in Montevideo by the Unión de Clasificadores de Residuos Solidos Urbanos¹ (UCRUS), the trade union for Uruguay’s waste-pickers. Known locally as ‘classifiers’ (*clasificadores*), these are workers who make a living from recovering and recycling materials from the country’s waste stream. For a short time, a junction at the entrance to the neighbourhood of El Cerro was blocked off by a dozen or so waste-picking families, their horses, and their carts (see Fig.1). El Cerro, named after the hill (*cerro*) adjacent to which it was built, is an iconic neighbourhood. The very name Montevideo supposedly originates with the sighting of the hill (*monte*) by approaching Portuguese sailors in the 16th century, and the military fort built there features on Uruguay’s national coat of arms. The neighbourhood was originally founded in the 19th century as Cosmopolis, a utopian settlement built to house worker-immigrants from far-flung lands, and the names of its narrow streets still recall this cosmopolitan dream: Russia, Egypt, Greece, England, Cuba. During the 19th, and early 20th century, El Cerro became home to the city’s meatpacking industry and a stronghold of worker militancy and anarcho-syndicalism. Nowadays, it is home not only to a new municipal recycling plant, but also to a large number of waste-pickers, many of whom had gathered for the roadblock.

The claim that “rubbish belongs to the poor!” was shouted insistently by a group of children sitting on horse and cart, a vehicle that their family normally used to collect recyclables in the city. The children’s father told me that the new “hermetically sealed” rubbish containers that were being rolled out by the local government (the Intendencia de Montevideo, henceforth the Intendencia) – and into which citizens were to separate their recyclables – were making life difficult for waste-pickers like his family. Materials from the new containers were being channelled to the *clasificadores* employed in newly inaugurated formal-sector plants. But spaces at the plants were limited, and whole neighbourhoods were being closed off to informal sector kerbside waste-pickers, the father complained, with commercial enterprises already forbidden from giving informal sector actors waste by Municipal Decree 5383 (2012), which stipulated the need to contract a formalised waste transport company. What livelihood were they expected to turn to instead, his wife asked, theft or drug-dealing?

In this series of short statements, the *clasificador* family from El Cerro touched on the central political issues which brought Montevidean waste-pickers onto the streets to protest during my fieldwork year: problematic new containers, restrictions on the circulation of horse and carts, and the

¹ The Union of Urban Solid Waste Classifiers

diversion of recyclables to formalised waste-pickers in recycling plants. They also hinted at the moral economy of waste-picking labour. *Clasificación* was defended by union leaders as honourable work and contrasted with drug-dealing and theft, which were considered morally dubious but cited as the only feasible alternative employment available to those from the waste-picking milieu. Yet it is the claim that “rubbish belongs to the poor” that captured my attention and which I seek to explore in detail throughout this thesis.

The speakers and the context of the speech act – children astride a horse – are important, for these are animal and human subjects whose engagement in urban waste work has been singled out as unacceptable in 21st century Uruguay, clashing with what I will go on to describe as Montevideo’s “infrastructural modernity”. And it is no accident that the children used the word rubbish. In the following pages, I argue that the peculiar and problematic status of rubbish cannot simply be replaced by the enthusiastic reconceptualisation of waste as resource. The word poor (*pobres*), a descriptive term long discarded by Uruguayan policy-makers in favour of “marginalised” and “excluded” was still an important and rarely pejorative self-referential term used by Montevideo’s popular sectors, and one that I will argue characterised them as customary beneficiaries of access to waste. Rubbish, in a certain vein of ecological scholarship and investigative journalism, is often involuntarily foisted upon the poor, minorities and people of colour whose low-income neighbourhoods become what Steve Lerner (2010) calls “sacrifice zones” (also Melosi 1995; Mohai, Pellow and Roberts 2009; Renfrew 2009). Yet the waste-poor nexus that I explore in this thesis is of a different order, one where rubbish is coveted rather than rejected and where life is threatened by waste’s absence as opposed to its presence. The claim that rubbish “belongs to the poor” is a moral property claim that, I will argue, firmly places rubbish in the sphere of the commons.

More precisely, this thesis pivots on the dynamic relation between the commoning and enclosure of Montevideo’s waste. During research conducted with *clasificadores*, I came to notice how the peculiar status of waste as temporarily discarded, unwanted material enabled a series of relations, exchanges, and practices that ranged from sharing and commoning to recommodification. For *clasificadores*, rubbish was neither an economic bad nor principally a hygienic risk, and from such a perspective policies like containerisation and the fencing of the landfill begin to look less like common-sense waste management practice and more like processes of enclosure and appropriation. I will argue that the enclosure of Montevideo’s waste has principally been carried out on the grounds of hygiene and formalisation but that this leads to dispossession, impoverishment or wage labour for the city’s poor in ways comparable to the enclosure of the English commons. The chapters of this thesis chart the variegated processes that common and enclose waste, from the period *clasificadores* referred to as the ‘free landfill’ (*cantera libre*) through the repression of the (1973-1985) Uruguayan dictatorship, to the Catholic-inspired social inclusion and labour formalisation policies of the current ‘progressive-era’ of centre-left Frente Amplio (Broad Front) national government (2005-).



Figure 1 On the *clasificador* roadblock, with the fort of El Cerro in the background

Classifying Discards I

This thesis might argue that Montevideo's waste constitutes a commons, but it is no less odorous or sticky than rubbish elsewhere. In order to avoid any romantic illusions, let us dive directly into the materiality of the city's rubbish, and the labour of its classifiers, with a typical afternoon at one of my fieldsites, the Cooperative Felipe Cardoso (COFECA).² This is a waste-picking cooperative situated adjacent to the operational landfill (*cantera*) of Felipe Cardoso. It was March of 2014, and I worked assiduously, emptying out black plastic bags delivered by Intendencia trucks onto a ground moist from days of rain. Something fell in front of me, and I attempted to classify it visually. A balloon? No. A condom? No, these were more likely to be found alongside little bars of soap and damp hand-towels in the bags that the cooperative received from love hotels. On closer inspection, the clear tubing identified this item as a medical discard. Composite plastics made it unrecyclable, so I left it in peace, untying another black bag instead. I was working alongside Pedro, affectionately nicknamed Grampa (*El Abuelo*) by his colleagues. Grampa had returned to waste-picking at 60 after formal sector

² All names of persons in this thesis have been changed, as have a number of organisations and businesses. There is only one landfill in Montevideo, so I have decided not to change its name, nor that of its associated waste-picking cooperative, COFECA. A few nicknames have also remained unchanged.

employers had swindled him out of a pension. With skilful dexterity, he unpicked one of the white sacks that arrived from industrial bakeries.

Such sacks are usually fairly promising, and might contain enough flour to see out the month. But they could also contain loose dough that stuck uncomfortably to gloved fingers. Many of the black plastic bags, meanwhile, held an assortment of items factory workers had placed into small ‘waste-paper’ baskets. Often, these were simply scrunched up pieces of paper used to wipe a surface, a nose, or perhaps a bottom. They were effectively worthless, the lowest quality types of paper made by IPUSA, Uruguay’s largest paper manufacturer, where some of the white paper that COFECA classified were sent to be recycled. A transparent plastic packet carried the logo of one of IPUSA’s brands: *Elite* tissues. I left empty crisp packets and tobacco pouches on the ground but picked up clear plastic PET bottles, putting them in one of the large plastic bags that I had placed around me, in a category we call “little bottle” (*la botellita*). The black plastic bag itself joined others in a category known as “black nylon” (*nylon negro*) and I pulled at another that had become snagged on the adhesive from a disposable nappy. From a distance, I heard Matute singing in an attempt to liven up the mood of a landscape that appeared particularly grim after a deluge: mud mixing with soggy cardboard and moist food waste. Still, workers had a solid concrete floor under foot that they had proudly laid themselves several years previous. They also had protective “raincoats” on, a mixture of cagouls and black bin bags in which they had fashioned holes for heads and arms, giving the impression that the rubbish was engaged in the labour of its own classification.

I pushed a mass of transparent “white nylon” (*nylon blanco*) into another bag – this has a higher market value as long as it isn’t too dirty. Another black bag was mixed with the most common and unpleasant contaminant one is likely to find in Uruguayan household rubbish, mundane rather than toxic: the damp, scattered leaves from *yerba mate* tea.³ From the waste’s composition, one could speculate on the origin of its assemblage. Catering workers sitting around a table enjoying pre-prepared sandwiches and quiches on polystyrene trays that they disposed of in the bin, joined soon after by plastic cups from an office cooler, then by the post-lunch *mate* leaves and a tea bag or two. The bell rings: back to work! As Francois Dagognet (1997: 13) asserts, “even the smallest utensil, like the most used cloth, carry with them a sort of tattoo indicating time and contact” and in such conditions “the abandoned or the now unemployed seem an incomparable witness”. Waste here appears as an indicative, if ultimately unreliable and speculative, archive (Rathje and Murphy 2001: 4, Yaeger 2003).

Stevie, my neighbour in the nearby COVIFU housing cooperative as well as my co-worker at COFECA, offered me a bag smeared with a white cream and holding an unidentifiable meaty

³ Mate is a bitter tea, popular in Uruguay and Argentina, drunk from a gourd with a metal straw and often shared. In Uruguay drinking mate is a veritable obsession, with people taking a flask and mate with them everywhere.

substance inside. “For the dog?”, I asked. “No, the chickens”, he suggested, throwing it towards a pile of potential take-home things known as *requeche* that I followed other workers in making for myself. This term is Uruguayan slang for ‘leftovers’, and as used by the general population most commonly refers to food. Amongst *clasificadores*, however, *requeche* can refer to anything recovered from the trash that can be consumed or has a re-use value. A horse wandered over to pick at the fringes of organic waste, and Stevie gently shooed him away by making a puckering noise with his lips. I tried to engage my workmate in conversation but he proved reluctant, preferring instead to concentrate on wiping the cream from his hands. He stopped, and with a colleague started to tie up a bundle of cardboard that he had piled on top of a canvas. I continued unenthusiastically picking at the damp pile in front of me. It was an unsatisfying load, because the small bags were too fiddly to open, I knew that I would not find much of value inside, and whatever I did find had been soiled by the ubiquitous *mate* leaves. I stopped to help the others hoist the cardboard canvas onto their shoulders.

The initial lift is a four-person job but the carrying was done by Stevie alone. The white cream had also got onto the canvas and smudged his neck and shoulder. The bag was heavy because the cardboard had become wet, but this was good because workers are paid by the kilo, and so will earn more from sodden cellulose. Raindrops started to fall again and suddenly there were dark clouds rising over the old landfill of the Usina 6, now a grassy hill whose *raison d’être* is suggested only by the methane pipes that emerge from deep inside its belly. “*Se viene el aguaaaaa*” [“The water is comiiiiiiiiing!”], Matute shouted, interrupting his broadcast of cumbia hits with a weather update. The downpour was not heavy enough to justify stopping work though, so we continued, emptying black bag after black bag. Stevie laid down another canvas onto which I started to pile more damp cardboard, which he arranged so as to maximise the load that could be carried. “Fragile”, read the letters on the cardboard, a description that also applied to Stevie’s body as he bore the heavy load, although he was unlikely to admit it.

Waste Labour: Methodology and Fieldsite

Whether sneaking into the landfill, joining *compañeros* in cooperatives, manning the conveyer belt at recycling plants, levelling piles of rubbish at family recycling yards, or even making the odd outing on horse and cart, I came to know Montevideo’s waste stream rather more intimately than most. As a researcher, waste-picking was not always easy, either in terms of the labour itself, or of explaining to a range of interlocutors exactly why I was so keen to get my hands dirty in Uruguayan rubbish. “Is there no good *requeche* in Scotland?”, a colleague asked, laughing, as we greedily shared some broken Easter egg chocolate that had made its way to COFECA. But labour power was, alongside friendship,

also the most obvious “thing” that I could offer waste-pickers who agreed to participate in my research, whether through recorded interviews, casual conversations, or simply not objecting to my presence. There is a practical and an ethical component to such involvement: I don’t like standing idly by or getting in the way while others are working, even if observation is a key part of the anthropological endeavour. I wanted to pull my weight, even if I struggled and stumbled with heavy bags of recyclables on my shoulders, adopting what Walter Benjamin (1999: 364) called the “jerky gait” of the ragpicker.

A willingness to get my hands dirty was often perceived as proof of my humility, a trait which might well be considered Uruguayans’ “paramount value”. The importance placed on humility is one reason why Uruguay’s last President, Pepe Mujica, touted by the BBC as the “world’s poorest president” (Hernandez 2012) was celebrated even by political opponents for donating 90% of his presidential salary and continuing to live in a humble country home with his wife, three-legged dog, and Volkswagen Beetle when elected to office. When I asked a veteran waste-picker with a fearsome reputation how I would have fared back when the dump was a tougher place and knife-fights were common, he said that I would have been treated well because I was humble, “and if you act with humility, you are treated with humility”.

More importantly perhaps, in order to understand the materiality of rubbish and the *clasificador* orientation towards it, it was crucial that I became an apprentice in waste-work. Physically and sensorially engaging in waste labour helped me to avoid the reification of waste as a uniform category (Gille 2010: 1050), an “amorphous blob” (Van Loon 2002: 106), or merely the discards of cultural classification, leading me instead to engage with the materiality and affordances of such matter. The waste-picking trade involves a range of skills and sensorial sensitivities, while the move into municipal recycling plants requires training in what Carenzo (2016) has called a “craft-in-the-making”. Adoption of the anthropologist-apprentice model (Downey, Dalidowicz and Mason 2014) was inspired by Ingold’s (2000) argument that it is by engaging, moving, and working together in a shared environment that we come to understand and perceive the world. Participant observation, in this framework, “allows the ethnographer to access other people’s ways of perceiving by joining with them in the same currents of practical activity, and by learning to attend to things – as would any novice practitioner – in terms of what they afford in the contexts of what has to be done” (Ingold 2011: 314). This is more than simply a methodological matter – like Ingold, I reject a narrowly constructionist approach to social life where different cultural representations are imposed on the world “out there” in favour of the idea of collaborative, engaged, fluid, but also political classifications made by subjects-in-their-environment.

The discussion is apposite, because one of the main theorists of the constructionist/ symbolist approach has also remained influential in the theorisation of waste. Mary Douglas’s (2002 [1966]) claim that dirt was “simply matter out of place” has become widely accepted as underlining the

culturally relative, as opposed to universal, nature of ideas of purity and pollution. More specifically, Douglas (2002 [1966]) argued that dirt, pollution, and taboo emerge as part of cultural attempts to order a fuzzy environment that would otherwise not make sense. Whenever a creature, practice, or subject falls into the cracks and crevices of systems of classification, then they are conceptualised as polluted or dirty. Douglas's theory is, of course, not specifically one of rubbish, but it has served as an accepted shorthand for the cultural relativity of waste.

As Strasser (1999: 9) has argued however, different conceptualisations of waste often have as much to do with class as with culture. Indeed, in the case of *clasificadores*, I will argue that class, understood as the relationship of subjects to the productive economy and its leftovers, plays a more important role than culture in explaining different approaches to waste. Rather than belonging to a culture that classifies the environment in ways that an ethnographer (from a different culture) could never access, *clasificadores* classify waste by drawing on sensory immersion, imagination, and attunement to the political economy of discards. By tearing open rubbish sacks, picking over waste piles, gathering expectantly in front of overflowing dump trucks, and selling materials to intermediaries, I came much closer to understanding popular categorisations of the heterogeneous materials officially bundled together under the categories of household, industrial, and commercial waste.

The base for my exploration of Montevideo's waste economy was a home at the *Cooperativa de Vivienda Nuestro Futuro* (COVIFU), the "Our Future Housing Cooperative", situated a few hundred metres from Montevideo's Felipe Cardoso landfill (see Fig.2). The cooperative consisted of two dozen homes constructed by the residents themselves, many of whom had formerly lived in the Villa del Cerdito (Pig Town) shantytown located on top of the old Usina 5 landfill and close to the COFECA recycling cooperative. COVIFU was divided into two strips of homes separated only by a row of sports pitches. On one side was COVIFU Rural, officially situated in rural Montevideo, and on the other was COVIFU Urbano, in urban Montevideo. In 2010, whilst conducting undergraduate research with *clasificadores* in the area, I had been recruited as a labourer on the COVIFU building site, getting to know the future residents and never guessing that I might one day come to occupy one of the homes myself.

All the houses officially belonged to the cooperative rather than individual residents, but the COVIFU Rural house that I was given to live in had been adjudicated to social worker and self-proclaimed "lay missionary" Oscar, who had yet to occupy it. In exchange for staying rent-free for the year of 2014, I agreed to fix up the house, a shell that initially lacked a toilet, furniture, or even windows. Such "house-work" encroached into the time that I could have spent participating in other collective activities. But it was also an opportunity to ask a series of questions of my new neighbours. What things might I need to constitute an acceptable home and where could I best procure them in the neighbourhood? What type of goods could be recovered from the landfill? And what help could I

expect from my neighbours? As I discovered, rather a lot could be extracted from the landfill or intercepted before they reached it, including my bed, mattress, cooker, and even my bathroom door. As for my neighbours, some could be counted upon unconditionally, others were less reliable and a few would be there for me if the price was right. But almost without exception, they let me into their lives and invited my partner and I to family parties, tropical music concerts, children's football tournaments, and Afro-Uruguayan religious *sesiones*. Without such openness and generosity, this research would never have been possible.

Most of the COVIFU residents were waste-pickers, and a large part of my fieldwork consisted of joining them in the labour of waste classification and recovery. Initially, I spent most time with neighbours Stevie, Moncho and Victoria at COFECA, but on occasion I also joined another neighbour, Morocho, who worked with the Pedro Trastos cooperative. I accompanied my immediate neighbour, and Morocho's stepson, Juan when he recovered materials at the landfill. Towards the end of my fieldwork period I asked María if I could work at the recycling yard that she ran with her adult children, most of whom were neighbours in COVIFU. Finally, when COFECA was disbanded and its workers were incorporated into a new formal sector recycling plant, I followed them to the conveyer belt. As well as working with neighbours, I conversed informally over innumerable *mates* and conducted semi-structured interviews with them about their lives and labour, hopes and dreams.

One of the advantages of living as well as working with *clasificadores* was that this gave me a rather different perspective into their subjectivities. On the one hand, it allowed me to encounter them beyond an occupational status as *clasificadores* and to get to know them as mothers, brothers, neighbours, friends, pig-rearers and amateur footballers. On the other, I could also observe *clasificadores* in their own milieu. Much research on waste-pickers has focused on the stigmatisation that they suffer as they collect waste in city centres and affluent neighbourhoods (Lombardi 2006; Whitson 2011; Sternberg 2013; Neiburg and Nicaise 2010; Moraes da Costa 2016; Magalhaes 2016). Such encounters between middle-class neighbours and waste-pickers are but one moment in the process of waste recovery, one which may be positive or negative, or indeed may not take place at all, as was the case for most of my neighbours who had waste brought to them around Felipe Cardoso. Nevertheless, the appearance of waste-pickers in middle-class areas has dominated media reports and scholarship in cities like Buenos Aires and Montevideo, and has encouraged policies centred on themes of visibility, rights, and recognition.

Not everyone who lives in COVIFU, or the neighbourhood of Flor de Maroñas to which it is attached, is a waste-picker. But I only rarely heard of waste-pickers being stigmatised locally because of their occupation. Given that my neighbours spent most of their time in *Flor*, and other popular/working-class neighbourhoods, they did not regularly endure middle-class insults or a reproachful bourgeois gaze. When activists and academics speak of "society" treating waste-pickers like the rubbish they collect, I suspect that they often, perhaps subconsciously, engage in an exercise of class-

based synecdoche, where “high society” comes to stand for society as a whole (c.f. Ingold 1993a: 212). But the working-class residents of Flor de Maroñas are just as much part of society as anyone else, and it was with this society-as- “collective audience” (Graeber 2001: 76) that my waste-picking neighbours interacted on a daily basis, as they picked up their children from school or football practice, went to Sunday market, or waited endlessly for the only bus that served the neighbourhood. I remember the predicament of Gonzalo, who coached Juan’s son Ivan at the Flor de Maroñas football team. Struggling to find work as an electrician, Gonzalo listened enviously to tales of the bounty Juan brought back from the *cantera*, and wondered out loud about whether he might not give it a go himself.

As Kathleen Millar (2012: 168) notes, “much of the recent literature on urban poverty suggests that today’s urban poor are excluded economically, politically and socially, and constitute a residual class that is superfluous to the global capitalist economy”. But like the Rio de Janeiro landfill *catadores* Millar has worked with, Montevideo’s *clasificadores* are intimately connected to the broader citizenry by way of their waste. The city’s built environment is literally sustained by their labour, crystallised in the steel girders made from recovered scrap metal. In any case, I suspect that the centre-periphery dichotomy is not a particularly useful heuristic tool for understanding the lived subjectivities of my interlocutors. While *el centro* for me meant the historic heart of Montevideo, for my interlocutors the word *centro* was used for their local socio-educative centre (Los Trigos) or the Portones shopping centre to the East. As a desirable leisure space, the relatively accessible stretch of beaches and their promenade (*rambla*) held much greater appeal than Montevideo’s old colonial heart, rich in architectural grandeur but suffused with airs of gradual decline.

In many ways, the real centre of both neighbourhood economic life, and this thesis, is the landfill itself. Viewed from the air, many elements of the surrounding built environment radiate out from the Felipe Cardoso. There are the waste treatment facilities established around its perimeter, such as the privately-owned medical waste disposal plant, and the municipal facilities that capture methane gas and leachates. There are the yards that companies use for keeping skips, and the spaces where waste-picking families intercept trucks in order to classify and “fly-tip” their contents. There is waste-picker housing, from the shantytown of Felipe Cardoso, to the housing cooperatives of COVIFU, COVICRUZ and COVISOCIAL, built to replace informal settlements. The *cantera* is the centre of economic activity but also of (largely male) sociality, stories, and dreams of redemption and progress.

For the cultural theorists Geoffrey Kantaris and Robert Stam, waste and landfills are de-encharmed objects and spaces. Drawing on the writing of Walter Benjamin, Kantaris (2016: 54) argues that garbage is the “commodity stripped of its ‘aura’...a thoroughly defetishized object”. Stam (1999: 72–3), meanwhile, writes of the dump’s “squalid phantasmagoria”, where “the same commodities that had been fetishized by advertising, dynamized by montage and haloed through backlighting, are stripped of their aura of charismatic power”. But while materials that arrive at the landfill have lost

their commodity status, they have certainly not, as Kantaris would have it, “fallen out of the realms of desire, exchange, and use” (2016: 54). When waste vehicles turned the corner onto Felipe Cardoso, their ontological status underwent a sharp revision, since waste’s antithetical relationship to value was always at risk of being disturbed by *clasificador* recovery, repair and re-use (Graham and Thrift 2007).



Figure 2 Farm workers harvesting, as trucks line up to dump at the Usina 8 of Felipe Cardoso behind them

I would suggest, drawing on the work of Jane Bennett (2001), that we can count Montevideo’s landfill among the “natural and cultural sites that have the power to ‘enchant’” (2001:3), a space of life rather than death and destruction (Reno 2014). Enchantment at the landfill is intimately linked to the joyful corporeal experience of searching, rummaging, and discovering and it rests on the fundamental conjuring trick of getting something from nothing. Memories of chance finds, and bodily dispositions attuned to the search for another, sustain in *clasificadores* a powerful sense of attachment to the landfill, even when other job opportunities beckon. And as we shall observe in subsequent chapters, the temporary de-commodification of waste materials and their owner-less status also inspires a praxis of waste-picker sharing and gifting.

Classifying Discards II: Waste, Waste-picking and Infrastructure

The work of the historian, Walter Benjamin (1999: 441) famously argued, can be compared to that of the chiffonier, the 19th century Parisian figure “dressed in rags [lumpen]...and occupied with them”. Critical theorists, too, have been seen as chiffoniers who “save... treasure from the capitalist order of things in order to construct objects that will help upset its digestive system” (Wohlfarth 2006:18). The anthropologist of waste, I would suggest, can also be seen to engage in a classification of discarded materials analogous to that of the Uruguayan *clasificador*. Like these workers, social scientists who write about discards must also sift through and categorise them in a way that enables their potential conceptual value to be realised.

Should the terms waste, rubbish, trash, garbage and discards be used indiscriminately? In an effort to defamiliarise the reader, Passos Lima (2015) studiously avoids using the word rubbish in her ethnography of Brazilian waste-pickers, emphasizing that this category makes little sense for her interlocutors. Zsuzsa Gille (2007, 2010) develops the macro-level concept of “waste regimes” but also attempts a trans-historical definition of waste as “surplus material”. Josh Reno has written of “trash” (2009) before turning to “scat” (2014) and John Scanlan philosophises “On Garbage” (2005), but is soon discussing waste, imperfection, disorder and nothingness. There are “waste scholars” but there is also a growing subfield of “discard studies” (e.g. Liboiron 2011). Each of these terms is subtly different from the other; each has its own etymology and genealogy in different languages; each brings its own evocations and associations.

In this thesis, I employ a two-fold approach to the linguistic determination of waste matter. Firstly, I attend to and explore the categories employed by my waste-picking interlocutors, who broadly divide up the waste stream into *material*, *requeche* and *basura*. *Material* corresponds to the different categories of materials that they recover in order to sell to intermediaries by the kilo. This is then sub-classified into *blanco* (white paper), *botellita* (PET bottles), *pomo* (high density polyethylene), *metal* (non-ferrous metals), *hierro* (scrap metal), *cartón* (cardboard) and *nylon* (low density polyethylene). The labour of selecting *material* can be understood principally as “commodity classification” (O’Hare 2013): *clasificadores* generally know the market price of such materials and their recovery involves sensory skill in identifying valuable items.

Classifying *material* can be contrasted with the work involved in the recovery of *requeche*. While a large part of *clasificadores*’ time was spent sorting plastics, paper and metals, they would also invariably make a little pile of interesting things to be taken home or sold at market. This might include a varied array of heterogeneous things: packets of spices, children’s toys, empty containers, electronics, ornaments, clothes, and so on. There was in the process of selecting such items rather more

creativity, spontaneity and, I would argue, non-human agency involved. Following Simondon (2009 [1964]), Deleuze (1994) and more recently Reno (2009), I describe this labour of recovery as “individuation” (O’ Hare 2013), a concept that I will explore later in greater depth but which is related to Jane Bennett’s (2010) idea of “thing power” whereby materials exert an attraction over and above human agency and intentionality. Finally, we have the category of *basura* (rubbish), used by *clasificadores* to describe the waste stream generally but also contrasted with the previous terms, so that a dump truck without much *material* or *requeche* might be dismissed as “pure rubbish” (*pura basura*).

These native Uruguayan waste categories are important, but I also wish to conserve the analytical value of concepts like discard, surplus, and waste. One of the reasons that the term discard has been adopted for an interdisciplinary sub-field is its relative neutrality compared to “waste”. The English word waste is indelibly associated with inefficiency and improper use, whether of time, money or opportunities (Frow 2003). To say that people discard, on the other hand, suggests the inevitable and everyday need to rid oneself of surplus things, like the bad “card” from which the term is derived. More specifically, and following Gille (2010) and Evans (2014), this thesis argues that there exists a political and moral economy of discards in which surplus materials can become part of the waste commons but might also be intercepted before entering the waste stream and be transformed into donations, or reconverted to commodities.

This political and moral economy of discards has been the object of a considerable amount of research in recent years, particularly in Latin America, and there are material factors that partly explain the increased interest as well as the direction of scholarship. Foci of waste-picking scholarship exist in other geographical regions of course, including India, where there are a large number of low caste waste-pickers,⁴ and South Africa, whose post-apartheid waste policies have provided much fuel for discussion and critique (e.g. Miraftab 2004, Samson 2015). But in situating my work within waste literature here, I focus principally on Uruguay and its neighbours Brazil and Argentina, because these are the countries with which flows of Uruguayan waste, ideas and activism are most directly connected.

In these countries, a series of interlinked economic crises took place between 2001 and 2002. Waste-pickers, known in Brazil as *catadores* and in Argentina as *cirujas/ cartoneros*, certainly predate these crises (Perelman 2008, Suarez 2016). But the sharp economic downturn made thousands of workers unemployed, and many of these turned to recovering materials from the waste-stream in order to earn a living. The devaluing of local currencies also made imports more expensive, driving up the price of local recyclables and making this form of livelihood more viable. The increased

⁴ Such research has focused on the waste-picker trade union movement (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005, Chikarmane 2014, Samson 2015), the occupational injuries suffered by waste-pickers (Singh and Chokhandre 2015), the economics of the waste recycling trade (Gill 2009, Balasubramanian 2015) and the relationship between waste-pickers and public policy (Sandhu 2015, Shekar 2015).

number of waste-pickers translated into their heightened visibility and, for many, such workers came to be conceived of as symbols of national crisis (Grimson 2008; Whitson 2011).

Increased media and bourgeois interest in waste-pickers in the 2000s was accompanied by a growing scholarly output. This work has focused on: the economics of the “informal” waste trade; stigmatisation and discrimination suffered by waste workers; the history of waste-picking; and attempts by waste-pickers to organise into cooperatives, trade unions and political movements. The latter organisation of waste-pickers has been encouraged by a series of developments. First, a significant number of workers who were made unemployed brought their trade union experience into the waste-picking trade, and some political activists became *clasificadores* precisely in order to organise the sector (O’Hare 2017). Second, a variety of NGOs accompanied and encouraged the collective organisation of waste-pickers, ranging from local organisations to the continent-wide Avina, which receives substantial funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Sorroche 2015, Rosaldo 2016). Thirdly, the election of a series of centre-left governments in Latin America created an atmosphere propitious to the inclusion of organised waste-pickers into state waste management programs (Marello and Helwege 2014).

These developments in no way constitute a uniform process – important differences exist between countries, cities, and indeed municipalities. The fact that waste management is almost always devolved to local authorities means that radically different approaches towards waste and the waste-picking “problem” can exist in neighbouring localities. Nevertheless, in Argentina and Uruguay we can identify a common trend towards the decriminalisation of wastepicking (occurring in Montevideo in 1990, and in Buenos Aires in 2002) and the inclusion of waste-pickers into municipal recycling plants (in Buenos Aires from 2003, and in Montevideo in 2014). Brazilian President Luiz Ignazio Lula da Silva (2003-2011) was sympathetic to *catadores* and often addressed their national congress, while President Dilma Rousseff’s (2011-2016) government brought in ground-breaking national legislation to favour waste-picking cooperatives in municipal waste tenders. But there is still enormous variation in how waste-pickers are treated in different Brazilian cities and regions. While the broader Latin American panorama is expectedly diverse (see REDLACRE 2017), Colombia deserves special mention for its historic waste-picker trade union, its levels of cooperativisation, and the role that waste has played in recent public life (Samson 2015a; Rosaldo 2016; also Birbeck 1978).

Despite local variations, the vast majority of Latin American waste-pickers do not work in cooperatives or recycling plants and are not active trade union members (Medina 2005). Nevertheless, most academic research has been conducted with such collectives, shaping the profile of waste-picking scholarship. In Argentina, for instance, we find the early work of Fajn (2002) on the El Ceibo recycling cooperative; that of Angelico and Gutierrez (2004) on the Nuevos Rumbos and El Álamo cooperatives; that of Sorroche (2010, 2016) and Carenzo and Fernandez Alvarez (2011) on the Reciclando Sueños cooperative; and my own research at the NuevaMente cooperative (2013). In

Brazil, the work of Gutberlet (2008, 2016) has focused on recycling cooperatives, while Wirth (2010, 2016) researches classification plants and the national *catador* movement (MNCR) and Passos Lima (2015) conducted doctoral fieldwork with a landfill-based cooperative. In Uruguay, my undergraduate thesis (O'Hare 2011), some of Lucia Fernandez 's excellent research (2007, 2010, 2012), Gaston Fernandez 's (2009) undergraduate thesis, and the research carried out by social scientists from the Universidad de la Republica's Cooperative Studies Unit (Elizalde et al 2012, Elizalde and Fry 2010, Sarachu and Texeira 2013, Sarachu et al N.D, Texeira 2014) have all focused on Montevidean waste-picking cooperatives.

There is much of value in this diverse body of work, and my thesis seeks to build on some of the central themes raised, such as inter-institutional relations (Villanova 2008; Reynals 2002; Careno & Fernández Alvarez 2009) and the trajectory of waste objects (Angelico y Maldovan 2008). Nevertheless, the singling out and quiet celebration of certain collective recycling endeavours at the expense of so-called "individual" waste-pickers can be problematised. Careno and Miguez (2010) argue that many Argentine waste scholars have engaged in a simplistic division between cooperativised waste-pickers whom they associate with the values of solidarity, formality and dignification; and non-cooperativised waste-pickers negatively associated with individualism, informality and precarity. Long-term ethnography conducted with Latin American waste-pickers who do not form part of an association or cooperative is sparse, although the work of Gorban (e.g. 2004), Schamber (2008) and Millar (2008, 2012, 2014, 2015) stands out. My fieldwork site brought me into contact with waste-pickers who had diverse workplace locations, collective labour arrangements, livelihood strategies, and degrees of economic (in)formality. I did not so much "follow the waste" or trace the "social life of things" (Appadurai 1986) as follow my neighbours, joining them waste-picking at a range of sites. One of the features of my research, then, is its ability to compare the experiences of workers in formal plants and cooperatives with those who work in different kinds of collectives, such as family units and partner (*socio*) based arrangements.

Turning from waste-pickers to social science waste scholarship more generally, this body of work can, following Gille (2010), be organised under the headings of: waste governance (Chilvers & Burgess 2008; Davies 2008; Fagan 2004); waste ethics (Bennett 2001, Hawkins 2006; 2007); capitalism & waste (Foster 1994; Hanson 2001); post-human and vital materialist approaches to waste (Gregson and Crang 2010, Gregson et al 2010, Hird 2012, Reno 2014); and ethnographies of waste management (Reno 2009, 2016, Millar 2008, 2012, 2014). I echo many of these works in highlighting the ways in which waste's very materiality and indeterminacy challenges the idea that dirt is simply culturally relative "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966), and naming rubbish a strategy for "taking control over the fuzzy reality of matter" (Douny 2007: 313).

A particular variant of the anthropology of waste has focused on waste services as an example of infrastructural provision. In line with themes emergent from the turn towards infrastructure in

anthropology (e.g. Larkin 2013, Harvey, Jensen and Morita 2016, Venkatesan *et al* 2016), this literature has concentrated on the materiality of waste infrastructure (Harvey 2013, Chalfin 2014, Fredericks 2014, Miraftab 2004); its temporality; the relation between the flow, interruption and visibility of infrastructure (Dalakoglou and Kallianos 2014); and the potential of waste infrastructure to stimulate new politics and publics (Stamatoplou-Robbins 2014, Chalfin 2014). Chapter 2 of this thesis, in focusing on the Intendencia's discursive and material treatment of Montevideo's waste, speaks most directly to the anthropology of infrastructure. However, the wider thesis and its detailing of waste-picker practices can also be seen as relating to infrastructure if we recognise, as waste-picker activists have long argued, that waste-pickers provide an infrastructural service when they collect and recycle materials disposed of by the population. As in Fredericks's (2014: 539) research in Dakar, infrastructure in such instances is "devolved" onto labour and bodies which "bear the brunt of this labor-intensive infrastructure through the onerous physical demands of the work itself, associated diseases...and the stigma of laboring in filth". The labour of *clasificadores* and their commoning of waste, I suggest, constitute a "shadow infrastructure" that absolves institutional waste service providers from some of their responsibilities while potentially creating new challenges for them through environmental contamination.

The idea of waste-pickers as a shadow infrastructure builds on AbdouMaliq Simone's (2004, 2010) argument that people can be considered as infrastructure in many cities of the Global South. For Simone (2004: 408), urban African ruins mask a hive of social infrastructure, improvised "combinations of objects, spaces, persons and practices". Elsewhere, he suggests that the lack of what is commonly conceived of as infrastructure becomes an occasion for "residents to assemble ways of working together that otherwise would not be possible" (2010: 124). Until recently, an official infrastructure of recycling has not been present in Montevideo, only the "spontaneous" (Fernandez 2014) recycling carried out by *clasificadores*. In focusing on waste and kinship in chapter 5, I highlight not only that the waste commons provide a means for families to take care of each other, but also that kinship constitutes the backbone of a social infrastructure of recycling. That is to say, I do not agree that infrastructure can be considered purely as "matter that enable the movement of other matter" (Larkin 2013: 329). Mine is, to paraphrase Tim Ingold, an ethnography of infrastructure with people in it.

As Dalakoglou (2016) writes, the European "infrastructure gap" – the gap in the infrastructure provided by private and public services – has widened in recent years in the wake of the Eurozone crisis and has been particularly wide in Dalakoglou's native Greece. In the most optimistic scenario, it is "commoners" who fill the gap, as self-organised health clinics spring up, villagers welcome refugees and communities take control of their own waste, water, and power. Echoing somewhat the anthropological "people-as-infrastructure" thesis, a middle-aged "guerrilla gardener" tells Dalakoglou that "we are the infrastructure; the state and capital failed" (2016: 824). Indeed, the retreat of the infrastructural state in the United States and Europe partially explains the rising popularity of the

commons concept. And there is also good reason, as Lauren Berlant (2016: 395) argues in a recent essay, to “hold in suspicion the prestige the commons concept has attained in the US and theory-cosmopolitan context, often signifying an ontology that merely needs the world to create infrastructures to catch up to it”. “Although the commons claim sounds like an uncontestedly positive aim”, she continues, “the concept...threatens to cover over the very complexity of social jockeying and interdependence it responds to by delivering a confirming affective surplus in advance of the lifeworld it’s also seeking” (ibid).

Yet in most Latin American and developing countries, informal sector waste-pickers have long been the primary actors in the recycling trade, with formal sector firms making an appearance higher up the supply chain and the state only in recent years. In effect, the evolving relationship between the spontaneous “commoning” of waste by waste-pickers and its circulation within formal state recycling scheme moves in an opposite direction to developments in European infrastructural provision. In Latin America, the commons is often not emergent, but to be defended. The waste-commons in particular is threatened by the entry of the state and multinational capital into the recycling landscape. Through a focus on such infrastructure, I seek to bridge the gap between the anthropology of infrastructure and the social science of waste and the commons through an ethnographic approach that highlights the status of waste as an urban commons, the role of Montevidean waste-pickers in infrastructural provision, and the dispossession-by-differentiation these face through the contemporary modernisation of waste management and the fracturing of the waste-picking trade.

Wastes, Commons, and Suffering

Paraphrasing Robbin’s (2007) assertion that infrastructure “smells of the public”, we might say that urban waste smells of public infrastructure. The life of waste begins when heterogeneous materials are placed inside municipal waste containers that constitute a “crucial interface between waste infrastructure and waste practices” (Metcalf et al 2012: 137). An encounter between the citizen and the state, the act of putting out the bins is also a moment when private discard becomes public waste. As Italo Calvino (2009) puts it, the bin “proclaims the role that the public sphere, civic duty and the constitution of the polis play in all our lives” (2009: 67). A discussion of the precise nature and status of “public waste” in Montevideo will help to anchor the theoretical contribution and structure of this thesis. Key to its argument is the idea that when a person or organisation chooses to discard a material by placing it into the waste stream, they relinquish any claims to ownership, a process that in legal parlance is known as “abandonment”. In many places in the world, materials then become “public” in the sense that they are managed by a public entity – the local council or a private concessionary financed by the public purse. In O’Brien’s (2007) words, “to discard waste...is to

situate it in the channels and protocols of waste management” (2007: 203). Such materials become public in another sense too, as disturbed bins and unruly rubbish become a matter of public debate and concern (c.f. Latour 2004). We might recall the comedian Bill Hicks’ (1997) skit in which he teased his audience about arriving in England after the LA riots and finding the newspapers ablaze with the story of hooligans having “knocked over a dustbin in Shaftesbury”. But the property status of waste is no laughing matter for those who depend on it for a living, and the kinds of claims that Uruguayan waste-pickers make on waste suggest a particular type of *res publica*: a commons.

The idea that waste might be considered as a commons first occurred to me when I considered my informants’ relationship to the landfill. “You can get anything you need from the *cantera*” – my friend Matute told me soon after I had started working with him at COFECA - “clothes, food, furniture, building materials, whatever”. He then took pride in kitting me out with a t-shirt, boots, and trousers that he fished out in just one afternoon’s labour. The word used by *clasificadores* to designate the landfill – *cantera* or quarry – suggests a relationship of extraction, while their nickname for it – *madre* or mother – indicates one of care and provision. When I interviewed an older informant, Selva, she told me of a time when the *cantera* was *libre*, when the landfill’s bounty was “free” in the sense of being recoverable without cost and where wastepicking labour was also free of harassment or interference from municipal workers or police. The *cantera libre* was, like the commons, a vital space to which vulnerable subjects could turn for a livelihood, food, and shelter in times of need. In chapter 3, I explore the ways that the landfill might be considered a commons, so concentrate here on situating my work amongst scholars who have suggested that waste more generally can be considered as such.

Traditionally, the wastes that have been discussed in relation to commons have tended to be either waste-lands used as commons, or commons enclosed on the basis that they are wasteful (Locke 2005 [1689], Gidwani and Reddy 2011, Goldstein 2013). Recently, however, a number of scholars have begun to ask a more unexpected question: can modern discards, the mass waste of consumer society and urban living, be considered an urban commons? That is, can we see beyond waste’s status as a collection of the unwanted, the unloved and the harmful? In a workshop paper, Negrao (2014) asks whether Rio de Janeiro’s urban solid waste might meet Elinor Ostrom’s (1994) criteria for being considered a common-pool resource (CPR) without providing a convincing answer. Zapata and Zapata Campos’s (2015) study of Managua’s Chureca landfill and its potential commons status, meanwhile, shares features with my own fieldsite, including the customary right to access waste claimed by waste-pickers, forms of value extraction and enclosure, and the nostalgia that formalised waste-pickers felt towards prior work at the landfill.

In the work of geographer Bruce Lankford (2013, 2016), food waste joins other materials to form part of what he calls the “liminal paracommons” of “yet-to-be salvaged natural resource surpluses, losses, wastes, and wastages” (2016:66). Whereas the “commons’ is about competition over existing resources”, Lankford argues, “the ‘paracommons’ covers competition over salvaged resources from

yet-to-be-conserved and more efficiently consumed resources” (ibid 69), such as food and water which are currently “wasted”. Waste is thus a “para-commons” to be competed over, but only becomes a fully-fledged commons when it ceases to be waste and is converted into a resource. In this, Lankford’s work differs somewhat from my own, for I argue that when waste is recategorised as resource, this is for waste-pickers the precise moment when a material ceases to be a commons. Although *clasificadores* do effectively treat waste stream materials as resources, access to them depends on the fact that the previous owner has, in classifying them as waste, abandoned them. When businesses and individuals begin to treat materials as resources, they often start to commercialise them as commodities, depriving *clasificadores* of their livelihood.

A waste-as-commons hypothesis more closely related to my own is Ruth Lane’s (2011) short but insightful analysis of what in Melbourne is called “hard rubbish”: the large bulky items that residents are asked to put out for municipal collection on an annual or bi-annual basis. Drawing on Gille’s (2007, 2010) concept of “waste regimes”, Lane identifies an emerging “resource recovery waste regime” where waste is treated as a resource rather than a human and environmental hazard. Those competing for a share of the spoils include neighbours, waste management firms, and “professional scavengers”. Lane’s interest in the property status of waste at the moment of transfer mirrors my own, particularly her argument that “hard rubbish collections form a kind of informal waste commons where discarded goods and materials are relinquished by their owners into the public space of the kerb-side for a brief period of time” (398). Her suggestion that “hard rubbish” constitutes a commons rests principally on property status. Waste materials can be said to constitute a domain of zero-value for those who dispose of them, simultaneously reaffirming the “positive valuation of bodies and spaces as clean” (Whitson 2011; Hawkins 2003:41). The way that economic models account for waste in terms of absence – either the result of zero inputs or entailing zero cost – has been critiqued by Gille (2010), who argues that we should recognise that producing value entails the simultaneous, and hardly cost-free, production of waste. But in an important sense waste does hold zero-value for its disposer, even as it retains a “commodity potential” (Appadurai 1986, Whitson 2011) that might still be exploited by others. As this thesis will make clear, the potential of discarded materials cannot in fact be restricted to processes of commodification but must also account for the potential to constitute relations of care, intimacy, and patronage.

I differ from the above scholarship in both my methodological approach and my theoretical framing of the commons. To ascertain whether the landfill should be categorised as a commons one could follow Negrao in measuring it against Ostrum’s (Ostrum and Hess 2007) argument that low excludability (difficult to parcel up) and high subtractability (one’s use depletes the resource for others) differentiate common pool resources from other economic goods, or review the management of the landfill to check whether it corresponds to Ostrum’s (1991) eight design principles for successful commons management. Yet as Parker and Johannson (2011) note, such criteria do not

hold for much of what are identified as urban commons even by Ostrum's collaborators. Alternatively, I could follow Zapata and Zapata Campos (2015) in weaving a theoretical narrative from the threads of recent radical commons scholarship, which draws inspiration from "natural" commons but concentrates on theorising new forms of "communing" in the city, such as square occupations, social practices, languages, and modes of sociality (Hardt and Negri 2009; Harvey 2011,2012). Instead, I choose to develop an "ethno-historical" approach that combines ethnographic and historical sensitivities to the characteristics of particular commons.

In McCay and Acheson's (1987) anthropological volume on the commons, Pauline Peters argues that "opposition to the tragedy of the commons has bred its polar opposite: romanticised notions of a precommercial, precapitalist past when communal rights preserved the land and permitted all to use it on an equal footing" (177). Similarly, Harvey (2011) critiques an approach "typically laced with hefty doses of nostalgia for a once-upon-a-time, supposedly moral economy of common action" (2011: 101). But there is nothing fairytale-like about the detailed social history carried out by historians of the English commons like E.P Thompson (1991), J.M Neeson (1993), and Peter Linebaugh (2008, 2014). Montevideo's waste commons has, I suggest, more in common with the "classic" case of the various English commons than it does with square occupations or online activism. Thus, the methodology that I employ is to draw on participant observation and oral histories conducted with *clasificadores* to make a historical comparison with the case of the English commons. Articles, volumes, and even whole sub-disciplines have emerged in response to Garret Hardin's (1968) article on the "tragedy of the commons" but few have noted that that Hardin borrows his argument from a Malthusian propagandist for English enclosure (Thompson 1991: 107). I opt to return to the roots which sustain later commons scholarship, foregrounding the heterogeneous English commons in order to illuminate the contemporary predicament of Montevidean waste-pickers.

As Thompson (1991: 151) cautions, English "common right is a subtle and sometimes complex vocabulary of usages, of claims to property, of hierarchy and of preferential access to resources, of the adjustment of needs, which...must be pursued in each locality and can never be taken as 'typical'". Nevertheless, from the work of social historians, we can draw out some shared characteristics of the English common territories. They were landscapes from which commoners extracted use and exchange value; they were an invaluable resource for the poor; and they were a domain particularly associated with vulnerable subjects. Enclosures forced commoners into migration, the poorhouse or the ranks of the proletariat (J.L and Barbara Hammond 1911 [1995]), but were resisted during centuries by those who asserted their rights in the courtroom and through the destruction of enclosure's infrastructure.

There are many similarities between these historic commons and the Montevideo waste commons. First, as in the slogan espoused by the *clasificador* children in El Cerro, the claim is not that waste

should be open access or available to everyone, but that it “belongs” to a particular, if broad, group of subjects: the poor. As we shall see, the poor, and more specific vulnerable groups such as single mothers, recent immigrants, racial minorities, and neighbours living close to the landfill, are those who assert rights over the waste-stream in ways analogous to the rights claimed by other vulnerable groups to traditional commons landscapes such as fields, forests, and marshes. Another continuity between the waste and rural commons has already been mentioned: Montevidean *clasificadores* obtain clothes, food, shelter, and fuel from the waste stream in ways similar to how the English landless poor used the traditional commons for subsistence. To take the case of just one type of commons, that of the open field, an English Midlands observer wrote in 1767 that “little parcels of land with a right of commons of a cow or three or four sheep, furnished them [sic] with wheat and barley for bread...with beans or peas to feed a hog or two for meat; with the straw they thatch their cottage, and winter their cow, which gives breakfast and a supper of milk” (Thompson 1991:176-177). Now consider my neighbour Juan, who brought home from the landfill food for his pigs and sheet metal to roof his stable. His children’s breakfast of yogurt was provided not by his own cow, but from the recovered leftovers of the national dairy cooperative, CONAPROLE.

Like the rural commons, reliance on and access to the waste-stream also provides a refuge from wage-labour. I shall explore this point in more ethnographic detail in chapter 3, as well drawing on comparative work on landfill wastepicking elsewhere. The final parallel I wish to point to is not a feature of the commons *per se* but rather a contrary process: enclosure. Amin and Howell (2016:14) have recently warned against “misleadingly straightforward dichotomies” such as that between commons and enclosure, and I have no interest in resurrecting one here. Instead, in the thesis I set out to chart varied processes of commoning and enclosure, where the term enclosure covers the assortment of ways that the waste commons are denied to Montevideo’s poor. These include what I call “hygienic enclosure” – the material and disciplinary technologies used to construct a sanitary landfill and street-level containment of waste – but also legislative attempts to re-channel materials, and the interception of goods when they occupy a liminal state as surplus to particular requirements, but yet to be converted to waste.

Thinking about modern, mass waste as a commons also allows for a renewed exploration of the link between commons and territories designated as “wastes” for their supposed lack of exploitation or inappropriate use. Foundational liberal thinker John Locke (1993 [c.1681] argued that the underuse or misuse of land was justification enough for its appropriation. For Locke, “land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste” (ibid 282). But land where grass has gone rotten or fruit is left to rot on the branch or vine, “notwithstanding... enclosure, was still to be looked upon as waste, and might be the possession of any other” (ibid 276-277). Thus, as John Scanlan (2005: 24) concludes, “in Locke’s terms, claims to property ownership rest on an idea of the proper use of land, which entails the appropriation (through the use of one’s labour) of its previous unused potential”.

Gidwani and Reddy (2011) have recently argued that Locke's philosophy can be seen as underpinning dispossession not just in the new world, but also in India. Colonial figures such as Lord Cornwallis and James Grant described large swathes of the Indian territories as wastes, due to their inefficient cultivation by those denigrated as "constitutionally indolent" colonial subjects (2011: 1630). Those who did not cultivate their land appropriately were, in Gidwani's (2011: 1631) reading of Locke, treated as outside the sphere of modern political subjectivity, and had no grounds for complaint in the case of dispossession. Gidwani also traces the "afterlife" of this waste-appropriation dialectic in India over subsequent centuries, from Nehru's productive developmentalism, to contemporary forms of expropriation of waste-pickers and slum-dwellers (see also Gidwani 2013).

For the Montevidean case, we can use this liberal-colonial heritage – whereby practices are deemed wasteful or inappropriate in order to justify dispossession – as a way of thinking about the processes by which waste materials are enclosed and informal sector *clasificadores* denied their livelihood. Rather than being unproductive *per se*, Montevidean waste-pickers are more often accused of engaging in unacceptable forms of production. Contact with the unadulterated waste stream is deemed to be so undignified, and relations with informal sector intermediaries so exploitative, that dispossessing such workers and enclosing waste in sanitary landfills or recycling plants is justified. Even where the productive capacities of informal sector *clasificadores* are recognised, these are deemed inefficient in comparison to the mechanised, collective, Taylorian plants into which some workers are transferred. As we shall see however, the productive superiority of the recycling plant over informal landfill labour is not in fact so obvious.

Dispossessions of commons justified by under-productivity or over-use arguments still provide fuel for anthropological discussion and rebuttal today (see Chibnik 2011). Many anthropological engagements deal with what have been called the "big five" topics of commons research (forestry, fishing, animal husbandry, water management, irrigation), and are concerned with demonstrating the ecological effectiveness of commons management. The issue of conservation is rather complex for the urban waste commons since, as Zapata and Zapata Campos (2015:98) note, the waste commons "do not need regulation in the same way as do reservoirs, meadows, or fisheries: despite waste also being limited, it continues to grow in volume with urbanization". A landfill manager tells Josh Reno (2016: 4) that "the garbage keeps coming", while Brazilian *catadores* tell Kathleen Millar (2014: 39) that it "never ends". The daily replenishment of the landfill with fresh waste means that a tragedy like the depletion of arable pasture, fish stocks or forests cannot easily occur.

Rather than being concerned with conservation, my research is more firmly situated alongside the work of what Johnson (2004: 408–409) calls "entitlement scholars": those who "emphasize the historical struggles that determine resource access and entitlement, and the ways in which formal and informal rules create and reinforce unequal access to the commons". *Clasificadores'* claim to Montevideo's discards is made from a position of supposed weakness: their location outside of wage

labour. Yet this very weakness and vulnerability is itself nuanced by the way that different *clasificadores* conceive of and value their labour, and by the relative privilege of some landfill-based *clasificadores* in comparison to other waste-pickers who have less direct and extensive access to the city's waste-flows.

This relative privilege is one reason why the question of suffering does not feature strongly in the following chapters. The thesis, in addition to reconceptualising the landfill and the waste of which it is composed, also invites a rethinking of waste-picking labour, generally conceived of as abject, stigmatising, and hazardous. The news media, for example, “often uses scavenging as an index of global inequality” (Reno 2009: 32). Joel Robbins (2013) has argued that anthropologists have replaced the “savage slot” with the “suffering subject”, so that “the subject living in pain, in poverty, or under conditions of violence or oppression now very often stands at the centre of anthropological work” (2013: 448). While Robbins cites the work of Didier Fassin and Joao Biehl as examples of the genre, he might well have turned to depictions of the suffering waste-picker and slum dweller. With article titles such as “amidst garbage and poison”, the work of Auyero (2007) on “polluted peoples” is representative of a genre which seeks to draw attention to the environmental suffering endured by marginalised groups.

Whilst I would not wish to deny the life-worlds depicted by Auyero (2007, 2009, 2012, 2013), the relation to garbage is clearly different for those who rely on it for work rather than just endure it in their neighbourhoods. Describing my waste-picking interlocutors primarily in terms of their suffering would not do justice to their complex subjectivities, whether the *clasificadores* in question are ducking between trucks at the landfill, or donning gloves and uniforms in recycling plants. As I have noted, and notwithstanding significant structural constraints that limit available employment opportunities, waste-pickers actively seek out waste rather than being passively exposed to it. Further, emphasising the unsanitary, exploitative and dangerous nature of informal sector waste-picking can too often be used as a justification for dispossession. Is the informal waste trade more exploitative than standardised wage labour? Is work at recycling plants always less hazardous and precarious than semi-clandestine labour at the landfill? These are questions that this thesis seeks to explore empirically, and in conversation with interlocutors, rather than assume.

Generally, my waste-picking friends and informants have experienced an improvement in living standards in recent years, as a result of multiple factors including the relatively steady market value of certain recyclable materials (CEMPRE 2016), and a decade of redistributionist policies from the Frente Amplio government. Many of my interlocutors who still live in shantytown housing are on waiting lists for a cooperative home or are in the process of building one; school attendance rates are up; and by the time I left the field, most of my neighbours even had shiny new sets of teeth thanks to subsidised dental care. It is also the case that many of the violent or disturbing episodes recounted to me by informants took place many years before, and that many adults explicitly sought to avoid reproducing the harshness and hardships of their childhoods when bringing up their own children.

Nevertheless, suffering was hardly absent from people's lives. I can mention the generalised hardship of waste-work, as well as personal tragedies grounded in socio-economic conditions. Twenty years ago, veteran *clasificador* Ruso and his wife Ana lost two daughters when the shack they were living in burnt down due to precarious, self-installed electrics. Their memories live on in gothic script on tattooed arms and commemorations for digital publics. Only a few years ago, one of the San Roman brothers with whom I worked briefly at COFECA, El Nani, lost two young daughters in an almost identical accident. If Nani had stuck around, rather than drifting out of the neighbourhood and my ethnography, then perhaps the focus of this thesis might have been different. But despite such tragic incidents, and the generalised nostalgia of my informants for days gone by, few denied that the material conditions of their existence had improved in recent years. Were we to assume that the presence of workers at the landfill and the activity of informal waste classification indexed only penury, then an alternative narrative might be told. But as Teresa Gowan (2010: 174) asks of homeless recycling in San Francisco, "why should we stuff whatever poor people do into the black box of survival strategies?". Despite the numbers of waste-pickers rising in times of economic crisis, the decision to work with waste cannot always be said to be one of last resort.

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis places Montevideo's landfill at its centre, branching out from it in space and time. The first chapter focuses on historic and contemporary municipal attempts to enclose waste materials. The central landfill chapter describes how enclosure is subverted by *clasificadores* through their "communing" of waste. The two subsequent chapters deal in more detail with the social life of waste as it is appropriated and commoned by *clasificadores*, the first drawing on a series of material encounters to highlight the indeterminacy and agency of the materials themselves, the second describing how waste helps to constitute relations of kinship – and in particular siblingship – between waste-pickers. The final chapter returns to the institutional focus of the first, exploring the complex processes whereby the state appropriates a logic focused on recovering materials and accompanying the poor, but nevertheless seeks to enclose both in recycling plants as it dispossesses the vast majority of informal sector recyclers.

More precisely, chapter 2 draws on archival research, oral history, and participant observation conducted with private and public sector "waste managers" to explore the rationales and logics behind the institutional management of Montevideo's waste. I argue that central to the city's hygienic and infrastructural modernity has been a conceptualisation of waste as hazardous, risky, matter that should be contained and eliminated. The potential value embedded in the waste stream has been

downplayed in the interests of policing public health and private profit, I suggest. Waste is not merely inert stuff to be managed however, but is both discursively and materially created through classificatory and material infrastructures, and bites back against them. *Clasificadores* are shown to have suffered from eliminatory zeal at certain historic moments, but also to constitute a shadow infrastructure focused on the recovery of value in the waste stream. Chapter 3 explores practices of enclosure and commoning at the landfill, drawing on contemporary ethnography and oral histories gathered from *clasificadores*. I trace the history of “hygienic enclosure” at Felipe Cardoso, which involved the violent state repression of *clasificadores* both during and after Uruguay’s 1973-85 military dictatorship. In response, landfill waste-pickers, known as *gateadores*, stubbornly resisted exclusion and remain there to this day. I draw on research with *gateadores* to explore how, like the English commons, Felipe Cardoso functions as a refuge outside of wage labour where vulnerable groups can source materials of use and exchange value.

The story of Uruguayan waste is not, however, purely one of human control, where municipal officials and waste-pickers compete over the naming and control of discards. As Amin and Howell (2016:9) have recently argued, “practices of commoning need to be extended to a more-than-human community as well as to a more-than-capitalist one”. Waste’s power to enchant is thus the subject of chapter 4, which draws on two encounters between human and non-human materials to explore the indeterminacy of waste and its place within urban nature. Unexpected alliances between fragile things and bodies can be observed in and around the landfill, and *clasificadores* might be conceived of as “ecological prophets” (Alonso 1992) not only because of a future-oriented praxis of recycling but also because, in their commoning and scavenging practices, they do not discriminate between the affordances of the natural environment and those of the man-made landfill.

Chapter 5 looks more closely at the human relations sustained by the waste-commons, including the practices of care intrinsic to the strong bonds of kinship, and especially siblingship, found among *clasificadores*. In contrast to sociological accounts that depict informal sector waste-picking as shady and degrading, this chapter provides examples of the ways in which discarded things help to constitute desirable subjectivities and ethical behaviours. The second part of the chapter traces how the importance of kinship and siblingship among *clasificadores* troubles cooperative ideals in the COVIFU housing project, and I use this section to critically explore David Harvey’s (2012) conceptualisation of commons as collective and non-commodified goods.

Chapter 6 argues that the recent implementation of the *Ley de Envases* (Packaging/ Container Law) in Montevideo constitutes a dual appropriation of the *clasificador* logic of value recovery and the Catholic praxis of accompanying the poor. On the one hand, the new recycling plants represent merely the latest instance of hygienic enclosure, whereby materials and some workers are contained in plants while the majority of waste-pickers are dispossessed of their livelihood. On the other hand, the link between the waste-commons and the poor is maintained but reconfigured. Alternative definitions

and indicators of the vulnerable population entitled to labour in waste are laid bare in the gender and class inflected relations at the Aries recycling plant. The conclusion analyses the interconnectedness of the sites of waste classification explored in each chapter, and suggests how my framing of waste, infrastructure, commons, and enclosure might prove influential beyond the boundaries of my fieldsite.

Chapter Two

“All because we bought those damn trucks”: Hygienic Enclosure and Infrastructural Modernity

The office in which I conducted fieldwork during the Uruguayan summer of 2014 is no doubt much like other public-sector workplaces in Montevideo. The public servants there complain about broken air conditioning; they haggle over the taking of holidays; they joke and flirt with one another; and they enjoy endless sips of *mate* tea in order to deal with endless amounts of paperwork. Certainly, the office had a rather interesting location near the Punta Carretas lighthouse - Montevideo's southernmost point. But its principal distinguishing feature was the responsibility it held for authorising and classifying the thousands of tonnes of waste deposited daily at Felipe Cardoso, Montevideo and Uruguay's largest landfill. In travelling to Punta Carretas from my house opposite the landfill, I undertook the reverse journey of Montevideo's waste, which before reaching Felipe Cardoso had to pass through the office, in one form or another.

I had heard of the municipality's *Laboratorio de Higiene* from waste-pickers who had formalised their activity and needed municipal approval for the collection and disposal of waste. Given the institutional title, I expected to encounter a scientific environment when I arrived to interview the director. And indeed, most of the Laboratorio's small team were trained chemists who wore white lab coats. But they mostly encountered waste not under the microscope, but in paper applications to be processed, approved or declined. Under the direction of the middle-aged director Joana, a light and humorous atmosphere prevailed. After our interview, she agreed to let me return to the Laboratorio to conduct participant observation once a week. On my first day, I was asked to order the office cupboard, disposing of records that had already been digitalised. It was with a meandering journey through such paperwork that my archival research into the history of Montevidean waste management began, while I simultaneously noted down the queries that passed through the Laboratorio. A shipload of shark meat had mistakenly arrived at the port – could it be dumped in Felipe Cardoso? A ladies' retirement home founded in the 19th century was updating its audio-visual sets – would the Intendencia collect the old televisions? A private high school was replacing their scientific equipment – could they dispose of anatomical skeletons along with test tubes and Bunsen burners? I had already encountered plenty of discards as they tumbled out of trucks in and around the landfill: now I met them classified according to industry, calculated in kilograms and tonnes, and filed away under diverse rubrics.

The Intendencia is the most important actor involved in shaping Montevideo's “wastescape”, a fact equally relevant for *clasificadores* as it is for waste scholars. It is the Intendencia that defines and subdivides the city's waste; that stipulates what *should* happen to materials once they are thus classified; that collects refuse from most of Montevideo's citizens and grants concessions for the collection of

the rest; and that owns and operates the city landfill. From the moment when one even ponders discarding a material in Montevideo, the wheels of a purportedly linear process of containment, (treatment), transport, and disposal are set in motion. In their labour, *clasificadores* are governed by municipal decrees, they brush up against the materiality of municipal waste infrastructure at the landfill or on the streets, and they act against normative processes of linear disposal when diverting materials from the waste stream. Rather than mere background, municipal regulations and infrastructures have important affective and political implications for the everyday labour of waste-picking.

There is a pragmatic reason for beginning this thesis with a municipal perspective too, which is that in tracing the history of waste in Montevideo beyond the memories of my waste-picking interlocutors, the local state looms large. It is in their library that the intrepid waste historian unearths a vast archive of waste-related newspaper clippings; in their spreadsheets that one finds a record of waste's composition; and in municipal decrees that one discovers legalist definitions. The most detailed account of 19th century Uruguayan waste practices was even written by a man who went on to become Montevideo's first Mayor, Daniel Muñoz. Yet the idea of a unified municipal perspective on waste begins to break apart as soon as one delves into the curious institution that is the Intendencia de Montevideo. From my position in the Laboratorio, I was able to nuance monolithic state classifications with the more fragmented and pragmatic decisions taken by municipal bureaucrats and waste managers on a day-to-day basis.

The structure of this chapter attempts to model the linear ideal whereby materials are first defined as waste, secondly contained, and thirdly eliminated. At the same time, just as mixing materials is integral to waste management, we find a muddling of sequence in this model and chapter, so that infrastructures of containment and elimination designed to act on waste can in fact create it. I argue that the act of discarding can be seen as a key moment for the creation of waste both as an object of municipal management and simultaneously as an urban commons to be accessed by waste-pickers. In seeking to deny waste-pickers access to the waste stream, I describe how the Intendencia often goes one step further, transforming waste-as-discard into waste-as-useless material. I note that the municipal managers of Montevideo's waste have sought out an "infrastructural modernity" which, although dynamic, has several notable constants. These include the importation of ideas and technologies from abroad, principally Europe; the attempt to minimise waste's risks in their many manifestations; and the stress on municipal control of the waste stream. I argue that the substantive features of Montevideo's infrastructural modernity can be described as "hygienic enclosure". Set against this ideal of modernity is what I call a shadow infrastructure, made up of *clasificadores* and their bags, carts, horses, and bicycles. Infrastructures of elimination have at times been turned on denigrated waste-pickers, most notably during the dictatorship in which both sovereign and biopolitical modes of power coexisted. Yet municipal infrastructure has also adapted to accommodate the waste-pickers who operate at the margins of bureaucratic legibility.

Classification and the creation of Municipal Solid Waste

What is considered as waste in Montevideo and how has this changed over time? This seemingly simple question in fact entails a series of rather more complex ones. What commodities and materials are and have been produced and consumed in Uruguay? By which processes and at what stage are materials classified as waste, and according to what criteria? Can a material's classification as waste be consensual and definitive or is it always disputed? What native terms are used to describe waste in Uruguay and how do these differ from one another semantically and genealogically? The classification of waste, like other systems of classification, "forms a juncture of social organization, moral order, and...technical integration" (Bowker and Leigh Starr 1999: 33). What I offer here is not a complete historical account, but rather some key dates, definitions, and descriptions. I begin with the changing composition of Montevideo's waste-stream before turning to the ways that municipal decrees and infrastructures create waste, and the ethical implications for those who act in a moral, as well as a political, economy of discards.

Wastes, in the sense of materials surplus to human requirements (Gille 2010:1051), have inevitably been present in Montevideo since the city's founding in the early 18th century. To give but one example, European travellers were horrified to find cattle so abundant in the area that most of the animal was simply left to rot after having been killed. "They do not get [from the entire cow or bull] but the leather and the tongues, which they leave to dry in the sun" (Duviols 1975: 14), commented the 18th century French traveller Fesche, aghast. "Municipal solid waste" is, however, a much more recent invention, an object that can hardly precede the emergence of the municipality as a political form. As Fredericks (2014:536) notes, "cleaning work – as a highly visible and arduous labour – acts to prove or display the legitimacy of a responsible state". Household waste collection can be understood as an activity that consolidated the authority of the state in Montevideo as the city entered a period of post-bellum stability in the late 19th century. The Public Sanitation act of 1888 was one of the first decrees issued by the fledgling city government, the Junta Economica Administrativa, making it responsible for "extracting rubbish" from citizens, as well extracting from them a tax that would pay for the service (Fernández y Medina 1904). The decree formed part of wider municipal attempts to control the boundaries and material flows of a growing city increasingly perceived as disorderly (Barrachini and Altezor 2010). As an everyday presence, the local state became embodied in the men who picked up the rubbish as well as those who guarded the streets after dark.

For much of the 19th and early 20th century, Montevideo's municipal government – from 1908 known as the Intendencia Municipal de Montevideo – took responsibility for materials surplus to the

households located within the boundaries of the city walls. There is scarce quantitative data on the composition of household discards at that time, but this is compensated for somewhat by the rich description of late 19th century waste (collection) given by flaneur, and future mayor of Montevideo, Daniel Muñoz. In the Montevidean household kitchen of 1898, he recounts, writing under the pseudonym of Sansón Carrasco,

“there is usually a rubbish box (*cajon de basura*), similar to a hospital coffin... Affluent houses tend to have a reinforced box, presentable, decent even, if this word can be used to describe a rubbish receptacle; but the most fashionable junk used for this purpose are dilapidated kerosene tin cans that can be seen on the pavements every morning, ready for the visit of the rubbish man and brimming with all kinds of waste: rags, papers, vegetables, bones, and every type of filth that the broom gathers up during the day, from the living room to the last corner of the house. In the rubbish box, one can study the intimate life of each family: what they eat, what they spend, what they waste, what they save, what they work as, and what they wear. It is the index of private life, the sum of what was done yesterday, the household accounts book. If the rubbish men were observant, they would end up getting to know all the city’s inhabitants intimately, finding out about their customs, their vices and their virtues, just by paying a little attention to what comes out of each box as he empties them into his carts” (Carrasco and Paolini 2006: 36)

Carrasco goes on to describe the ragged appearance of the rubbish man, or *basurero*, who carries a bag into which he separates “cabbage, lettuce and cauliflower leaves, pieces of bread and bundles of straw” that he will use to feed his donkey (*ibid*). He then follows one of the “seventy rubbish carts which leave Montevideo daily” to its destination at Montevideo’s first recorded dump, overlooking the Rio de la Plata in the Buceo district and adjacent to the cemetery (*ibid*). “On arrival at the corner”, he writes, “what horror! I found myself in the kingdom of filth, vast, stinking, with mountains of waste and abysses of junk, over which an atmosphere of sour vapours floated, trembling in the light of the sun with dizzying reverberations” (Carrasco and Paolini 2006: 37).

Carrasco continues detailing the materials he encounters: “here a pile of jars, particularly those of Oriental Tonic, the bombastic hair regenerator from Lanman and Kemp; there a pyramid of bottles; further a stock of broken glass” (2006:38). He catalogues pieces of “bronze, copper and lead; latches and knockers, lamp tubes, broken gas contraptions, taps, bits of pipe and a thousand other knick-knacks” (2006:38). Set apart is the iron, consisting of “keys, nails, screws, old bolts, and a hundred other trifles that evade classification” (2006:39). Then there is the zinc and tinsplate, which includes “pieces of roofing, jars of conserve, tins of oil, pots of paint and varnish, and every other type of fabricated can, all dented, squashed and pierced” (2006:39).

The fact that these materials appear as classified to the flaneur’s eye hints at the early presence of the waste-picker, a figure who does not escape Carrasco’s pen. For now, however, let us concentrate on the composition of Montevideo’s late 19th century discards. In Carrasco’s account, we find organic

food waste, a range of metals, paper, glass, bones, and rags. His trip from the household to the landfill is not a literary sleight of hand which elides the industrial and commercial wastes produced in Montevideo: the materials he encounters at Buceo have indeed mostly passed through the household. Industry produced wastes or by-products, but these were not policed or collected by the municipality at the factory gates. Until the 1970s, the Laboratorio's director Joana told me, solid and liquid industrial wastes were often mixed and pumped into the rivers and sea, and in later years the sewage system (from where they also eventually ended up at sea). Empty glass bottles of Lanman and Kemp's "bombastic hair regenerator" might have been found at Buceo, but the waste produced by the American company at its Montevidean factory most likely ended up in the Rio de la Plata or the Miguelete river.

If there was a lack of municipal concern for solid and liquid factory wastes in 19th century Montevideo, the same did not hold for the gases or "miasmas" emanating from industry. As Alpini and Delfino (2016: 383) note, in mid-19th century Montevideo "doctors, police, press, and citizens shared a deeply-rooted belief that unhealthy air generated and transmitted illnesses". The central task of the Public Hygiene Council (Junta de Higiene Pública) when it was created in 1836, following a severe outbreak of scarlet fever (Pollero 2010), was to propose public health measures that would "conserve the pureness of the air and prevent the propagation of disease epidemics" (Alpini and Delfino 2016: 383). The Council advised citizens not to "throw materials onto the streets which would corrupt the air", while businesses suspected of being "the origin of emanations degrading the constitution of the atmosphere" and which "perniciously influenced public health [*salubridad*]" were required to relocate beyond the old walls of the city (ibid: 383). Slaughterhouses, brick kilns, soap and candle factories were targeted by decree in 1836, to which were added, in 1868, those producing starch, leather, fireworks, and animal fat (Fernández y Medina 1904).

The first comprehensive report detailing the composition of municipal solid waste did not appear until the late 1950s. Chief municipal sanitary engineer Francisco Bonino's (1958) report divided this into following categories: organic material; paper and cardboard; dust and ashes; tins and metals; bones, meat, and leather; glass and paving stones; and plastics and rubber. The municipal waste decree No.14.001 (1967) is the first to put forth a definition of household waste, dividing it into "waste (*desperdicio*) from food and domestic consumption; wrapping and paper from industrial and commercial establishments...; ash and remains (*restos*) from individual heating; pavement sweepings; rubble from small repairs or plant matter from pruning; dead animals; and ashes from the cremation of any of the above". Excluded from the category, meanwhile, were materials such as "waste (*residuos*) or industrial ashes from factories, workshops, shops, butchers, patisseries, delicatessens, barracks, and schools; earth and rubble; waste (*desperdicios*) from slaughterhouses, markets, laboratories, gardens, and zoos; waste from the hotel trade; manure/ dung (*estiércol*) from stables, corals, and sties; confiscated products; remains (*restos*) from gardening, building works, or pruning". These lists are useful in giving an idea of the make-up of Montevideo's waste stream and indicating how the municipality has

adjudicated on and classified matter at different points in time. Absent in the above definitions are generic “rubbish” (*basura*) and “filth” (*inmundicia*), which appeared in Muñoz’s account – in their place a more technical subclassification of “waste” (*residuo*) into scraps (*desperdicios*), remains (*restos*) and animal excrement (*estiércol*).

The decree setting out these definitions still holds to this day, with very minor amendments. But when I began fieldwork at the Laboratorio, I encountered a bewildering set of parallel sub-classifications that highlighted both an increasingly detailed specification of discarded materials and a more expansive national base of industrial and commercial production. The Laboratorio’s somewhat eclectic categorisation of waste was not entirely helpful for determining the contemporary origin or composition of discards however. It ordered some waste by producing industry (the “Leather” “Metal” and “Beer” industries were respectively the 1st, 3rd and 5th largest producers of waste) but others were listed under the transporter (“Special Municipal” and “Environmental Services” were the 2nd and 6th largest contributors). A sector of the economy as large as “Services” (4th largest contributor) had its own rubric, but some sub-sectors that one would expect to be subsumed by “Services” had their own category (e.g. “Supermarkets”, the 12th largest contributor). The Laboratorio’s classification system and figures were not the only contemporary source of knowledge on the composition of waste. Municipal landfill workers checked the weight of materials that entered, and performed a cursory visual scan to ascertain whether loads roughly corresponded to their paperwork, while landfill waste-pickers were the only ones who truly examined loads in any detail. Rather than a definitive account, we thus find a set of partial, situated perspectives on the composition of Montevideo’s waste.

Of these, the Laboratorio’s figures may be the most comprehensive and detailed, but even they do not tell us why materials are considered waste in the first place. For the Laboratorio’s director Joana, it is the act of discarding that converts materials into municipal waste. “Everything that you have to get rid of (*desprenderse*), that the generator has to get rid of, or is obliged to get rid of when a product doesn’t meet a requirement, is waste...every time that you have to dispose of something, from a control perspective, it is waste for us”, she explained. This definition is not based on the composition of waste, whether it might be hazardous or could be safely consumed – absolutely anything that one discards is “translated” by the municipality’s regulatory and classificatory framework into an object of waste.

But there are other competing definitions of waste, including that of “unusable material, substances, or by-products” (OED 2017). I would argue that rather than acting as a technocratic manager of homogeneous substances – wastes – the Intendencia has often played an active role in transforming “waste-as-discard” into “waste-as-unusable material”. Such was the case when the municipality introduced bright orange Mercedes-Benz “Kuka” dump trucks in the 1980s. Rather than compact waste, the vehicles would shred it. “Material arrived like a fertiliser or something because the

trucks mixed the waste so much that it broke everything down”, I was told by Sergio, a *clasificador* who worked at the landfill at the time. “It left you some cloth, some big cardboard, some plastic but nothing else...the goods [*mercaderia*] were filthy...it tossed the rubbish together and got everything dirty”. One waste-picker told a newspaper in 1980 that the new trucks were “limiting the possibility of our subsistence...with the old system we always found elements like plastic, paper, [metals] that after being cleaned we returned to the country as raw material useful for the recycling industry” (Molina 1980). The role of the new vehicles was to “undo, shred, completely crush most of what was collected, with little or nothing left to be put back into circulation” (ibid). The unintended consequence of this technological development was that *clasificadores* moved from the landfill back into the central areas of the city to reach discarded materials before they had been shredded. “All because we bought those damn trucks”, lamented chief municipal sanitary engineer Raul Blengio when I interviewed him: he preferred having *clasificadores* confined to the landfill. In this example, the conflict between a *clasificador* value-based approach to waste and the municipal approach predicated on the destruction of value, as well as that between the living labour of *clasificadores* and the dead labour materialised in trucks, is evident.

By the time I began working at the Laboratorio in 2014, the origin of materials that entered the municipal landfill had expanded beyond the household to include commercial and non-hazardous industrial waste. Unlike households, which could basically release anything into the waste stream as long as it fitted into proscribed containers, businesses were legally obliged to ensure that their wastes met certain criteria in order to be allowed into Felipe Cardoso. They could contain only minimal levels of cadmium, lead, and other heavy metals, and had to be of a solid, rather than liquid consistency. Beyond this, the Intendencia also stipulated that waste had to be rendered “unusable” (*inutilizado*), meaning broken down or purposefully contaminated. Food had to be shredded and mixed with sodium chloride and sawdust, for example, while other products were dismembered. This stipulation led to a boom in “environmental” companies whose job it was to neutralise materials so as to render them useless.

I became friends with Luisina and Homero, the friendly, middle-aged, owners of one such company. The couple were trained chemists who had worked in the pharmaceuticals industry before leaving to found the waste treatment firm and social enterprise Stericyclo. When I visited their plant, I encountered hundreds of cartons of a soya milk and fruit juice blend waiting to be squashed and their liquids mixed with sawdust; computers being dismantled for their component parts; and cosmetics blended with lime to render them non-toxic. As part of their social enterprising ethos, Luisina and Homero employed former waste-pickers and workers with vulnerable social backgrounds, adopting a patient and constructive approach to time-keeping and productivity. Yet there was a certain irony in employing workers with a background in waste recovery to destroy discards. Some of the materials that Stericyclo processed were considered dangerous and in need of neutralisation from a socio-ecological perspective, such as the phosphorous lightbulbs that the

company packed into protected barrels to be sent for treatment in Chile. But the cartons of soya and fruit drink were also “dangerous” in their own way, Luisina told me, because they were within their sell-by date and thus, in her terms, “at risk of theft” from (former waste-picker) employees. Different conceptualisations of waste and risk and differentially situated “ways of knowing” (Harris 2007) materials were employed here, and a comparison between them can help bring the difference between waste-as-discard and waste-as-unusable material more clearly into focus.

As I observed from work around the landfill, the *clasificador* assessment of whether a waste material could be recovered was fundamentally empirical, often involving a sequential use of different sensorial “tests”. A *clasificador* who found a bottle of juice at COFECA would first check to see if the colour inside matched that of the product – they would not drink a liquid from a Coca-Cola bottle that was anything other than black, for example. Then, they would often uncap the bottle and smell the substance inside. I remember bottles of Gatorade that appeared at the landfill: these seemed to be unopened but the colour of the soft drink was close enough to urine to necessitate a quick sniff, just to be on the safe side. Finally, in the case of foodstuffs, the product would be tasted. I recall a bag of biscuits that I found at COFECA. Although these looked and smelled fine, when I bit into one I felt the distinct taste of petroleum on my tongue and thus discarded the packet rather than offering it to colleagues. Where materials passed these tests, *clasificadores* would declare them “*sano*”, meaning healthy, intact, usable or in the case of foodstuffs, good to eat.

These were not the only tests that *clasificadores* performed on materials – they would also take into account any available information on the provenance of waste, generally rejecting anything that came from hospitals, for example. But the sensory tests were important, and had obvious limitations in their ability to detect microbial dangers. In some instances, the Laboratorio and Stericyclo carried out a more detailed, chemical and scientific analysis of materials to determine whether or not they were safe to be landfilled with household waste. As Zsuzsa Gille (2013: 2) notes referring to waste in particular, “there are many other modes of knowing that take place outside laboratories”, and at first glance one could assert that *clasificadores* had a sense-based epistemological engagement with materials, while waste professionals had a more scientific approach. Yet the very nature of the enquiry was also different. *Clasificadores* checked to ascertain whether or not things could be safely consumed, whereas waste processors tested whether or not they could be safely landfilled. From a municipal perspective, materials had already been classified as waste by the very act of discarding, and so rather than verifying if they were “usable” (*sano*), it was in many cases Luisina and Romero’s legal and contractual obligation to render them “unusable” (*inutilizarlos*).

Both the owners of Stericyclo and the Laboratorio staff had highly ambivalent feelings about the part they played in this process of “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 1994 [1942]), sentiments that can be noted in the following quote from my interview with Joana:

“For us, the best would be to decrease the amount that enters Felipe Cardoso or the amount that is destroyed. Recycling and re-use are always preferable alternatives. The problem is that we have norms that don’t allow for things to be recycled or re-used. There are cases of fake things (*cosas truchas*), brands that are not real. Things come from China, like trainers that say they are Reebok and are not, and one must destroy them (*hay que destruirlos*). For us, it would be better if these things were distributed amongst children in care, people who are in prison, I don’t know. But then there is the issue of ‘no, if you give it to them, they might sell it, commercialise it, and it would return to the market’, all those issues which are outside our remit (*escapan a nosotros*)”

In the above passage, Joana moves between the Spanish first-person plural “we” (*nosotros*) and the impersonal “one” (*hay que*) to navigate the moral economy of waste disposal/ creation. She repeats that *para nosotros* (“for us”) – gesturing to the Laboratorio’s employees – materials should in the first instance be recycled and re-used, and “fake” brands distributed to vulnerable groups. It is impersonal “norms” and issues beyond the Laboratorio’s control that mean that “one must destroy things” (*hay que destruirlos*), preventing their ethical redistribution. Yet Laboratorio staff play an active role in drawing up legal definitions of waste and in policing that things are correctly destroyed. “If it can’t be sold, it can’t be donated”, Joana added. We can glimpse here what Bowker and Leigh Starr (1999) refer to as the “invisible forces of categories and standards” (1999:5): once discarded, materials are categorised as waste, once categorised as waste, they cannot be donated or commercialised.

The kind of material transformations and “destructions” that Luisina and Romero engaged in at Stericyclo, meanwhile, demonstrate the diversity of practices that currently take place in Uruguay under the banner of “environmental services”. On the one hand, Stericyclo employed two technicians to disassemble computer parts, and Homero proudly told me that 98% of these could re-enter productive processes and avoid landfill. On the other hand, they also destroyed crates of foodstuffs like the soya and fruit drink that might have been consumed but instead were landfilled. When I asked what was wrong with the cartons, Homero told me that they “don’t really ask that kind of question of individual lots”. “Perhaps they were exposed to the sun”, Luisina wondered out loud. Or maybe they had been sent back to the factory from a supermarket as unsold stock, Homero added. Whatever the reason, they were crushed, mixed with sawdust and lime, and transformed from a mere discard into useless waste.

I was uncomfortable with this practice, as I knew that had the cartons not passed through municipal oversight and the hands of Stericyclo workers then they might have arrived at Felipe Cardoso intact and, after being tested by my *clasificador* neighbours, declared *sano* and consumed. Luisina told me that she often received materials that were “perfectly re-usable” but had to be destroyed because of “legal factors” and “accounting/ inventory practices”. For such materials to avoid destruction, she noted, “the law would have to change”. Like Joana, the couple also found the destruction of value problematic. Homero said that for each individual Stericyclo worker, the

“treatment” of a particular material might act as a “trigger” for affective and ethical concerns. For some workers, the agentive discards might be expensive make-up sets or bottles of juice, while for Homero it was the destruction of functioning computers that he found most difficult.

In this section, I have explored processes of waste-making in Montevideo. This has involved looking at how produced materials have changed, as bones, rags, and ash were replaced by an increasingly diverse range of plastics. Systems of categorisation have also changed from the 19th to the 21st century, whilst some uncomfortable categories and materials remain: “dead animals” as a category excluded from household waste; the leather industry as the country’s largest waste generator. Industrial wastes, long a private affair, also became public, in part through their physical transformation. Mixed with sawdust, waste from the leather industry became solid and consequently municipal matter, and was therefore permitted to enter Felipe Cardoso and create ongoing technical problems for the landfill foreman and his machines. Yet, as I have suggested, the Montevidean municipality does not merely manage wastes that are somehow already “out there”. Rather, through decree and infrastructural provision, it has played an ethically ambiguous role in transforming “waste-as-discard” into “waste-as-unusable material”.

Enclosure Devices and Infrastructural Modernity

When waste was born as an object of municipal control, so too was an infrastructure designed to contain, transport, process, and eliminate it. In this section, I join other scholars in suggesting that this infrastructure should be understood not as “neutral means to more substantive ends” but rather as “central to multiple constructions of modernity...assembled and re-assembled in relation to particular ethical regimes and political projects” (Von Schnitzler 2013: 672). In the Uruguayan case, enclosure devices have played a constitutive role in the definition of waste. The coal dust, packaging, rubble, food waste, and prunings that a 19th and early 20th century Montevidean household co-produced were heterogeneous materials brought together in the category of household waste by municipal decree but also by emplacement in specific containers. According to decree No.1585 (1937), the classification of material as “household waste” was contingent upon its ability to “fit within one or several of the containers normally used” (Article 22e). Non-household waste, meanwhile, was defined negatively as that which “exceeds the proportions indicated” (Article 23). Decree No. 11566 (1959) excluded from the category of household waste materials that did not fit into 50 square metre containers, while Decree No.14.001 (1967) stipulated that waste should be “handed over to the authorities in buckets with particular characteristics specified in the accompanying regulations”, where “the content cannot by any measure exceed the recipient or fall on the floor” (Art 23). For a material to be classified as household waste then, it was not that it must

somehow be “out of place” (Douglas 1966) but rather it should fit in a particular place: the municipal waste container.

The effort to seal such containers has been a constant of municipal management in Montevideo—what has varied is the material used to ensure best practice. Article 8 of Decree No.1585 (1937) made “metal containers with lids” obligatory for holding domestic waste, with any other makeshift containers to be considered rubbish themselves and removed. Vehicles that transported “dung, rubble and earth” had to be covered, while those which transported fish or food waste should be “hermetically sealed” (ibid Art.2). In 1948 an amendment was made to the ruling ordinance specifying that “the vehicles that transport waste should have a metal container or a wooden container with a metal lid”. These containers can be thought of as “apparatuses”, in the Agambian sense: things that “imply a process of subjectification” (2009: 11) and have the “capacity to orient, determine...or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings” (2009: 14). They created not only the responsible citizen/ neighbour (*vecino*) who disposes of waste correctly, and the deviant one who does not, but also the “rummager” (*burgador*) who thrusts an illicit hand into the municipal container. Partially excluded from accessing waste, waste-pickers were also excluded from the category of the *vecino*, whose Hispanic root as the male home owner in the formal city casts a long shadow over contemporary notions of the citizenship in Montevideo (Fraiman and Rossal 2009: 93).

The penchant for detail in specifying infrastructures of waste containment has been matched historically by the Intendencia’s willingness to spend large sums of money importing technologies of enclosure. Just as there always seems to be money available for the machinery of war, so too has it been found for the artillery deployed against the enemies of hygiene. In Uruguay, the two spheres often overlapped and we should perhaps not be surprised – Adam Smith (1869: 154) did, after all, list cleanliness, “the proper way of carrying dirt from the streets”, with security and ensuring plenty as constituting the basic functions of the state. One famous and controversial campaign took place in 1967-68 under the title of Operativo Limpieza (Operation Clean-Up) and was led by a Colonel, Manuel Díaz Ciblis. Contemporary opinion pieces complained about the exorbitant, even “unconstitutional”, sums that were being extorted from the population for the Operation, without visible result. But the municipal head of Engineering and Works, Bolívar Escudero, argued that it was necessary in order to “defend the city” from the “filthy state, lack of hygiene, insects, rodents and illnesses” generated by wastes (El Diario 1968).

When a new fleet of trucks was purchased from Argentina in 1971, these were lined up in front of the Intendencia alongside an equestrian statue of Uruguay’s founding father, General José Gervasio Artigas, giving them the appearance of tanks accompanying him into battle (Vea 1971). When 3,200 standardized municipal waste containers were introduced in Montevideo in 2003 at the cost (together with corresponding trucks) of over US\$5 million, the newspaper El País (2003) described their arrival as an “invasion”. And when the Intendencia rolled out “anti-vandal” containers for the *Ley de Envases*,

new US\$500,000 trucks fitted with Italian technology were purchased to be operated by the private city centre concessionary CAP. The latter containers had been adapted especially so as to prohibit the unlicensed extraction of waste, an indication of how such devices, although originating in the Global North and embedded in unequal transnational political-economic relations, can be reprogrammed to materialise local ethico-political projects.

Why this obsession with enclosing waste? Why the high cost and precise specification of legitimate technologies of containment? At first glance, the imperative seemingly stems from waste's perceived public health risks, as befits the hygienic origins of Montevideo's waste management infrastructure. The emphasis on keeping waste contained while it is temporarily held on the city streets has, as in the case of municipal waste engineer Francisco Bonino's 1958 report, often been framed in a hygieno-aesthetic register bordering on the apocalyptic. Failure to attend to the elimination of waste led, in Bonino's view, to "immediate hygienic and aesthetic chaos" (1958:17). "Rubbish will cover the streets of the city" (*La Mañana* 1970); "Deficient hygiene in the City" (*La Plata* 1966); "Montevideo: Anti-Hygienic City" (BP 1966), screamed newspaper headlines accompanied by photos of the offending matter overflowing onto street corners. In such accounts, Montevideo appears constantly on the verge of being transformed into a "vast rubbish tip" (*El País* 1971), "a septic hotspot" (*El Día* 1971) or even "the city with most rubbish in public space, per capita and per square metre" (*ibid*).

This was then principally a "hygienic enclosure", but one which also involved questions of aesthetics, value, and modernity. Containers served as markers of property status where, regardless of their composition, properly enclosed materials were transformed from private into municipal property, *de jure* at least. Early Montevidean waste ordinances, sparing in their description of household waste's composition, all featured articles prohibiting the extraction of materials once they entered containers and detailing the corresponding sanctions. The text of the 1937 decree, which stipulated that "from the moment in which domestic waste and street sweepings are left out to be collected by the Public Hygiene Authorities, the extraction of any materials from containers is prohibited", remained in force until 1990. Yet *clasificadores* have long claimed a customary right to access waste materials. As in the case of the English commons, we find a situation where legal and customary rights diverge. J.M. Neeson's assertion that "commoners owned [the English wastes] through access even if they owned nothing by law" (1991: 172) is, I suggest, equally applicable to Montevidean *clasificadores* and the waste commons.

The concept of "infrastructural modernity" (Graham and Marvin 2001, Collier 2011) can help explain the important role technology, property, and risk play in the management of Montevideo's waste. Collier (2011: 205) notes that infrastructural modernity comes in many forms, and to identify them we must study "how infrastructure is mobilized as a political technology" and the goals and forms of reasoning involved in its development. In the Uruguayan case of waste management, horizons of modernity have always been primarily European, from early containers based on French

designs, through English-built incinerators, to present-day Italian waste trucks and waste-to energy models. Indeed, the challenges that containerisation posed for waste-pickers in Montevideo mirrored those which affected Parisian chiffonniers a century earlier, when a certain *Monsieur Poubelle* pioneered the waste receptacle (Barles 2005). When I asked Leticia, a municipal waste official, about which cities she viewed as exemplary in their waste management, she said that there weren't any in Latin America, which was "very backward in all that". The best examples, she continued, could be found in the US, Sweden and Madrid, which had "clean incinerators even in the middle of cities". In dismissing the Latin American panorama, Leticia disregarded the important experiments in "inclusive recycling" involving waste-pickers in cities like Bogotá and Porto Alegre (REDLACRE 2017) in favour of technological solutions designed for cities without waste-pickers.

It was not only physical technologies that were imported from Europe but also the very idea of what a municipal infrastructure of waste management should look like. We thus find the influence of early French and English hygienists, and the "infrastructural ideal" of state-led universal infrastructure that prevailed in many parts of the world from the mid-19th century well into the 20th (Graham and Marvin 2001: 206). The splintering of infrastructural provision that Graham and Marvin argue characterises a neoliberal turn in much of the West from the 1970s onwards also manifested itself in Montevideo, with the privatisation of city-centre waste collection in 1995. Further splintering was, however, resisted. Attempts to privatise the Felipe Cardoso landfill in 2009 were blocked, and the bulk of waste collection remains in the hands of the local state, not least because the centre-left Frente Amplio has controlled Montevideo's local government since 1990. The head of municipal waste management during my fieldwork period hailed from the Uruguayan Communist Party.

Waste collection, in common with other infrastructures, should ideally function as an "invisible, smooth-functioning background" (Edwards 2002:188), noticed only when something goes wrong - "when the server is down, the bridge washes out, there is a power blackout" (Bowker and Leigh Star 1999:35). Or, in the case of waste, when containment is breached. This is at least the case in the cities of the Global North from where the early theorists of infrastructure drew their examples. Edwards (2002) offers the disclaimer that he is principally writing about the "developed world", not the Global South, where infrastructure might be much more precarious (2002:188). More recently Dalakoglou & Kallianos (2014) have argued that for southern European cities creaking under imposed austerity, "when it comes to... waste infrastructure and its flows, disorder and arrhythmia are part of the normal infrastructural patterns for the people who have direct experience of it" (2014:531).

I would suggest that Montevidean waste management has been characterised by a hybrid condition. The municipal government has been able to afford imported technologies of containment, and elites see themselves as Europhile moderns. At the same time, infrastructures of waste containment and disposal have broken down with alarming frequency, putting Montevideo's status as a modern city at risk. "The Switzerland [*Suizra*] of the Americas or the Dirty [*Sucia*] of the America's?" (Epoca 1966),

punned one headline referring to Uruguay's prized epithet: clearly it couldn't be both. From the "beautiful cup holding the silver river" (*la bella tacita de la Plata*) immortalised in tango ballad, the presence of waste on the streets was indicative of Montevideo's decline, alleged another (Ultimas Noticias 1985). "Are we so backward that we know nothing of hygiene? Does one not feel patriotic shame at the 'inferiorizing' spectacle that is Montevideo?", raged one journalist (El Día 1971). More recent reports feature a similar aesthetic of overflowing bins, and the literary conceit of punning on Uruguay's previously flattering nicknames (El Observador 2014, El País 2016). It may well be the case, as Sarah Moore (2009) suggests, that the dimensions of modernity that include increased purchasing power, consumerism, and disposable packaging undermine hygienic modernity in cities of the Global South that lack the infrastructure to deal with the volumes of waste that increase as a consequence. Garbage here can thus be seen as "an abject product of modernity that exposes the contradictions between our expectations of urban order and existing material conditions in cities" (2009: 435). We might contrast the regular break-downs in Montevidean waste management with waste infrastructure in Britain, where the presence of waste piled high in the streets during the "Winter of Discontent" was a singular, epoch-defining moment that arguably helped to bring Margaret Thatcher to power amid industrial strife (Martin López 2014).

At different times, municipal workers, technological break-down, disorderly citizens, and managerial ineptitude have been blamed for the overflowing waste on Montevideo's streets and the failures of municipal containment. But it is waste-pickers who have most regularly been singled out as the principal agents of disorder. As Mary Douglas (1992) notes, "in all places at all times the universe is moralized and politicized... disasters are generally turned to political account: someone already unpopular is going to be blamed for it" (1992: 5). Thus in 1985, well-respected Montevidean Mayor Aquiles Lanza affirmed that waste collection was his administration's gravest problem and that "rummagers" [*burgadores*] were partly responsible for spreading waste on street corners (La Mañana 1985). In 1989, the municipal Director of Public Hygiene complained that the two biggest contributing factors to the presence of rubbish in the streets were "rummagers" and the absenteeism of municipal workers (El País 1989). More recently, in May 2016, the Intendencia's outgoing head of waste collection and street-sweeping (*limpieza*) declared that Montevideo's biggest problem was the "illegal classification of waste" (Teledoce 2016). Finally, when I interviewed the chief municipal sanitary engineer Raul Blengio, he accused *clasificadores* of interfering not only with waste collection, but with other parts of the sanitation infrastructure such as drainage, which they supposedly blocked with post-classification discards.

Clasificadores are so often scapegoated, I would argue, because they challenge the "infrastructural modernity" of Montevidean waste management in two particular ways. First, they dispute a municipal monopoly whereby the local state either operates infrastructure itself or holds the power to grant concessions. Second, with their uncovered horse and cart collection and suspected dispersal of rubbish, they challenge long established technological norms and hygienic prescriptions. On both

these fronts, but particularly in their breaching of containment, street level waste-pickers trouble municipal claims to infrastructural, hygienic, and aesthetic modernity. For many municipal bureaucrats and city planners, waste-pickers represent a sort of “heterocronia” (Fernández 2010:2) existing, as one newspaper put it, “three blocks from the centre but centuries away” (Últimas Noticias 1986). The hygienic enclosure of waste enacted in pursuit of infrastructural modernity thus posed a threat to Montevideo’s waste commons and the customary access to it claimed by *clasificadores*. As I have suggested, this trend is the reverse of what Dalakoglou (2017) suggests is currently taking place in parts of Europe, where the “infrastructural gap” is partially being filled by emergent practices of commoning.

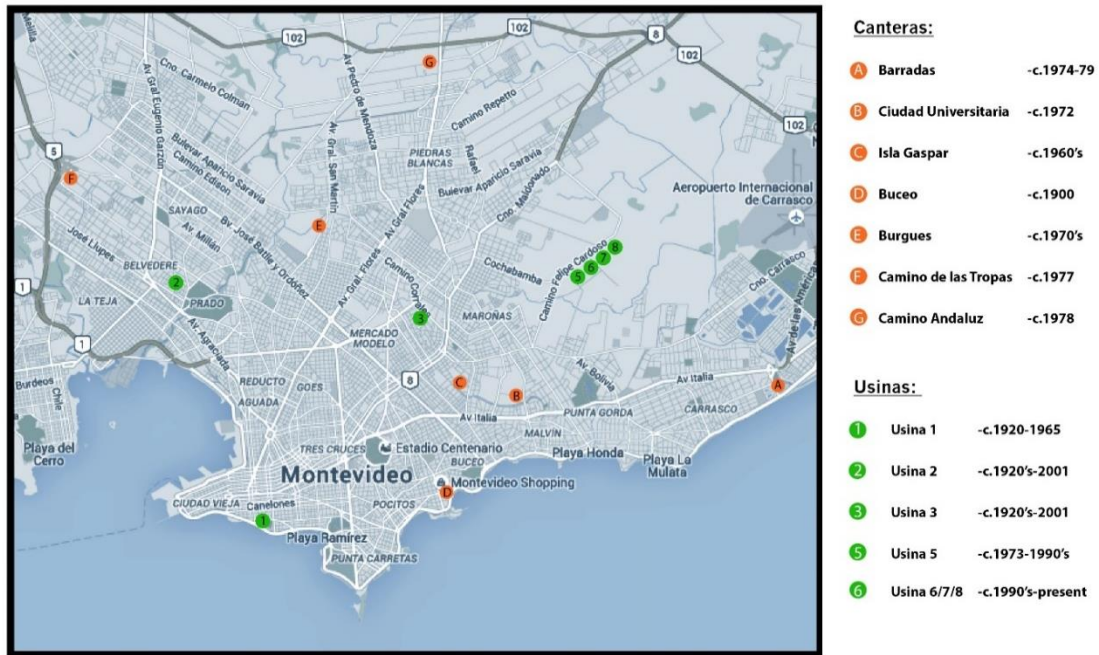
Eliminating Surplus Material and Populations

Thus far, we have tracked the creation, classification and (attempted) containment of Montevideo’s waste. The imported municipal truck now arrives to empty street-level containers, perhaps scooping up the debris that invariably surrounds them. What happens next? Over the last 150 years, Montevidean waste been taken to different locations for elimination – sites that have also adapted to conform with hegemonic ideas of hygienic and infrastructural modernity. The late 19th century Buceo landfill economy described by Daniel Muñoz was buried by Montevideo’s early 20th century “hygienic modernists” (Rogaski 2004). As part of a 1914 committee that sought to solve the city’s waste “problem”, the architect Juan M. Aubriot railed against the insalubrities of the Buceo dump, where germs had replaced miasmatic “sour vapours” as the source of disease : “our city is the only one that combines a large number of inhabitants with a dump just metres from its population, an unsanitary centre which directly and negatively affects hygiene and public health as well as revealing to tourists an immense and grave source of infectious disease germs, origin of the flies and rats which afflict the city...”(Alfaro 1971a). For most of the 19th century, city officials had focused on industrial production and cemeteries as miasmatic threats to public health. At the beginning of the 20th century, when the sprawl of Montevideo brought Buceo and its newly discovered germs closer to the heart of the city, they turned their attention to landfills. Another intellectual, Hipólito Millot Grané, evoked a “site of desolation and misery... pestilence and infectious smoke... clouds of flies and nauseous dust” (Alfaro 1971a).

The state concessionary Meneses dumped its last cartload of rubbish at Buceo in 1915 and the country’s first incinerator, the Usina I, was built further down the coast before the end of the decade (El País 1967). Henceforth, tourists arriving on boats or frequenting beaches would be met with a different kind of dust: clean black chimney smoke to which Montevideo’s heterogeneous waste was reduced, inaugurating the waste technology that would reign supreme for the next fifty years. The fact

that the Usina I was situated closer to the centre of Montevideo than the Buceo dump suggests that officials believed it to be completely effective in eliminating the risks of urban waste. “At the beginning of the [20th] century, Montevideo was very advanced in waste treatment compared with the rest of Latin American countries”, engineer Blengio told me proudly. “We incinerated household waste and were so advanced that we had three *Usinas* and [each] had its own chambers for burning waste, six chambers and six chimneys”. Blengio boasted of the use of English technology, an early indication that Montevideo’s conceptions of modernity were primarily imported from Europe. Such a link has been described in detail elsewhere (e.g. Barrán 2014) but finds one materialisation in waste infrastructure. The location of the first Usina also serves as a metaphor for such horizons, sitting as it did on the fringes of the city’s landmass, edging out into the Río de la Plata and beyond it the Atlantic, as if seeking to eschew the American continent (see Fig.3). As the old national saying went: “Uruguay with its back to Latin America, Montevideo with its back to rest of the country, the city centre with its back to the periphery” (Alfaro 1971a).

The desirability of incinerators can be understood if we recognise that sanitation and waste management infrastructures emerged primarily as defences against hygienic and epidemic risk. In England, where the first waste furnaces were designed and patented in 1874, “sanitary engineers implored local authorities to abandon tipping and adopt burning before the visitation of an epidemic”. Fire was thought to “permit the perfect destruction of ‘contagia and virus’” (Clarke 2007: 261). Before being imported as indicators of “infrastructural modernity” in Uruguay, “destructors” in England were heralded as the “progressive” alternative to “primitive” tipping which was denounced as a “miserable link with the sanitary past” (Clarke 2007:261). In Montevideo, the first Usina was followed by the construction of the Usina II in the west of the city (see fig.3, below) and the Usina III in the east, where the burning of waste continued for the first half of the 20th century. The 1937 City Hygiene Act also obliged any residences producing large amounts of waste to “install incinerating ovens for the elimination of such waste” (Art. 23); ashes and cinders resulting from the domestic incineration of rubbish were classified as household waste; and businesses had the option of either transporting their waste to the municipal Usinas or burning it on-site. Whilst the private or commercial incineration of waste was permitted, the burning of “rubbish, leaves or other materials” in the street was a task “reserved for municipal public servants” (1959 Decree). The burning of waste formed part of an urban landscape dominated by “chimney dreamers’ (Renfrew 2007, Gudynas 2004) who saw in smoky industry the symbols and materialisations of modernity.



http://www.takeamaps.com/pt/mapa_de_mundo_pt.php

Figure 3 Location and estimated operational dates of Montevideo's dumps (*canteras*) & *usinas*



Figure 4 Still-intact incinerator chimneys of the Usina II

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, what officials had referred to as the “safest sanitation technique” (El País 1967) was collapsing under the weight of increasing volumes of waste and its changing composition. The Usina I was closed in 1965, its chimneys dynamited and themselves reduced to construction waste (El Diario 1969). The other Usinas deteriorated, and according to one report, “the use of plastics and other modern chemical elements that appear in household waste” were “directly responsible for the accelerated deterioration that the incineration plants are [sic] suffering” (El Diario 1974). A municipal director at the time explained that “when the waste is burnt in the *usinas*, the corrosive smoke given off by plastics seriously damages the ovens...with time, the thick metallic plates and the pipes disintegrate” (ibid). Individual waste incinerators were eventually also banned, amidst complaints of smog and air pollution (El País 1980). Plastics were “biting back” (Tenner 1996), exposing the limits of fantasies and technologies of total elimination.

Incineration began to be replaced with a return to what one newspaper called the “human and sanitary quagmire of dumping in *canteras*” (El País 1967).⁵ Yet although the source of waste’s perceived risk (miasma, germs) and the method of elimination (landfill, incineration) changed, what remained was a logic that conceptualised waste negatively as a source of risk and elicited technologies designed to eliminate its capacity for sanitary and aesthetic contamination. As a polarised Uruguay slid into urban guerrilla warfare and state terror in the 1960s and 1970s, the treatment of waste was also increasingly discussed in bellicose and martial terms. It was the “fight against the dump” (Acción 1965), “the war against filth” (El País 1967) and the “battle against plastic” (El Diario 1974) as Montevideo was “invaded by rubbish” (El País 1971).

While the work of refuse disposal in Argentina and Uruguay was professionalised at the beginning of the 20th century (Dimarco 2011, Sorroche 2015), that of waste-picking was not. Those who engaged in the activity thus failed to benefit from the social security and labour-based citizenship of the welfare state (Pendle 1952). Instead, the criminalisation of waste recovery was enshrined in law in 1937. The substance of this prohibition endured in the municipal waste decrees which followed in 1959 and 1967, with sanctions strengthened to include large fines and the confiscation of vehicles. In the mid-19th century, carts carrying “people with infectious or contagious diseases” in Montevideo could be confiscated (Fernández y Medina 1904: 126); by the mid-20th century, this punishment had shifted onto those carrying potentially hazardous materials.

A crackdown on waste-picking formed part of the 1967-68 Operativo Limpieza (See El Popular 1967; El Debate 1968) but it was not until the 1973-1985 dictatorship that “surplus populations” (Baumann 2003) like waste-pickers became the focus of a zealous campaign of repression and

⁵ *Cantera* being the Spanish word for quarry which, because of this practice, became synonymous with dump or landfill.

elimination. Already in 1965, a group of middle-class neighbours in el Prado occupied a landfill (the Cantera Lussich) to protest against “an incredible invasion of flies, bad smells and on top of these calamities, almost a hundred *cirujas* [waste-pickers] who rummaged in the rubbish and whose customs and manners were at odds with morality” (Acción 1965). In their complaint against the associated “activities of so-called *bichícomes* and the dumping of rotting organic matter” (Acción 1965), we can observe how the threads of waste and those who made a living from it were coming together in a particular socio-material knot: a dual “problem” to be managed and eliminated (c.f. Latour 1993:50).

In 1967, a newspaper report described the *canteras* as “immense pits where chilling sub-human stories ferment between the bubbles of hate and filth” (El País 1967). Those found working there were dehumanised in the press as “strange beings disguised as men, women and children” (ibid). The language used to describe these workers facilitated their denigration. They were *vagabundos* [vagabonds], *burgadores* [rummagers], *cirujas*, *bichícomes* or *píchis*. The last two terms reportedly stem from the English “beachcomber” and might have originated in the beachcombers who searched El Cerro’s beach for flotsam and jetsam that drifted in from the city’s port. In any case, they are also words with unpleasant associations, homonymous with piss (*píchi*) and insects (*bichos*). In another report in 1980, a bleak photo of grey figures at the *cantera* of Felipe Cardoso was accompanied by a sub-heading which clarified that these were “also Uruguayans” (Molina 1980: 19, see Fig.5 below). With non-naturalised citizens only minimally present in Uruguay at that time, the question mark again seemed to hang less over their nationality than their very humanity.

The military dictatorship, perhaps buoyed by the dehumanising language of the press and middle classes, enforced waste law in its severity and beyond. In 1974, we read of an attempt to evict “rummagers” from the landfill (El País 1974). In 1976, the Intendencia placed an advertisement in a mainstream daily informing “rummagers” that they could not “under any circumstances undertake the collection of *residuos* or circulate on public roads” under pain of “severe sanction” and the confiscation of vehicles (El Día 1976). In 1979, the chief inspector of vehicles threatened “a frontal fight to eradicate what he termed vagabonds from the Old City” (El Diario 1979). And in 1980 an operation was undertaken to “eradicate rummagers and their carts” with “brigades traversing the city repressing rummagers day and night” (El País 1980). A sympathetic editorial in one newspaper expressed disbelief at the Intendencia’s burning of several hundred carts that had been “compulsively” confiscated from *clasificadores* in the preceding days. This ritual sacrifice made to the gods of social and hygienic purity involved the incineration of carts that “had been constructed with sacrifice by whole families, and were their only work instruments, the only tool which helped them to honourably earn their daily bread” (El Día 1980). Although this population appeared as surplus to the dictatorship, they were in fact integral to the recycling industry, as evidenced by the paper manufacturers who complained in the press about the effect that the crackdown was having on their production (c.f. Millar 2013).

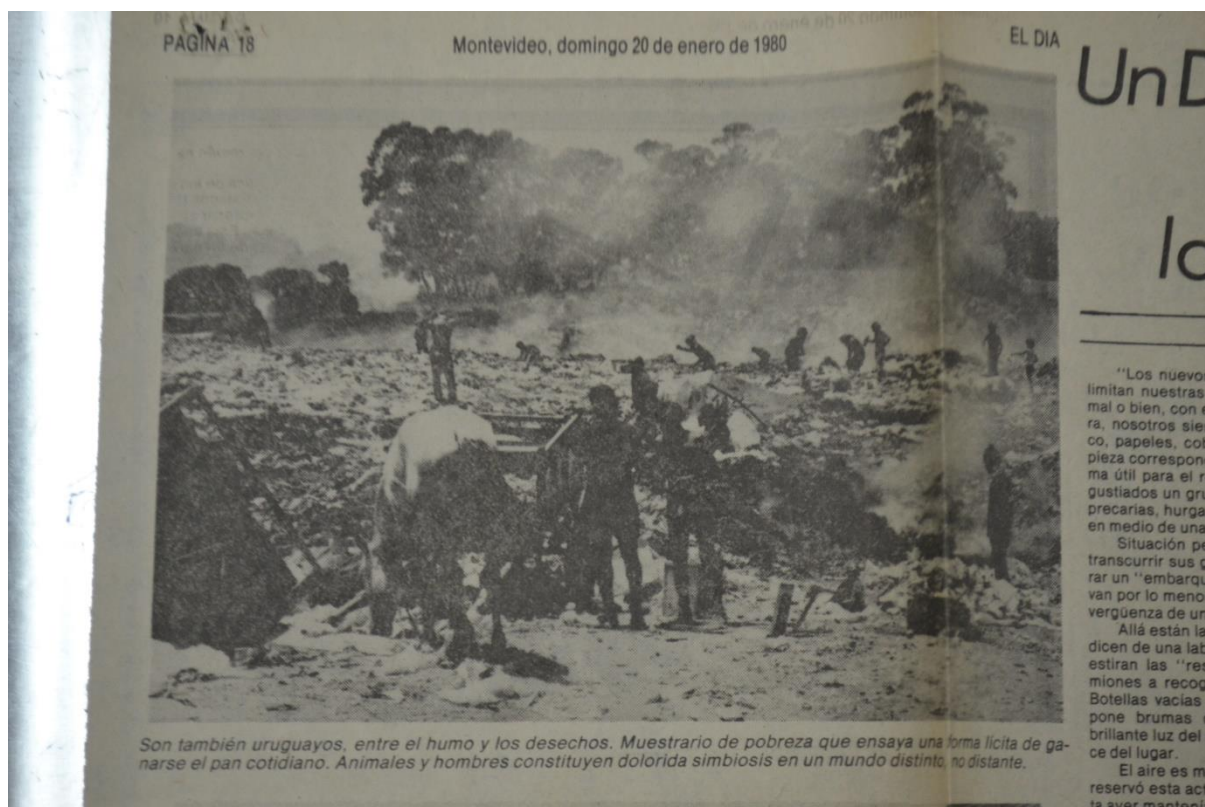


Figure 5 *Clasificadores* at the Usina 5 in 1980. The caption reads: “Between smoke and rubbish, they are also Uruguayans. Sign of poverty which indicates a licit way of earning the daily bread. Animals and men constitute a painful symbiosis of a distinct but not distant world” (El Día 1980)

Suffering repression at work, *burgadores* were no safer at home. Living in shantytowns (*asentamientos*), they suffered regular police and army raids where men were tortured and detained without charge for periods of days to years. Zuli was a middle-aged colleague at the Aries recycling plant when I conducted participant observation there in 2014, but she had worked as a *clasificadora* since moving from rural Rivera with her grandmother as a young girl in the 1970s. In the countryside, she had barely been conscious of the dictatorship but soon found out about it when she moved to the capital. Living in the *asentamiento* of Isla Gaspar, her *clasificador* husband was regularly detained and tortured. “It would be cattle prod and submarine, cattle prod and submarine”, she told me, referring to the techniques of electric shock and water-boarding employed on him.

“Old Selva”, who lived in the first house of the Felipe Cardoso shantytown, and who we shall get to know better in the following chapters, was at the time another Isla Gaspar resident whose husband was detained. Selva told me that he was caught with a list of names, folk who were supposedly leftist militants but were in fact members of the local drumming corps. He was tortured and jailed for 8 years on trumped up charges and now receives government compensation for a shattered kneecap. Ironically, the dictatorship forced others into the waste work it was trying to repress. My

octogenarian Cruz de Carrasco interlocutor, the sprightly Carceja, was a Communist trade unionist held and tortured in the improvised prison of the Cilindro basketball stadium. On release, the only way he could escape persecution was to hide at Felipe Cardoso, earning a living by classifying waste with his two young sons, one of whom would become a neighbour of mine in COVIFU.

During the dictatorship then, there was a dual focus on eliminating both the sanitary risks of polluting things and the perceived political risks of the “dangerous classes”. The reintroduction of burial applied not only to wastes but also to mangled bodies thrown in mass graves, many still undiscovered today. In those years, Zuli remembered making her way to the old country house and grounds of La Tablada on Camino de las Tropas, then in the hands of the military, and where the Intendencia operated a landfill for a short period of time. The police wouldn’t allow *clasificadores* to work there however and the municipality soon began dumping in another site. It has since emerged that La Tablada was used as a detention centre for so-called “subversives”. It is suspected that some victims of state terror were executed and buried there, and forensic anthropologists have been carrying out excavations on the site (La Red 21 2007). The macabre link between the graveyards of persons and things thus re-emerges, contiguous rather than coextensive this time, both victims of the eliminatory zeal of the fascist generals.

The logic of elimination that operated during the dictatorship can be likened to that of the sovereign, in that there was a tendency not only to prohibit but also to “avenge contempt for...authority by the punishment of those who violate its prohibitions” (Muyart de Vouglans, in Foucault 1995:48). Although the dictatorship mostly killed behind closed doors, the public burning of horse and carts accords with Foucault’s analysis of the logic of public executions, which he argues “bring into play...the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength” (ibid). “The ceremony of punishment”, he concludes, “is an exercise of terror” (1995:49). At the same time, if we follow Agamben’s (1998: 11) reworking of bio-politics, there is no need to see the logic of the sovereign and the reduction of *clasificadores* to “bare life” in detention centres as mutually exclusive. Agamben argues that “the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original – if concealed – nucleus of sovereign power”. When the modern state places biological life at the centre of its calculations then, it “does nothing other than bring to light the secret tie uniting power and bare life” (ibid). Anthropologists have also been at odds to stress that rather than “different types of regime”, what is at stake in sovereign, disciplinary and bio-political technologies are “different modalities of power... that coexist in any society” (Graeber 2001: 95). In later works, Foucault appears to suggest as much himself (1991: 102).

The co-existence of different modalities of power operating on persons is mirrored in the co-existence of different “infrastructural logics” focusing on particular aspects of waste’s materiality and calling forth technologies for its management. As such, I would argue that elimination did not constitute a temporally-constrained “waste regime” (Gille 2007) that disappeared at the end of the

dictatorship. Instead, a logic of elimination focusing on the dangerous properties of both waste and *burgadores* remained “residual” (Williams 1977) and resurfaced in different guises. Attempts to institute a municipal recovery of materials did not truly emerge until the 1990s, and even then only as a pilot scheme. Instead, what prevailed was the attempt to extend municipal control of waste, and minimise its risks through more closely monitored landfill practices.

By the time of my fieldwork period of 2014, Felipe Cardoso had been recognised as a ‘controlled’, if not a fully sanitary landfill, with additional plants built to capture and burn methane and to pump out and treat leachates. Despite Joana’s desire to minimise the amount of waste going to Felipe Cardoso, the 70 rubbish carts mentioned by Daniel Muñoz at the beginning of the 20th century had grown to 700 mechanised trucks dumping over 2,000 tonnes of waste on a daily basis (LKSur *et al* 2013:8).⁶ The normative, linear process of waste generation, collection, and disposal remained hegemonic. Yet this is only part of the story of Montevideo’s waste. For, unlike some “developed” countries from which the Montevidean state imported their technologies, hygienic norms, and standards of modernity, Uruguayan technocrats had to account for the “shadow infrastructure” constituted by waste-pickers.

Shadow Infrastructures on the Waste Commons

Just as waste can be considered the dark shadow of more visible processes of production and consumption (Moore 2009), as far back as the origins of Montevideo’s municipal waste management, *clasificadores* represented a shadow infrastructure concerned with recovering value from the waste commons. Thus, inside the “kingdom of filth” he described at the 19th century Buceo landfill, Daniel Muñoz found:

“men who, like pigs, root in the rubbish, disputing with them the scraps. Nothing is wasted here, everything is classified and collected separately: bones here, rags there, beyond them tins and leathers, everything neatly removed from the rubbish which the city’s throws away daily as if useless waste. The leftovers of Montevideo support an industry, a productive industry that provides work to hundreds of arms and feeds numerous families, as well as a thousand succulent and respectable pigs”

(Carrasco and Paolini 2006:37)

As we have seen, the messy but ultimately productive inter-species ecosystem of Buceo proved offensive and dangerous to Uruguayan hygienic modernists and was replaced by the fantasy of total

⁶ Figures are for 2013

elimination embodied in technologies of incineration. But when this infrastructure began to falter and landfills were re-established, waste-picker families followed. As with the Buceo escarpment, there is nothing visible in the sea-side gated community of Barradas that suggests the tonnes of waste which lie beneath. Neither are there many references to this or many other dumping grounds in municipal waste documents. Yet in the 1970s, this was a landfill where a teenage Zuli turned up with her grandmother after falling on hard times. Their tools consisted of hooks on sticks (*ganchos*) with which they raked through the rubbish, but the women would disguise these in musical instrument cases so as not to betray the stigma of their occupation. “‘There go the guitarists!’”, other passengers would say, and my granny would kill herself laughing’, Zuli giggled. “We went all dressed up as if we were going to [the middle-class seaside neighbourhood of] Pocitos but we were going to the *cantera*. We’d arrive and get changed into old clothes”.

During a brief period in the 1970s before dumping was centralised at Felipe Cardoso, the Intendencia operated short-term dumping grounds at various points of the city: Oncativo in the East, Barradas in the South, La Tablada (Camino de las Tropas) in the West, Camino Andaluz in the North and Boi Merino y Menorca nearer the geographic centre (see Fig.3). “I liked Barradas because the beach and the River Carrasco were nearby; I especially liked break time at midday when the trucks which brought the goods [*mercadería*] stopped and... I would go off to explore the forest, the plants, the trees”, reminisced Zuli. “I stayed close to the river because I was used to playing by the stream and woods in Rivera and I was reminded of my village”. “It was strange because I loved to go to the *cantera*”, she continued, “we gathered [*juntábamos*] bread, bones, glass bottles, cardboard, and metals, leaving paper for others”.

Zuli accompanied her memories of bathing at Barradas with other reveries: picking flowers at Felipe Cardoso, and even scrumping for peaches as she wandered to the dump at Camino de las Tropas. These images contrast sharply with the dystopian malaise of foul smells and creatures found in risk-based municipal and journalistic descriptions of dump sites. For Zuli, recovering materials was a way of avoiding hardship in the city; landfills and their surrounding environments spaces of refuge, leisure, and even beauty. While municipal trucks dumped *residuos*, Zuli and her colleagues recovered what they called *material* or *mercadería*. While plastics caused problems for technologies of elimination, *clasificadores* at the *cantera* were the first to realise their potential value. “Before, no-one collected the *botellita* [little bottle]”, my 60-year-old neighbour and veteran *clasificadora* Beatriz explained, referring to plastic PET bottles. “Who first started working the bottles because no-one else did? Me”, she smiled proudly. Because she was the only one with access to a buyer and thus a market for PET, other *clasificadores* even put the bottles aside for her, believing them to be of little value. “For a while I lived from the *botellita*”, she recalled fondly, “until the others cottoned on when another buyer appeared at the landfill”.

Clasificadores have largely appeared in this chapter as a group who interfere with the smooth running of municipal infrastructure, challenge “infrastructural modernity”, and were particularly repressed during the dictatorship. But their presence also influenced the planning of such infrastructure. It became clear from my fieldwork at the Laboratorio that the obligation to destroy materials – to transform them from waste-as discard to waste-as-unusable material – responded not to a generic hygienic imperative but to the presence of waste-pickers at the landfill. This applied to even the most unlikely items. When she received the phone-call enquiry about disposing of shark meat at Felipe Cardoso, Joana responded that this certainly couldn’t go in as it was, because *clasificadores* might eat it. I don’t know whether shark meat would have held much interest for my interlocutors but they did tell me that when Leo, the much-loved first elephant to be born in Uruguay, died and was dumped at Felipe Cardoso, a fine feast was had. In the final weeks of my fieldwork, my neighbour Martín Azucarero also did the rounds selling Australian kangaroo steaks that had turned up at the landfill, presumably after being impounded at the port. So Joana’s fears about illicit shark consumption might well have been justified.

In official waste legislation, it is nowhere stated that companies should render their waste unusable in order to prevent *clasificadores* from consuming it. Certain materials were modified to make them suitable for dumping at Felipe Cardoso: tyres shredded to stop air bubbles filling up with methane; liquids mixed with sawdust to transform them into solid waste; chemicals modified in order to adjust PH levels; paints diluted to lower the quantity of lead contained. Yet, to take the case of another material I witnessed being destroyed, this time at the Intendencia’s composting plant, what risk did packets of Phillip Morris cigarettes pose to the operation of the landfill? The risk, which existed as a sort of “open secret”, was that *clasificadores* at the landfill would either consume or re-enter them into commercial circulation. The profitable activity of *inutilizando* carried out by the waste processing industry in Uruguay and often cited as examples of responsible environmental management, in fact partly responded to the stubborn and unstated existence of *clasificadores* at the landfill.

The presence of urban waste-pickers shaped municipal waste infrastructures in other ways too. As part of a large Inter-American Development Bank (BID) funded project to improve Montevideo’s sanitary system in the early 2000s, recycling stations known as “green points” (*puntos verdes*) were set up so that *clasificadores* could leave their discards there instead of clogging up pipes and waterways with them. In 2014, when the Intendencia ordered special sliding mouth waste containers for the city centre, there was little doubt that these were designed to keep out not “vandals” as was claimed, but waste-pickers. At Felipe Cardoso itself, the foreman told me that waste was being dumped in such a way so as to build up a great wall of rubbish, behind which waste would continue to be landfilled, and waste-pickers continue to labour without being visible from the street. Waste technologies were sometimes designed to make the work of *clasificadores* difficult, as was the case with the “anti-vandal” containers, “Kuka” trucks and the obligatory shredding of commercial waste. The *puntos verdes* and

landfill landscaping were, inversely, attempts to accommodate their presence. But all were designed to make municipal waste infrastructures run more smoothly in the face of *clasificador* activity.

In the Laboratorio, Joana and her team played their own part in ensuring that the municipality retained control over materials, doubling up as detectives investigating the illegal diversion of discards away from Felipe Cardoso, either for clandestine disposal or for unregulated recycling. I was present when they received a complaint alleging that a garage in upper-class Carrasco had been dumping tyres at the back of the Felipe Cardoso shantytown, presumably paying residents a small fee but avoiding the larger cost of shredding the tyres and entering them into Felipe Cardoso. Invisible from the street and difficult to access for inspectors, a large circular pit of tyres was nevertheless visible in a Google Earth print-out that the Laboratorio staff studied in the office. Another day, Joana mentioned the name of someone who had been picking up waste from a large furniture company without the appropriate documentation, and without then taking it to Felipe Cardoso. Was he perhaps a Cruz de Carrasco *clasificador* recycling materials in the informal sector? The fact that I knew most waste-pickers only by their nicknames meant that I could honestly answer that I had no idea who Joana was taking about.⁷

Waste-picking activity was, for municipal bureaucrats, shadow-like. Often unmentioned in official paperwork, waste-pickers were present in places where they should have been absent, operating at the margins of legality and regulation. Nevertheless, they had to be taken into account both in everyday bureaucratic activity, and in longer term infrastructural planning. The image of *clasificadores* labouring in the shadow of Felipe Cardoso's waste mountain provides the perfect illustration of the adaptation of municipal infrastructure to waste-pickers' presence. But if there was municipal oversight at the landfill, the informal labour of *clasificadores* was elsewhere difficult to grasp, bureaucratically illegible, ghost-like even. This was a world of blurred photographs of wrong-doing, phantom "companies" – with names like Environmental Commitment' (*Compromiso Ambiental*) – which operated without municipal registration, and unconfirmed reports of illegality.

Rather than merely an illicit practice, however, the activity of Montevidean *clasificadores* can also be seen as an infrastructure in its own right, albeit one which exists in the shadow of the state. As "matter that enable the movement of other matter" (Larkin 2013: 329), waste services are not like other infrastructures like roads allowing transport, or pylons permitting the passage of an electrical current. As Josh Reno (2016) sets out in his excellent ethnography of a Michigan landfill, the "enabling activity" of waste infrastructures lies in the way that they allow people to live their lives in relative separation from the discards they co-produce. *Clasificadores*, in their extraction of waste from

⁷ Uruguayans are particularly fond of using nicknames. This tendency is perhaps more pronounced in the world of *clasificadores* but I also observed an incident at the Laboratorio that indicates their more common usage. The director wanted to get in touch with civil servant whom she only knew by the name of 'El Chino' (the Chinaman)- attempts to contact him using the general directory thus failed, and she had to phone around several colleagues to find out his real name.

municipal bins, in their organised collections from neighbours, and by extending the life of the landfill through reducing the waste buried there, exercise this infrastructural function. In the case of waste extraction, *clasificador* infrastructure runs parallel to municipal collection, a situation that is intolerable for Uruguayan urbanists like Barracchini and Altezor, who argue that municipal control over primary services like waste collection is “inalienable” and should immediately be reasserted over the “primitive use of little carts” (2010:271). Yet the infrastructural logic that motivates *clasificador* activity is clearly different from that which organises municipal collection. As I explore in the following chapters, *clasificadores* focus on recovering value in discards, rather than enclosing and eliminating them in order to minimise the risk they pose.

Conclusion

This chapter has approached Montevidean waste from a primarily municipal perspective, through a historical account of waste management infrastructure combined with participant observation conducted with private and public sector waste managers. For the most part, municipal waste management in Montevideo has been based on a linear model of classification, containment, transport, and elimination by landfill or incineration. This approach amounts to what I call “hygienic enclosure”: attempts to minimise waste’s potential for hygienic and aesthetic risk, and maintain a municipal monopoly on waste management at all stages of the waste disposal process. Late 20th century liberalisation opened up limited spaces for private sector involvement in containment, transport and indeed the creation of waste, but this was still guided by the municipal granting of concessions.

Together, the minimisation of hygienic and aesthetic risk, and the attempt to establish a municipal monopoly on waste collection can be seen as constants in what I have discussed as the shifting infrastructural modernity of Montevidean waste collection. Within this model, the substance of risk may itself change or remain the same. Germs replaced miasmas as the source of epidemic and hygienic risk at the beginning of the 20th century, and the foulest smelling industries ceased to be automatically conceived as the most dangerous. With respect to aesthetic risk, on the other hand, there appears to be more consistency, at least during the 20th century, when omnipresent overflowing bins were negatively perceived as indicators of infrastructural failure and threats to Montevideo’s modernity. The drive to contain waste has also endured in time: what has changed are the materials thought best to ensure this enclosure, evolving from “wooden boxes with metal lids” to “anti-vandal” plastic containers.

Another relative constant has been the way in which infrastructural models and visions of modernity have been sought from beyond Uruguay’s borders, principally in Europe. Montevideo was

one of the first South American countries to install English built incinerators at the beginning of the 20th century, and at the beginning of the 21st, important political figures lobbied for Uruguay to become the first in the continent to pioneer a waste-to-energy plant, modelled on the Italian city of Brescia (El País 2014). The notion that Uruguay imports ideas and technologies is hardly a revelation, but it has meant that a native “shadow infrastructure” operated by waste-pickers has often been framed as backward in comparison. *Clasificadores* on horse and cart have been criticised as a challenge to an infrastructural modernity that includes hygienic norms, state control, and the deployment of imported technologies.

I have shown that municipal waste managers have had to adapt their infrastructure to account for the presence of *clasificadores* in ways which have variously sought to pragmatically accommodate, or eliminate their activity. This can be seen in the containers designed to keep waste-pickers out, in the landfill landscaping that disguises their presence, and in the construction of “green points” to prevent post-classification discards from blocking sanitation infrastructures. More than anywhere, however, it can be seen in the stipulation that materials entering the landfill must be “rendered unusable”. This clause, easily framed as an environmental imperative because it sits amongst other stipulations that regulate the levels of free liquids, heavy metals, and contaminants which enter the landfill, in fact addresses another kind of risk. Waste-as-discard is transformed into waste-as-unusable material in order to prevent landfill waste-pickers accessing the waste commons to share, consume, or possibly recommodify “ex-commodities” (Barnard 2016) or “would-be commodities” (Boarder-Giles 2015: 12) on their own terms.

This last point highlights that although *clasificadores* and municipal waste workers share a common infrastructural function when they collect discards from citizens – allowing them to live separated from their waste – the operating principle of each is fundamentally different. The municipal priority, as we have seen, centres on the minimisation of risk in its many forms, while the “shadow infrastructure” of waste-pickers is, as we shall explore in later chapters, guided by the risky extraction of value from the waste-stream. The social relations and spaces for capital accumulation enabled by municipal decree are centred on practices and technologies of containment and destruction; those of waste pickers on liberating the potential value and relations embedded in discarded things.

Chapter Three

The “Mother Dump”: Montevideo’s Landfill Commons

A desalambrar, a desalambrar!

que la tierra es nuestra,

es tuya y de aquel,

de Pedro y María, de Juan y José.

Let’s tear down the fences, let’s tear down the fences!

this land is mine,

yours, everyone’s,

Pedro and Maria's, Juan and Jose's.

A Desalambrar, Daniel Viglietti (Montevideo, 1968)

The hill visible from the window and garden of my COVIFU home was represented in the paintings of neighbourhood children as a rolling curve of green, much like those children anywhere in the world would depict. This peak differed slightly, however, for beneath a thin surface layer of grass lay not dark earth but a stranger mix of plastics, papers, metals, bones, cardboard, and food waste. This, the third highest point in Montevideo, was the Usina 6, part of the Felipe Cardoso landfill range which constitutes the graveyard for Montevideo’s recent waste. Alongside it, the currently operational Usina 8 receives 700 trucks and skips daily, which between them dump over 2000 tonnes of waste (LKSUR *et al* 2013:8). Its bulldozers and compacters work around the clock to crush and spread the waste across its surface area, and from my bed at night I could hear the beeping of *las machinas* as they advanced and reversed. The sweet-smelling cocktail of mixed rubbish, quite unlike that of domestic waste or rotting organic matter alone, would often drift over, scenting the evening mist or morning dew. It was not entirely unpleasant. Known colloquially as *la cantera* (the quarry), Felipe Cardoso provides a resting place for the city’s waste as well as considerable employment, for *municipales*

(municipal workers), a few *milicos* (police guards) and a much larger number of *gateadores* (crawlers), the name given to the waste-pickers who, more or less stealthily, enter the landfill.

Landfills have been viewed as a “prism through which social scientists refract the politics and economics of consumption; industry-government and labor relations; urban-rural divides...and more” (Hird 2013: 106). In recent history, they have been overwhelmingly depicted as sites of potentially contaminating and degrading human labour and risk. As Josh Reno notes, “you do not need to know much about landfills to know that you are not supposed to like them” (2015: 22). Lucia Fernandez summarises reports on working conditions for *clasificadores* at Felipe Cardoso as agreeing that these are “indecorous, dehumanising and aggressive” (2007:91), with similar descriptions of landfill waste-picking found elsewhere. Yet little participant observation has been carried out at Felipe Cardoso, partly due to the semi-clandestine nature of recycling work there.

I was able to enter and conduct fieldwork thanks to my next-door neighbour Juan and the openness of the core group of *gateadores* who overcame any initial doubts about my presence and welcomed me fully into the fold, even giving me a ritualised initiation which involved being thrown into a filthy pond at the nearby Parque Rivera. Following a consideration of the way that my *clasificador* neighbours, workmates, and interlocutors interacted with and described the landfill, I suggest here that rather than a dystopian nightmare, the space can be understood as part of an urban waste commons. For the *gateadores*, the *cantera* was “a giant playground”, the “big free shop”, and a “mother” to whom they could always turn. After situating my work in the context of wider commons scholarship, and situating *gateadores* within the wider *clasificador* population, this chapter focuses on the activity of Felipe Cardoso’s waste-pickers, detailing their resistance to attempted “hygienic enclosure” of the landfill. I subsequently transition into a comparison between the historic English commons and what I postulate can be understood as the contemporary urban commons of Montevideo’s landfill.

What parallels can be found between the historic enclosure of English common wastes and the attempted “hygienic enclosure” of waste at the landfill? Worldwide, with many rural habitats either destroyed or enclosed and populations urbanised, could landfills, as spaces of autonomy and alternatives to low-paid waged labour, represent a contemporary urban counterpart to the rural commons? In the following pages, I resist a simplistic commonwealth/commodity dichotomy and a romantic vision of democratic commons management by exploring differential access to the *cantera* and its role as a node where commodities are recovered into the capitalist economy. Rather than simply applying the commons concept to the *cantera*, I follow Lazar in conducting a “disjunctive comparison” that exposes both “differences and similarities across two quite different contexts” (2012: 349). In suggesting comparison with the historic English commons, I extend Kathleen Millar’s (2014) questioning of the assumptions surrounding the precarity of “rag-pickers”, drawing attention

to the historical specificity of hygienic enclosure and the burial of the value embedded in waste, surplus, and excess.

The present juncture of waste politics in Uruguay is characterised by a state initiative to formalise the lower (*clasificador*) and middle (*intermediario*) links in the recycling chain. This chapter serves to highlight that where informal sector recyclers can gain access, materials that arrive at landfills are not necessarily “wasted”. Formal sector recycling companies are thus not operating on virgin territories but are potentially involved in a form of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2008): a transfer of materials and income from common to private territories, and from the informal to the formal sector. In the context of increasing resource scarcity, academics, government, and the private sector are becoming aware of the value embedded in urban structures such as buildings or sinks and beginning to speak of “urban mining” (Brunner 2011). But in the shadows of the formal economy and wider society, sections of the urban poor have long been “pathfinders” (Luning 2014) in recognising value amidst the trash and rubble.

Commons and Wastes

From cyberspace (Levine 2002) to academic production (Neary & Winn 2012), indigenous forests (Cahtre & Agrawal 2009) to occupied squares and social movements (Harvey 2011; Susser and Tonnelat 2013), the concept of the commons has in recent years been reinvigorated, even if the “traditional” commons have not quite been restored. Publications have burgeoned on the “big five” topics on commons research (forestry, fishing, animal husbandry, water management, irrigation) (Van Laerhoven & Ostrum 2007), alongside a search to identify or create new urban commons (Hardt and Negri 2009; Hardt, Negri & Harvey 2009; Hardt 2010; Harvey 2011, 2012, Borch and Kornberger 2015, Amin and Howell 2016).

Judging by recent publications, anthropologists have been rather more reluctant than other social scientists to frame their work in terms of the commons (although see Strathern 2016, Muehlebach 2017), with the most comprehensive anthropological volume on the commons published by McKay and Acheson in 1987. To some degree, this compendium of ethnographic case-studies follows the scholarship model of Elinor Ostrum (e.g. 1990) and her collaborators in that both seek to challenge Garret Hardin’s (1968) “tragedy of the commons” argument through a series of real-world case-studies of effective commons management. Hardin’s hypothesis was that left to their own devices, farmers would increase their cattle on common land, leading to over-grazing (the “tragedy of the commons”), whereas the institution of private property rights and/or state intervention would provide an incentive for ecological conservation. In fact, Hardin’s theory, a variant of the prisoner’s

dilemma, rests on stock economic assumptions about individual, rational self-interest and failed to acknowledge that farmers might communicate to arrive at an agreement, or might not act as individuals at all. As such, the theory provided the ground for anthropologists to engage in a favourite sport: the disproving of economic models through the mobilisation of ethnographic evidence.

There is of course a danger in appealing to a concept that has become increasingly expansive, accommodating “artificial commons”, urban spaces, and seemingly every public or semi-public resource at risk of privatisation (Parker and Johannson 2011). And as Silvia Federici notes, much radical commons theory focuses on “the formal preconditions for the existence of commons” rather than the “material requirements for the construction of a commons-based economy enabling us to resist dependence on wage labor and subordination to capitalist relations” (2010: 4). One way that I attempt to remediate these dangers is through my methodological approach. Montevideo’s waste commons, I suggest, has more “in common” with the classic case of the various English commons than with square occupations or online activism. I opt to return to the roots that sustain later commons scholarship, combining a social history of the heterogeneous English commons with oral history and contemporary ethnography of Montevidean waste-pickers.

In the following part of this chapter, I detail the history of Felipe Cardoso, its contemporary predicament, and the position of its *gateadores* in relation to waste-pickers in Montevideo more generally. I then focus on the attempted hygienic enclosure of Felipe Cardoso as part of the local state’s risk-based approach to waste, and document the resistance of *clasificadores*, whose forms resemble the “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985) mobilised by fence-breaking English commoners. Turning to the commons, I identify five commonalities between Montevideo’s landfill and old English commons centred around property status; the rights claimed by poor and vulnerable populations; patterns of usufruct and extraction of use-values; their position as refuges from wage labour; and the blurring of the boundaries between work and play. Against what I consider the ideological purifying of some radical commons scholars who focus on the absence of exchange and the presence of “communing” as the sine qua non of any commons, I suggest that the economics and management of urban commons like Montevideo’s landfill are inevitably “messy”, without this precluding the existence of important continuities with traditional rural commons.

Felipe Cardoso: the (not so) Final Resting Place

As set out in the previous chapter, Montevidean waste disposal oscillated between incineration and landfill during the course of the 20th century. Incineration was initially replaced with a series of short and medium term dumps that filled in natural depressions and quarries in different parts of the city

until, in the 1970s, the Intendencia began to concentrate waste disposal in the east of Montevideo. When I interviewed municipal waste engineer Blengio, he extolled the advantages of the area for landfilling, including low population density, clayish soil, and a considerable distance from the city's water supply. Some maps still refer to the area as *Las Canteras* (The Quarries) due to the large number in the area and, according to Blengio, dumping began when local brick manufacturer Andres Deu agreed to let the municipality fill some of his quarries with waste.⁸

A little detective work brought to light a more serendipitous account of the founding of the *madre cantera* (mother dump) at Felipe Cardoso. After the staggered closure of most of Montevideo's municipal incinerators in the 1960s, the Intendencia returned to landfilling, but this was by no means meant to be a permanent solution. In his 1958 report, Francisco Bonino advocated the "fertiliser" or "incinerator" disposal method instead, arguing that landfills, which "always create environmental problems because of imperfections in compaction or cover", should only be reverted to "in emergencies and on the smallest scale possible" (1958:16). It was thought that the filling of geographic depressions and quarries would soon reach a natural limit, and the activism of neighbours in surrounding areas further restricted municipal room for manoeuvre as occurred in New York (Gandy 2003) and Buenos Aires (Suarez 2016).

When the Intendencia began filling the Lussisch quarry with rubbish in the mid-1960s, and the *cantera* Barradas in Paso Carrasco in 1970, neighbours complained and even occupied the sites (Hechos 1965, El Día 1970). As we have seen, they objected not just to the odours, flies, rats, and consequent risks of disease, but also to the presence of waste-pickers. A representative of a neighbourhood association near the Lussisch quarry told one newspaper that the neighbours didn't want to "continue fighting against the *Cantera de los Presos* shantytown, whose residents say that they will set up home wherever the rubbish is taken" (Hechos 1965). The Intendencia was also unhappy with the presence of waste-pickers at its dumps. At a 1968 press conference, which celebrated the (much contested) success of Operativo Limpieza, the municipal head of Engineering and Public Works said that the Intendencia was trying to "prevent groups gathering at dumps...in order to collect [*juntar*] newspapers and objects that they subsequently sell" (Acción 1968). The situation was "particularly alarming at the so-called *Cantera de los Presos*, where people expose themselves to serious risks because of the sanitary conditions" (ibid). The problem, he claimed, would be "definitively solved with the creation of the Usina 5, which would soon be able to transform, daily, around 400 kilos of rubbish into fertiliser" (ibid). The plant at Felipe Cardoso was to be the first of the Intendencia's Usinas to be dedicated not to incineration nor to landfill, but to the transformation of waste into compost.

⁸ The importance of this brick kiln for the local area can be seen in the fact that Flor de Maroñas used to be known as the Barrio Industrial Andres Deu.

The initiative originated with a group of councillors belonging to the Frente Amplio (El Popular 1972), whose first incarnation enjoyed a brief existence before being outlawed by the 1973-1985 dictatorship. Optimistic accounts suggested that the sale of the fertiliser could earn the Intendencia large sums of money (El Diario 1972) in the context of leftist proposals to institute import substitution industrialisation that would replace fertilisers bought from overseas. But the plant, whose machinery was itself imported from England, was plagued with difficulties from the outset. “The machinery was installed”, reported one visiting journalist in 1971, “but [the plant] could not and cannot begin to function because the plans for the main switchboard are missing” (La Mañana 1971). The composting plant was still the municipality’s “great hope for the daily elimination of a large volume of waste without endangering the health of the population” (ibid). But the “acrid and penetrating smell” that “invaded the lungs” of the journalist in question came not from fertiliser but from the ‘University Campus *Cantera*’ a few blocks away, where he reported that “the city’s waste [was] currently dumped” (ibid). When the plans finally arrived from England, a power-cut further delayed the Usina’s inauguration (Ahora 1972), and when production began, doubts persisted about the quality of a product that, due to its deficiencies, could not in fact be marketed as fertiliser or compost, only as “soil improver” (El Día 1973a, El Día 1973b).

Production lasted barely a year, and the site very quickly became yet another landfill, exemplifying AbdouMaliq Simone’s (2016) point that “the apparent systematicity of cities is in large part a process of ‘one thing leading to another’” (Venkatesan *et al* 2016: 16). “...And the rubbish keeps piling up” headlined an instructive 1973 article which noted that whilst the Usina “wasn’t working”, the installation and its surroundings were “completely filling up with rubbish” (Ultima Hora 1973). Neighbours complained that the place had become “totally unhygienic and unwelcoming because of the immense quantity of unknown individuals who marauded day and night in the neighbourhood, attracted by the enormous mountain of rubbish” (ibid). These “marauders”, none other than the waste-pickers who form the subject of this thesis, had even taken over the sanitary facilities built for municipal workers (ibid). The Usina 5 thus only “solved” the waste-picker problem in that it gave the latter a semi-permanent space where they could labour intermittently over the following decades and up until the present day.

The official title of Felipe Cardoso is now the *Sitio de Disposición Final* (SDF): the “site of final disposal”. While it is sometimes referred to as a sanitary landfill, it does not meet the international requirements to be recognised as such (Thurgood 1999), because the site is located in the city, is not covered on a daily basis, and features the presence of waste-pickers. In the words of the landfill foreman, “for anyone who knows sanitary landfill, this doesn’t really compare”. More broadly, Felipe Cardoso can be considered a “waste complex” that includes the now inactive Usinas 6 & 7; the old Usina 5 area (where the COFECA cooperative classified waste from 2006-2014); a leachate and

biogas treatment plant;⁹ a semi-public area for small-scale dumping in skips; nearby private waste transfer and treatment stations; semi-clandestine dumping sites; and the informal housing settlement (*asentamiento*) or shantytown where many of the *gateadores* live (see Figs.6 & 7). All these sites are connected by flows of trucks, waste materials, and people in a local example of “waste-dependent development” (Gille 2015) through which the excavations of Andres Deu were replaced with the landfill of Felipe Cardoso.

Trucks collecting waste in the centre of Montevideo can be conceived of as containing a homogeneous mass of junk, the city’s “surplus materials” (Gille 2010) or the antithesis of value (Alexander 2012). But when the vehicles turn the corner into Felipe Cardoso, their status undergoes a sharp revision as they become a heterogeneous jumble of the recoverable and the rotten – desired and valuable things sitting alongside plain old rubbish. One ceases to deal with monolithic waste and finds instead a medley that undergoes a fine separation of *basura* from that which can be commodified, repaired, and reconfigured. A patchwork of dumping grounds, scrap yards, polluted soils, and homes constituted from recovered materials, Felipe Cardoso was also my home for fieldwork.

Over the course of 2014, I worked at the *cantera* with Juan, with whom I shared ages, a passion for football, and a close friendship. After sleepily drinking early morning *mates* over an action film, we would travel the few hundred metres to the *cantera* together, hide our scooters in the cane or woods and head up to the dumping area known as the *pista* for about 7am, entering through a large hole in the landfill’s fenced perimeter. Since waste material didn’t arrive in much quality or quantity until around 9am, we had time to talk with the other 20 or so “core *gateadores*” about last night’s football match, complain about a deceitful materials buyer, or laugh about someone’s weekend antics. “Got anything good today?” Juan would often shout to the driver of a recognisable truck as we entered, such as those that brought chicken, hot dogs, or meat. He would also greet some of the municipal workers who remembered his round, jolly face from childhood, because he had been brought up at the *cantera* by his mother, the formidable Beatriz, or Gorda Bea (Big Bea).

⁹ Leachates are the polluted liquids which run off any landfill and thus should be captured and treated, while the biogas plant, funded by the World Bank through a ‘carbon credits’ scheme, captures methane gas.

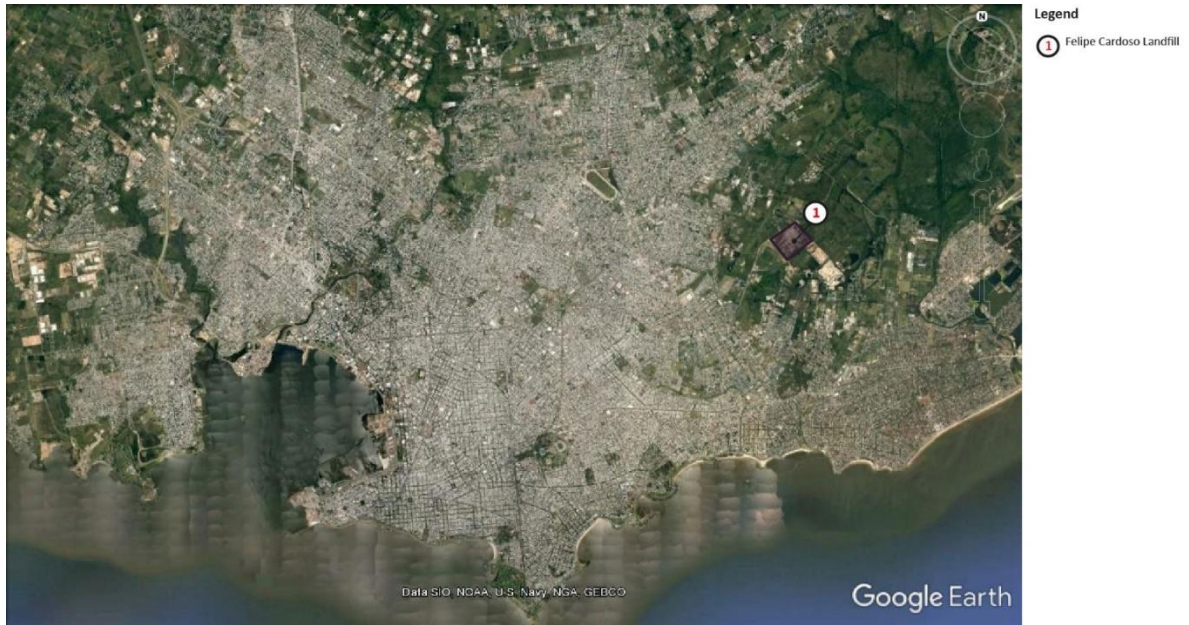


Figure 6 The Felipe Cardoso landfills in relation to Montevideo



Figure 7 The Felipe Cardoso waste complex

Many of the core *clasificadores* were kin, and around half lived in the informal housing settlement established soon after the landfill was moved to the area in the 1970s. The *cantera* had several respected authority figures: El Ruso, Juan's paternal uncle, a once feared old jailbird who now worked quietly with his daughter and daughter-in-law (then the only two women at the dump); Juan's maternal uncle "El Puto", who had worked there longest; Negrito, one of the few who had persisted at the *cantera* during the 2000s as the Intendencia attempted to move all the *gateadores* to an approved cooperative site; and Enrique, younger, but brought up at the landfill, a man who barely missed a day's work and had amassed significant capital through hard work and access to valuable trucks. Many of the *gateadores* were, like Juan, heads of large families. Another group, loosely referred to as *los gurises* (the kids), were young men like Juan's brother-in-law Leo, who worked less arduously to earn a smaller amount of money that they often spent on clothes, trainers, and going out dancing.

Gateadores often worked in pairs as partners (*socios*) who could help each other hoist *bolsones* (large bags) of recyclables onto shoulders, keep each other company, and split earnings (a useful safety net if one became ill). Working practices varied between scouring old waste for material and accessing the fresh waste recently dumped by trucks before a *machina* arrived to compact and spread it over the dump. The most valuable of these trucks carried not household waste but that from factories, building sites, and large commercial enterprises. *Gateadores* generally tried to complement each other by focusing on different materials (principally cardboard, plastic, paper, and metals) if possible, and switched depending on market value – Juan changed from PET bottles to cardboard during the year – supplementing income with the recovery of metals like copper, steel, and aluminium. For most *clasificadores*, the differentiation of materials was a sensory and principally visual activity – a process of training one's eye to recognise value in the trash.

Recovery implied both a movement from the general to the particular (from mass waste to singled out thing) and from the particular to the general (from a thing with a particular history and characteristics to a general category). Thus, a bronze tap spotted at the landfill would both be differentiated from surrounding rejectia and assimilated into a general category (bronze) where importance would be placed on certain characteristics (weight, purity) but not its status as a tap or its life history. Through this training of the eye, a homogeneous pile of rubbish was reconceptualised as a stack of valuable material categories interspersed with trash. At the same time, categories that might operate in other spheres of life were disregarded. Receipts, blank paper, a jotter, a new book, and bus tickets all become *blanco* (white paper).

What is the relation between materiality and classification? On one level, certain material properties of things determine how they can be used as raw materials and thus valued as commodities. *Botellitas* are simply one form taken by the polymer polyethylene terephthalate (abbreviated as PET) – any

other molecular composition and these would not be able to enter the same productive processes of dissolution and re-composition. Although glossed in vernacular as “the little bottle”, this is clearly not a purely cultural classification imposed on the material environment: the classificatory category emerges out of an intimate knowledge of the material properties of this synthetic resin. *Clasificadores* at the landfill do not of course have to be aware of the molecular structure of the *material* they concentrate on, only how to recognise them, so as to sell it on to men variously described as buyers (*compradores*), yard owners (*depositeros*), or intermediaries (*intermediarios*) who come to collect them. Some *clasificadores* doubled up as small time *depositeros*, buying materials from their colleagues at the landfill, others built up long-term relations with particular buyers – a practice which they felt led to more preferential rates – while others still shopped around for the best prices. Paper and cardboard mostly stayed in the national economy, and were transformed by large manufacturers like IPUSA, but plastics often travelled contraband abroad. This could be to Brazil, in one of Canario’s trucks but also shipped to places like to Belgium and China by wholesale buyer El Hugo.

For municipal workers, the process of managing the waste that remained at the landfill was a technical procedure, consisting primarily of compacting and spreading rubbish whilst dodging the *gateadores*. When I interviewed the landfill foreman, he told me that management of the site was a process of trial and error, where the theoretical knowledge of engineers interacted with his more practical experience and that of machine operators (*machinistas*). Whilst household wastes were relatively easy to deal with, industrial wastes such as those from the leather industry were more problematic. Tanneries are one of the largest and most polluting industries in the country, generating seventeen different types of waste at different stages of the productive process, according to Laboratorio director Joana. The arrival of sludge and cattle innards (*tripa*) were particularly problematic for the dump foreman, and he had tried out different tactics to deal with them, such as isolating and covering them with other rubbish – creating “islands where machines sunk in a metre of tripe” as he put it –, spreading them around the site, and finally mixing them with dry waste, which was effective unless it rained. This was the treacherous terrain the *gateadores* had to tread and negotiate in their daily activity of extracting value from the wastescape.

The landfill *gateadores* form part of a larger population of *clasificadores* in Montevideo and Uruguay and a brief quantitative survey is necessary in order to clarify the representativeness of my landfill fieldsite. The size of the *clasificador* population is a contentious political issue, with Montevideo’s local government and the *clasificador* trade union (UCRUS) often at loggerheads over numbers in a way reminiscent of conflicting organiser and police estimates of demonstration attendance. Rather than seek to arrive at a definitive number, I will list here the most important attempts at quantifying what has often been perceived as the *clasificador* “problem”. A 1986 local government study (BIRF-IMM 1986) cited by Chabalgoity et al (2004) provides one of the earliest *clasificador* estimates: for the year 1978, it gives the number of 800 waste-pickers divided between 600 working at the landfill and 200

horse and carts in the city. The second figure taken up by Chabalgoity et al (2004) is from the same study, and describes the number of carts for 1986 as having grown to between 2,000 and 3,000. The numbers are slippery – several people might work collecting and separating materials from a single cart – but they appear to capture an inverse relationship, suggested to me by municipal interviewees, between the numbers allowed to work at the landfill and those on the streets.

In 1990, the first voluntary census of Montevidean *clasificadores* was carried out by the Intendencia, in conjunction with an NGO, the Organización San Vicente (OSV), founded by the Uruguayan priest Padre Cacho. During the 1973-85 Uruguayan military dictatorship, Cacho was a Catholic radical operating under the protection of Montevideo's Archbishop, the quiet but virtuous Carlos Partelli (Clara 2012). He lived in a poor community in provincial Salto before returning to Montevideo in 1978 where he established himself first in the shantytown of Placido Ellauri, then in neighbouring Aparicio Saravia, living in shacks (*ranchos*) “no different from the rest...a little house of wood and metal, a bed, a table, 3 plates, glasses, a pot and some clothes” (Clara 2012: 35). He wanted to move to the shantytowns, Cacho told a fellow priest, because “that is where God is, and I want to find him” (ibid: 29). Cacho did not only privilege the poor however, he also prioritised a subsection within them: waste-pickers. He became known as “the priest of the little carts” (*el cura de los carritos*) for his close association and helped change their popular nomenclature from the semi-disdainful *burgador* (rummager) to the more dignified *clasificador* (classifier). Urban recyclers represented a population of special interest for the priest not only because many of his neighbours engaged in the activity but also because they appeared as particularly marginalised and scapegoated. Cacho recognised the important environmental role played by these “ecological agents”, arguing that “the injured dignity [of the *clasificador*] calls out for us to recognise him as a worker, prophet and citizen” (Alonso 1992).

The OSV's 1990 survey resulted in the number of 3,500 *clasificadores*. In 2003, following the Uruguayan economic crisis, an “obligatory” but not legally binding Intendencia/OSV census recorded the number of *clasificadores* as having doubled to 7,200 (Chabalgoity et al 2004: 14). A survey carried out in 2006 for Uruguay's *Plan de Atención Nacional a la Emergencia Social* (PANES), an emergency anti-poverty program, gave the figure of 8,729 *clasificadores* (PUC 2006:19) nationwide. In 2012, the Intendencia carried out another study with the help of the national university (Universidad de la Republica)'s statistics department, estimating 2,027 households and 3,188 individuals engaged in the classification of waste in Montevideo. While the PANES figures are national and the latest Intendencia figures refer to the capital alone, there is still a large difference between the 4,407 *clasificador* households recorded in the 2006 PANES, and the 2,027 households identified in the 2012 Intendencia study. The most recent household study (*Encuesta Continua de Hogares*) of 2015 estimated between 2,000 and 3,000 *clasificadores* (Matonte, Fernández and Sangunetti 2017). To put these figures into perspective, Uruguay has a population of 3.4 million inhabitants and Montevideo 1.3 million.

Municipal sources told me that there has been a decrease in the number of *clasificadores* in recent years as a result of economic recovery, a boom in the construction industry, and government labour force formalisation policies. However, the *clasificador* trade union disputes such a notion, regularly citing the figure of 15,000 *clasificadores* for Montevideo. When the 2013 study was released, the president of the UCRUS countered in the press with the figure of 7,000 *clasificadores*, the total number of waste-pickers who had been issued with the Intendencia's "*clasificador* card", and a figure he increased to 21,000 to include dependent family members (La Red 21 2013). Even the director of the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) unit responsible for *clasificadores*, Program Uruguay Clasifica (PUC), was sceptical about the most recent study. "I don't trust the Intendencia and Statistics Unit study much", she told me, "there have been studies but not a real census because a census carried out on a voluntary basis is not a real census". A further difficulty for quantification is the existence of those who do not count waste-picking as their central occupation, but who combine recycling with other economic activities and "odd jobs" (*changas*).

Of the studies, the most in depth with respect to the socio-economic profile of waste-pickers is the PANES. Per the PANES study, the Uruguayan waste-picker is overwhelmingly male (almost 80%) and has little formal education (77% hadn't gone further than primary school), while the average age that *clasificador* women had their first child was 17 (PUC 2006:18-19). The 2013 IM/ Statistics study compared the surveyed *clasificador* households with figures from various other control groups, including shantytown and Montevideo averages, and found *clasificadores* significantly weaker in terms of educational attainment against all groups. *Clasificadores* were also found more likely to be self-employed or to have more than one job, worked marginally less hours, and were less likely to have pension provision.

With respect to *clasificador* income, one finds widely varied results and indicators in the relevant studies. The 2002 "census" detailed an average *clasificador* income of US\$146 (U\$3650) per month (PUC 2006:13), while Chabalgoity et al (2004) note that by the time of their study such an income had halved in pesos, and was five times less in dollars following the economic crisis and subsequent devaluation of the Uruguayan peso. An LKSur report commissioned by the local government – also in 2004 – calculated the monthly *clasificador* income at between US\$86 (U\$2600 pesos) and US\$146 (U\$4300 pesos). The 2006 PANES survey measured household rather than individual income, but dividing this by the number of working adults in the household gives the average figure of just US\$17 (U\$474 pesos) per month per *clasificador*, suggesting that it might be an outlier. 93% of *clasificador* households were registered as below the poverty line in PANES, with a combined monthly income of less than US\$65 (U\$1300 pesos). The 2013 study, meanwhile, calculated an average Montevidean *clasificador* household income of almost ten times as much: US\$610 (U\$12,200 pesos), and the 2015 household study put *clasificador* income at an average of US\$203 (U\$5,700) per month (Matonte, Fernández and Sangunetti 2017). The national minimum wage in Uruguay is now US\$430 (U\$ 12,265 pesos), while *clasificadores* at the new state recycling plants have recently campaigned

successfully to have their wage increased to US\$596 (U\$17,000). Both of these figures are pre-tax, which can be considerable.¹⁰ During 2014, I calculated an average monthly income of US\$1180 (U\$26,000 pesos) for landfill *gateadores* from the sale of *material* alone. As we shall see, *clasificadores* often supplemented such income from the sale of recyclables with the use and exchange of *requeche*.

Finally, turning to the contribution that *clasificadores* are estimated to make to recycling in Montevideo, the most cited figure is from the 2004 LKSur report, which suggested that around 400 tons per day were saved from burial in the municipal dump by the work of *clasificadores* (LKSUR 2004: 267), generating a saving for the Intendencia of approximately US\$65 per ton. Lucia Fernandez (2012) has suggested that up to 52% of Montevideo's waste is recycled by waste-pickers if *clasificador* numbers are scaled up to the PANES figure, although this was before the 2014 construction of four public-private *Ley de Envases* recycling plants (PNUD/ PNUMA 2012). Prior to these plants, *clasificadores* were employed almost exclusively in the informal sector, and were either stationed at the landfill or collected waste throughout the city, using a horse and cart, a hand-cart, a bicycle, or simply a bag. These devices for collection and classification have themselves served to further divide waste-pickers between “carters” (*carreiros*), “baggers” (*bolseros*) and so on, as well as the “crawlers” (*gateadores*) who enter the landfill and serve as a focal point of this chapter.

“There will always be *gateadores* in the *cantera*”: resisting hygienic enclosure

“What is Scotland like?”, the *gateadores* often asked me. “I bet they don't stop you working like here in Uruguay – this must be the only country where they don't let you work!”, one exclaimed, referring to the police presence at the dump and repeated attempts to prohibit their activity. In this section, I look at attempts to prevent waste-picking at the *cantera* and detail how *clasificadores* have resisted enclosure of the site. I trace stories and memories of the *cantera* – previously undocumented oral histories of resistance and struggle – that situate my informants' perception of the wastescape and complement a rich Uruguayan historiography and sociology of formal trade union, cooperative, and pro-democracy activism.

Gateadores agreed that police had first been stationed at Felipe Cardoso in the 1970s. Access to other city dumps, like Barradas in the East, Camino Andaluz in the North and Camino de Las Tropas in the West had been unimpeded (see Fig.3). These were known to *clasificadores* as “free dumps” (*canteras libres*). The reason for the arrival of the police was disputed. Some claimed *milicos* and *municipales* wanted the best pick of the rubbish themselves, in order to supplement their meagre salaries (see

¹⁰ All currency conversions are based on exchange rates at the time of each estimate. The US\$596 (U\$17,000) recycling plant wage was reduced to around US\$489 (U\$14,000) after tax, according to informants.

Zapata and Zapata Campos 2015: 99 for a similar situation at the Managua landfill). Others argued that they were stationed there in order to look after expensive operating machinery. Another told me that they were brought in because things had become very rough, with fist or knife fights between *clasificadores* an everyday occurrence. A practical reason for attempting to exclude waste-pickers was the risk of an accident for which a municipal operative might be held responsible and prosecuted. Indeed, the father of the current foreman was a *machinista* who had once been detained by police, but eventually released, after having accidentally knocked over and hospitalised a working *clasificadora*.

Many of these suppositions can be included under the broader heading of “risk management”. In chapter two, I argued that the minimisation of risk is a central operating logic governing the municipal management of waste in Montevideo, as elsewhere (see Wynne 1987). Although some attempts to minimise risk were always present, they became more pronounced in the 1970s and 1980s, with growing awareness of environmental contamination and the public health risks of landfill sites. Enclosure of Felipe Cardoso took place in the context of a move away from open dumping towards sanitary or at least controlled landfill in much of the developed world in the latter half of the 20th century (See Reno 2008: 88). When interviewed, Raul Blengio, several times Director of Felipe Cardoso, told me that “we tried to turn an open dump into a controlled one, in terms of registering the weight and the number of trucks entering but also controlling the entry of outsiders (*personas ajenas*)”.

The minimisation of risk was accompanied by the control of value. Before the legal requirement that companies render surplus products unusable, these were buried intact, and had to be hidden from *clasificadores*. An emblematic case that several interlocutors such as El Tío remembered fondly was that of *La Philli*, which I only later discovered referred to the consumer electronics company Philips. *La Philli*'s excess inventory, often in perfect working order, was buried by *municipales* in large pits, and *gateadores* would then attempt to unearth them when the police were not looking, recovering televisions, stereos, blenders, and hair-dryers. The attempt to prohibit *clasificadores* from entering the dump and to make the surplus that arrived there “unusable” for them when they did, thus rested on a matrix of ideas concerning public health, dignified labour, and value destroyed to protect formal commodity markets. Nevertheless, the recurrent references made by municipal authorities to public health hazards in press and policy documents substantiate my conceptualisation of a principally “hygienic enclosure”. In 1982, for example, the daily national *El Día* reported the move from incinerating to compacting waste with a headline lauding the “sanitary benefits” of “a system known as sanitary landfill”. The previous practice of filling geographic depressions in the city had provoked not only “contamination and fetid and offensive odours” but also “the concentration of persons who went through the rubbish looking for objects to sell” (*ibid*).

Many *clasificadores* could reel off the different police units that they had experienced at Felipe Cardoso, as well as the severity of their reign: the *Republicana* (Republican Guard), the *Policía* (ordinary

police), the *Guardia Blanca* (private security), the *Plantel de Perros* (Police Dog unit), and the feared *Coraceros* (mounted police). In order to continue working, *clasificadores* initially had to labour clandestinely, or bribe the police for entry by buying them wine, meat, and cigarettes. *Clasificadores* from that period described how the police would beat them up, interfere with their work and arbitrarily expel them. Carceja, the persecuted Communist, described how the police would set fire to the piles of materials that *clasificadores* had set aside, and to their tents when they assembled them in nearby woods, barely caring if there were children inside. Gorda Bea remembered when eight policemen had been stationed at the dump, who “didn’t let you work, chased you, beat you”. At times, police would try to persuade the women to perform sex acts in exchange for access, Selva told me, whilst at others only women were permitted to enter, leading at least one man to take up cross dressing. During the “infrastructure of elimination” of the Uruguayan dictatorship, everyday violence was complemented with police raids on the *cantera* and the shantytowns where the *clasificadores* lived. Reinforcements would be called, and the men taken to police cells in commandeered rubbish trucks.

The *gateadores* were in a difficult position, since they had to work but could not openly confront the *milicos* without being arrested or worse. So they waged a guerrilla-style war.¹¹ When taken to the police station in dump trucks, Carceja told me that *clasificadores* would fill up their boots with rubbish and empty them into the prison cells, causing such a stench that the police captain would be forced to order their release. To prevent the police burning their tents, *clasificadores* would tie them up in trees during the day and let them fall only at night. When guards detained waste-pickers in pits at the dump, Gorda Bea, who boasted of being “more macho than the men”, snuck off to set them free. Knowledge of the terrain was essential for this warfare, especially when dealing with the mounted police. Carceja told me how he and colleagues would lead the pursuing police into parts of the dump where there were trenches or pools of water that horses would refuse to cross.

Carceja and Bea’s stories are from the 1970s and 1980s, but much of the same struggle continued into the 1990s and 2000s. In the early 2000s, for example, the *coraceros* were brought back to guard the *cantera* when some *clasificadores* were allowed to classify on an internal landfill road, Cepeda. Juan told me that at that time he was one of those who most “made war on the *coracero*”, and his case exemplifies a genealogy of resistance to enclosure. His grandmother China Tore had accompanied Selva when she first went to the *cantera libre* in the 1960s, while his mother Gorda Bea had raised him on the dump and played a prominent role in resisting police violence and breaking enclosure. Struggles with police were then passed on to Leo, a young brother-in-law that Juan and his wife Sofia had raised like a son. Leo described to me how on one occasion a group of *clasificadores* defecated in the police cabin, smearing their faeces all over the walls in a dirty protest at their presence. Then, aged just 15, Leo was shot in the back by a drunken policeman at the dump. The bullet is still lodged near

¹¹ Although I identify this as a form of warfare given that there were hostilities on both sides, one informant said that it was more accurate to say that the *clasificadores* were ‘hunted’ by the police (“*te cazaban*”)

his heart, while the policeman was never brought to justice. Such episodes highlight why *clasificador* trade union leaders would often complain that while the dictatorship ended for most of the population in 1985, it continued for *clasificadores* and those suffering state violence in the shantytowns.

Gateadores, like street *clasificadores*, endured varying periods of permissiveness and repression of their activity. Yet in the face of police harassment, many persisted. Negrito told me with confidence that: “there’s nothing else but to accept us because whatever guard they assign, whatever they do...there will always be *gateadores* in the *cantera*”. When I asked another *gateador* whether he wasn’t worried that one day the Intendencia would succeed in excluding them, he told me that he wasn’t, since:

“Those of us who are there now, we’ve always got into the *cantera*, all our lives. Even when they put a police guard, the *coraceros*, they didn’t get us out. Sometimes there’s a threat and they take us out for a day, they arrest us or take us to the police station. But then we’re released and we come back. I mean, I’ve been working here for almost 40 years.”

In perforating the landfill fence and fighting agents of enclosure, the actions of *clasificadores* resembled those of English commoners centuries earlier. In one memorable case from 1830 cited by Linebaugh (2008), commoners from Otmoor, Oxfordshire “armed with reap-hooks, hatchets, bill-hooks, and duckets... marched in order around the seven-mile long boundary of Otmoor, destroying all the fences on the way” (2008: 153). *Gateador* knowledge of the landfill terrain also finds a parallel in the way that, in their struggle for the commons, the English “peasantry and the poor employed stealth, a knowledge of every bush and by-way, and force of numbers” (Thompson 1991: 103). And when *municipales* and *milicos* had skimmed off the best waste to augment their wages, can they not be compared to the “forest officers and under-keepers, who had long supplemented their petty salaries with perquisites” (Thompson 1991: 103)?

The enclosure of distinct English commons was generally carried out by private landed interests and given blessing and protection by the parliament and courts in which they often held office. It was justified through a discourse of reinforcing private property, ensuring the nation’s food supply, and making wastelands productive and profitable (Neeson 1993: 46). There was an ideological conflation of “wastes” and wastage in the economic sense (Goldstein 2013: 366) as common land was derided as unproductive: as one report to the Board of Agriculture had it, “common fields may be called the worst of all wastes” (ibid). In Uruguay, the 19th century enclosure of cattle ranches, known as *alambramiento*, was also designed to increase economic and agricultural productivity by preventing cattle wandering off or being rustled, and enabled the emergence of a standardised, high quality bovine product for export (Nahoum 1999). As in England, this had a perilous effect on smallholders – who could not afford to fence in their land – and on the cowboy or gaucho, Uruguay’s mythical national horseman, who found that he could no longer wander the land freely. In fact, horse and cart *clasificadores* (*carreros*), excluded from circulating and practicing their trade in parts of the city, claimed

an ancestry to this marginalised figure, and dressed in the symbols of the nation at political protests (O’Hare 2017).

The hygienic enclosure of Montevideo’s landfill is clearly different from that of rural land, inserted as it is into a history where waste has been contained as a public bad in order to protect the population from hygienic risk. While peasants were denied access to land because their labour was deemed economically wasteful, *clasificadores* were to be denied access to the landfill because its contents were classified as unsanitary stuff, “dead commodities” rather than materials with productive potential. One enclosure sought to transform “wastes” through capitalist production, another to stop economic activity in its tracks at the landfill gates. But from the perspective of *clasificadores*, who argue that waste “belongs to the poor” and remember when they accessed it freely, the brutal methods used to exclude them can hardly be explained away by arguments of the “public interest” kind. The guerrilla warfare *gateadores* waged to access waste, and the state repression they encountered, mimicked and sometimes overlapped with Uruguay’s better known armed conflict, between Tupamaro urban guerrillas and the fascist military junta (Huidobro 1986). At the landfill, however, the struggle was not for socialism or post-capitalism but simply for the right to work the waste. The question of access to the *cantera* and its materials is in many ways part of the broader question of Uruguayan waste politics and economics which I explore throughout this thesis: who owns the waste and who has the right to exploit it? Like the English commoners of old, *clasificadores* stake and defend a moral claim based on custom and necessity.

Montevideo’s Landfill Commons

Felipe Cardoso, like the English rural commons, provides a space where the poor can forage for food, fuel, building materials, and objects of use and exchange value. After a day at the landfill, Juan would arrive back home like Father Christmas, spilling the contents of a large sack out onto the living room floor to be perused by his excited wife and kids. Soft drinks, biscuits, colouring books, chicken, shampoos, beers, fruit, vegetables, and *mate* tea would tumble out: food for his family and pigs but also to share, so that my fridge was often overflowing with miscellaneous bags of foodstuffs passed over the fence. There were different types of firewood, sheet metal to repair his horse’s stable, and colourfully printed cloth that his wife washed, cut, and hung as curtains. Many neighbours made their fences – as well as the pens in which they kept their pigs – from pallets, while the grills on my windows were soldered from metal Juan had recovered from the dump. Jessica, Ruso’s daughter, told me that her family only had to buy bread and milk, with the rest of the week’s necessities taken from “the big free shop”. In the absence of a forest ecosystem that would provide them with their needs, *clasificadores* turned to what they called *requeche*, the “leftovers” of urban life and industry. After a brief

theoretical foray into the socio-material processes involved in the selection and sharing of *requeche*, this section sets out five commonalities between the traditional rural English and the contemporary Uruguayan waste commons.

The selection of *requeche* corresponds to a process that I elsewhere term, following Simondon (2009 [1964]), Deleuze, (1994) and more recently Reno (2009), “individuation” (O’Hare 2013). Simondon’s (2009 [1964]) original treatise disputes both the hylomorphic and monadistic theories of the individual, relying instead on the idea of the “pre-individual”, whereby objects or persons may become individualised but they are never exhausted or reach an endpoint in that state. Instead, the elements of the pre-individual persist as potential seeds for a future individuation. Thus “the negative is not a stage or a phase and individuation is not a synthesis or a return to unity but rather an undoing of being which emerges from its pre-individual centre and potential incompatibility” (2009:40). Simondon’s “individual” in this description corresponds to Gregson’s (2010) “object”, understood as “but a temporary moment in an endless process of assembling materials, a partial stabilization and a fragile accomplishment that is always inexorably becoming something else, somewhere else” (Gregson et al 2010: 853). Things that appear at the landfill are not only leftovers of production or consumption then, but also themselves contain an excessive materiality that allows them to take on a new life or existence, like the pallets used for fencing or the piece of iron as window bars.

Unlike the “commodity classification” (O’Hare 2013) of *material* (stock recyclables), in the individuation of *requeche* things themselves are much more likely to play an active role in catching the eye. The assortment of things each worker took home was often inchoate: many *clasificadores* would select an item without knowing why, and some, considering themselves hoarders (*cachivacheros*), would end up stockpiling these at home, never quite managing to disentangle themselves. Selecting materials on such a basis involved an act of seeing, or being drawn to, waste imposters that simply could not be abandoned to rot at the landfill amongst real rubbish. For some, there was a pattern to such acts of rescue. With all the bereft children in the world, explained Selva, she simply couldn’t bear to see a soft toy in the trash and would thus save them, her home slowly transformed into a toy animal sanctuary (see Fig.8 below). The process by which such things emerged from the waste-stream was not unidirectional: the affordances (Gibson 1977) and surfaces of materials, their “thing-power” (Bennett 2010:18), suggest potential avenues for recovery, re-use, and re-invention. Things came out of the waste-stream not by themselves, nor thanks to the human mind alone, but jointly in the context of the “contingent tableau” (ibid:5) they formed with rubbish and the activity of the worker. A fragile alliance between the human and non-human diverted discards from the dump in a process of individuation which was “mobile, strangely supple, fortuitous and endowed with fringes and margins; all because the intensities which contribute to it communicate with each other, envelop other intensities, and are in turn enveloped” (Deleuze 1994: 254). This introduction of non-human agency complicates a simple view of use-values that *clasificadores* recognise in discarded things and

then put to good use. This is clearly not what is happening in cases such as Selva's soft toys, which exert a pull enabling their rescue from the waste stream but for which a purpose is indefinitely postponed.

Alongside domestic consumption and storage, *cantera* extraction also enabled sharing among those who otherwise had few material resources, sharing being a classic area of anthropological enquiry whose recent re-theorisation by Thomas Widlok (2013) I find useful here. Sharing at the *cantera* worked on several levels. First, without expounding too much energy, *gateadores* would often put aside *material* that they were not themselves collecting but knew that others were. For example, when raking through the valuable rejects from Uruguay's only steel forge, a *gateador* collecting non-ferrous metals might throw any ferrous metals that he found into the pile of a colleague collecting scrap (see Fig.9) Second, *gateadores* often set aside *requeche* that they thought another worker might like, tossing it to them with the question – “*Te sirve?*” (“Any use to you?”). Examples of this are cosmetic products offered to women; machine parts offered to someone with an interest in repairs, joinery, or motor vehicles; fodder offered to those with animals; or, in my case, books (I received a fine collection of Uruguayan literature from El Ruso). Third, there was the regular immediate consumption of recovered foodstuffs such as MacDonald's burgers, ice-creams, nuts, drinks, and biscuits that I explore in the next chapter. Finally, when a *clasificador* would chance upon a large lot of a particular *requeche* – a crate of beer, a carton of *yerba mate* tea, a box of sausages – they would often share these out with their *socio*, other *gateadores*, or extended family members. As noted in chapter two, the identification of that which was *sano* – intact or good to eat – formed part of the sensorial, embodied skill-set of the *gateador*.

Although at other times my informants would “share what they value and what is of value” (Widlok 2013), contra Widlok the sharing of *requeche* does seem to embody an instance where things are shared partly because they are “considered surplus that would be wasted unless given away” (2013: 12). While Widlok (2013) writes that “the bulk of reported sharing does not involve extraordinary quantities” (2013: 12), the nature of industrial and commercial dumping meant that sometimes epic amounts did arrive at Felipe Cardoso. Three elements of Widlok's theory of sharing do fit the example of the landfill however. Firstly, I would agree that sharing of *requeche* differs from reciprocity. Instead, “the underlying (implicit or explicit) demands that trigger sharing rely on cultural practices that are recognised as appropriate actions” (2013: 22). Secondly, his argument that “in sharing it is not supposed to make a difference that you got this item from me rather than from someone else or directly from the environment” (2013:24) also seems to hold for the landfill. The peculiar property status of waste as a temporarily owner-less bounty favoured weak ownership over a material at the moment of discovery, and encouraged the practice of sharing. When Juan's uncle *El Puto* complained about my presence at the *cantera*, he had me lean over to him and shout “the landfill has no owner!” (“*la cantera no tiene dueño!*”). Finally, as Widlok (2013) argues, “the move away from sharing” is often

“a consequence of the shared common ground that crumbles away or changes” (2013: 22). In this case, the common ground is very literally the uneven terrain of the landfill commons.

In diverse English commons and the agreements which governed them, we find property arrangements that resonate with the status of modern waste in Montevideo. In the first instance, and like common-use rights, *clasificadores* do not claim ownership over the landfill, but only the right to access its materials, separating use-rights and property rights often conjoined in capitalist notions of private property (Thompson 1991: 159). Further, from an admittedly narrow, anthropocentric perspective, what else is forest dead wood than natural discards which would otherwise rot and “go to waste”? The right to glean private fields after harvest also provides an interesting comparative case, for the crops left unharvested can also be thought of as *requete* (leftovers), unwanted and discarded by their private planters. The right to glean can be traced back to Deuteronomy (24:19), which contains the injunction that “when you reap the harvest in your field and forget a swathe, do not go back to pick it up; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan and the widow”. The right to glean was defended in the English Commons Pleas court, ultimately unsuccessfully, by Mary Houghton in 1788 but gleaning was thought to have continued long after (Thompson 1991:139). In France, a royal edict promulgated in 1554 by King Henri II – and still in place today – established gleaning rights for “old people, amputees, small children and other persons who lacked the strength or faculty to work” (Sargent 1958: 100). The link between urban and rural gleaners (*glaneurs*) has been documented by the French cineaste Agnes Varda (2000), and in both cases the right to glean is associated with particular vulnerable groups. We find this feature in other commons too: Linebaugh (2008), for example, has rediscovered a forgotten clause in the English Charter of the Forests (1225) that granted widows the right to the “estovers” of the common: wood that could be used for house repair and fuel.

Like these commons, the *cantera* has historically provided sanctuary for vulnerable subjects. Firstly, there were migrants who came to Montevideo from rural areas outside of the capital and either hadn't found other work or came directly to the dump. Canario Ramon, an older interlocutor, told me that he had built the first shack in the Felipe Cardoso shantytown in the early 1980s, having migrated with his mother and siblings from rural San Jose. The settlement began to grow steadily, initially populated with his relatives. Women and single mothers like Gorda Bea could also work at the dump while keeping an eye on their children. Selva first appeared at the Isla Gaspar dump in 1965, when her husband was away in the military and she was struggling to put food on the table for her children. “I started going to the *cantera*”, she told me, “because we had nothing”. A friend had told her about “a place where it isn't so bad, where people work and ‘gather’ [*juntar*]”. Intrigued, she turned to her friend, Juan's grandmother China Tore - “China, let's go to Isla Gaspar, where I've heard that they are dumping and you can make money”. Together, the two women would walk seven kilometres from the Piedras Blancas neighbourhood to the Isla Gaspar *cantera* and back with a four-wheeled cart in which Selva carried her son, niece, and nephew. They would find food to eat and a slaughterhouse

truck driver would give them fresh meat. In order to avoid the daily trip home, they began to sleep overnight at the *cantera* with their children, first in a tent, then a shack of sheet metal. There were no police stationed at Isla Gaspar, Selva told me, and *clasificadores* could work without harassment.

Those wanted by the law, either for criminal or political activities, also sought refuge: recall my octogenarian neighbour Carceja who was persecuted during the 1970s by Uruguay's military junta for being a Communist. "They wouldn't let me live", he told me, and the dump was the only place that could offer him refuge, food, and enough money to provide for his children. In the past, older *clasificadores* told me, wanted political activists from the armed revolutionary Tupamaro movement slept in the woods nearby and would sneak into the dump in the early hours to gather together just enough food for their daily stew. Finally, marginalised and discriminated against Afro-Uruguayans also made up a significant proportion of *cantera clasificadores*. These were figures like Antonio, the father and step-father of the Azucarero siblings, my neighbours who worked afternoons at the landfill. Now in his fifties but still with an impressive, muscular frame, Antonio told me amidst the beating drums of a family party that he had finished secondary school in the 1970s but couldn't stand the everyday racism he encountered as a ticket inspector on the buses. So, he turned to the *cantera* instead. "The dirt from the *cantera* makes us all black", Ruso once told me, asserting a non-racialized space of exception.



Figure 8 Soft toys at the home of one of Selva's *gateador* neighbours, who recovered them for his daughter



Figure 9 Recovering metal from a truck at the *cantera*

There is an argument to be made that the *cantera* functioned as a safety net for those traditionally excluded from social security. Although George Pendle (1952) points to Uruguay as Latin America's "first welfare state", with a raft of social protections and insurance brought in for workers and citizens by the Battle government of 1910-1920, this welfare system, as well as rising and falling with economic cycles, "led to a new type of social stratification, consolidating middle sectors, such as public functionaries, and protecting some subordinate groups, especially industrial workers" (Filguera 1995:2). It is quite possible that such social security did not adequately cover women, racial minorities, rural migrants, ex-convicts, and the long-term unemployed.

These vulnerable groups conceptualised the landfill as a giving mother: the *madre cantera*. In referring to the landfill as a *cantera* (quarry), *clasificadores* referenced the fact that Montevidean dumps had often been situated at old quarries, as well as indicating waste-pickers' extractive relationship to the space. Indeed, we might say that Felipe Cardoso is land to be filled for the municipal authorities but a quarry to be mined for the *clasificadores*. Key to the parent metaphor, meanwhile, was the idea that whatever you had done, you could ostensibly always rely both on your mother and on the *cantera* to provide you with at least a plate of food. The first thing Ruso's brother Sordo did on leaving prison was make for his maternal home, and then for the *madre cantera*. Ruso spoke of *requecheros* who would turn up at the dump with a pot, fill it with food, and leave and he referred to Felipe Cardoso as the "mother of the rubbish". "She was everyone's mother", another informant and COVIFU neighbour Pelado explained, "because you went there and rescued something to eat, somewhere to sleep, with sheets, mattresses, and no-one would bother you". In and out of care and foster homes, Pelado had eventually found his way to the *madre cantera*.

The conceptualisation of the *cantera* as a mother resonates with the way in which certain indigenous peoples relate to their environments. Bird-David (1990,1992) argues that hunter gatherer perceptions of the environment are often articulated through the root metaphor "forest is as parent". A classic example can be found in Turnbull's (1961) study of the Mbuti, when he is told by an informant that "the forest is a father and mother to us, and like a father or mother it gives us everything we need – food, clothing, shelter, warmth... and affection" (1961: 92). Bird-David contrasts the hunter gatherer "perception of the forest as ever-providing parent" with that of cultivators, who construct "nature as reciprocating ancestor", where "nature is viewed as providing food in return for appropriate conduct" (1990: 190). In the absence of a culture of cultivation, or indeed much paternalism from the industries to whom they supply materials, *clasificadores* also conceptualised and relied upon a caring and maternal landfill. Work at the landfill is thus not precarious in the sense of the Latin root *precarium*, meaning to beg or entreat (Breman 2013), because *clasificadores* do not need to supplicate, demand, or reciprocate in return for their livelihood.

We might compare this to the discard-donations that my neighbours in COVIFU received from the upper-class Catholics who "accompanied" them. These so-called *acompañantes* managed to secure

discards from upper-class contacts before they entered the waste stream, and used them to establish relations with the poor. Examples of such materials include old clothes from friends; surplus bread and cakes from a factory; seeds used to feed pig; and rubble used to temporarily pave the muddy track that led up to COVIFU Rural. The post-Vatican II emphasis on reciprocity rather than uni-directional charity meant that Catholic *acompañantes* often sought out a return in exchange for their delivery of such discards. They passed on gifts to the poor but the in-kind counter-gifts characteristic of gift exchange economies (Gregory 1982) were neither expected nor possible because of structural and class differences, and so its actors sought to define “immaterial” returns that they should receive or indeed perceive. What was principally expected of the COVIFU neighbours and pig-rearers were particular patterns of conduct and demonstrations of hard work, characteristics that place these inter-class relations in the realm of governmentality.

The *cantera*, on the other hand, was, like the traditional commons, a space of autonomy. Another characteristic these shared was that the *cantera* allowed for an alternative to low-paid wage labour and a fall-back option in case of unemployment. “If you’re made unemployed, you can always go and make money in the *cantera*”, another neighbour, Gabi, explained. When I first met Juan in 2010, he worked at a biscuit factory but was subsequently injured and decided to return to the *cantera* instead of accepting a job further away. Ruso’s daughter Jessica had worked in several jobs in the private sector but when she was fired from her last after a dispute, she likewise headed to the *cantera*. Ruso himself, on losing his job in a plastics factory, had decided, in words repeated by many other *clasificadores* in similar circumstances: “Well then, I’m off to the *cantera*!” (“*Bueno, me voy pa’la cantera!*”).

“In some part of their lives”, Thompson concludes, commoners “still felt themselves to be self-determined, and in that sense free” (1991:179). Such sentiments were echoed in a common refrain from landfill waste-pickers who valued the autonomy of boss-less work. Negrito, for example, told me that should the Intendencia offer him a job street-sweeping or working in the rubbish trucks, he “wouldn’t accept it. Because here I am my own foreman. I am my own boss”. At the *cantera*, *clasificadores* did not need to stick to a regular schedule and work-day (*cumplir un horario*), obey orders, or work for someone else. These were all important benefits that they often formulated as “at the dump no-one tells you what to do, you don’t have a boss” (“*en la cantera no te manda nadie, no tenés patron*”). The lack of fixed working hours meant that *gateadores* could take unannounced days off. Juan, for example, would sometimes stay at home to work on odd jobs, and once had to take time off to look after his kids when his wife was admitted to hospital. In the following weeks, he was able to make up for the lost earnings by working more intensively and for longer hours. El Ruso indulged in periods of binge drinking when he would be off work for several days, while his daughter took leave when recovering from an operation. Autonomy and freedom from orders were also associated with masculinity, so that workers like Enrique could earn respect and money without either turning to crime or suffering the perceived indignity of service sector work (c.f. Bourgois 1995). The *cantera* is all

the more remarkable then for its ability to combine a space for the realisation of masculine identity with the historical provision of labour for women who needed to work but could not afford childcare.

In the Hammond's (1995 [1911]) classic study, part of the design and consequence of the 18th-19th century British parliamentary enclosure acts was the forcing of rural freeholders and peasants into the ranks of agricultural waged labour. This narrative has been contested (see Shaw-Taylor 2001) but E.P. Thompson's (1991) extensive research led him to the conclusion that the commons did play an important role in enabling peasant self-sufficiency up until the 19th century, even if such subsistence might not have been "any more than meagre" (1991: 178). Income at the *cantera*, on the other hand, was anything but meagre. Negrito told me that he would also not be able to make the same amount of money in the other jobs available to him as he did at the landfill and indeed from my research it became clear that the money made by landfill *clasificadores* was considerable. I was able to calculate a 2014 mean of US\$295 (U\$6,500 pesos) per week for the core *clasificadores*, ranging from a low of US\$91 (U\$2,000 pesos) for Jessica and her sister-in-law, to US\$545 (U\$12,000 pesos) for the more established men like Negrito. Even taking this variation into account, the unskilled jobs available to *gateadores* simply did not match the hours: income ratio possible in the *cantera*, recourse to which gave them greater choice over what jobs to accept. Jessica, for example, asked if I could get her a job as a municipal worker, where the starting salary was around US\$818 (U\$18,000 pesos) per month. She did not, however, want a job in the new recycling plants, where workers were initially paid the minimum wage of only US\$309 (U\$6,800 pesos) per month after tax, supplemented by a few thousand pesos from the sale of materials. In short, landfill *clasificadores* in 2014 earned roughly the same in a week as those in recycling plants earned in a month, even excluding *requeche*.

A final common ground between the historic commons and the *cantera* can be found in the blurring of lines between recreation and work. Goldstein (2013:265) has noted how children grew up working, foraging, but also playing on the historic wastes, citing Katz's (2004) concept of "workful play and playful work". Most of the *gateadores* whom I spoke to went to the dump as children to engage in a mixture of activities that involved both work and play. For example, one of the main attractions for children and teenagers was the possibility of hunting birds, with Juan a particularly good shot with a catapult. "At first I went to mess around", countless *clasificadores* told me when I asked them how they were initiated. The recreational activity of the neighbourhood children was bound up with exploring, hunting, and scavenging, as well as provoking the police and older, drunken *clasificadores*. *Gateadores* transitioned from play to work at the dump as they moved from childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood. Work had replaced play as the principal mode of action for the active *gateadores* at *Usina 8* when I began fieldwork, but residual elements of recreational activity remained. The *gurises* in particular would often spend many hours at the dump chatting, joking, eating, and engaging in what they called "mandarin warfare" – the throwing of soft fruit at each other and older *clasificadores*. Such

an activity had also been recorded by Hugo Alfaro at the Burgues landfill in 1971, where he encountered young lads (*pibes*) “throwing rotten oranges at each other [and] giving themselves up to the joys of recreation” (1971a). Kathleen Millar also identifies a “blurring of work and play” (2015: 34) at Rio de Janeiro’s Gramacho landfill, and she argues that this engenders a “time-sense” in waste-pickers that made transition into waged labour difficult.

The fact that commodities emerged from the landfill would seemingly disqualify it as a commons for scholars like David Harvey (2012: 73), who argues that these should be “both collective and non-commodified – off limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations”. To a certain extent, Linebaugh (2015) understands the English commons in these terms, and there is little doubt that their enclosure fed the growth of industrial capitalism and commodification. Goldstein (2013) points out that the use of resources from the English commons was almost always restricted to the home and sale in local markets (2013: 364). Nevertheless, from the Canadian high-seas (Acheson 1987) to the English fenland, there has very often been a patchwork of use and exchange value extraction from the commons. “The fuel, food and materials taken from the common waste”, writes Neeson (1993: 158) “helped to make commoners of those without land, common-right cottages, or pasture”. But it also enabled “a means of exchange with other commoners and so made them part of the network of exchange from which the mutuality grew” (ibid).

I consider it important that the presence of market exchange not preclude the classification of spaces like the *cantera* as commons, not least because such a move would require a kind of ideological and practical purity that is unavailable to most of the world’s poor. The *cantera* economy combines the recovery of *requeche* with the gathering of *material* that is sold on as commodities to intermediaries, eventually reaching national industry and even international markets. While *gateadores* take food, fuel and other materials from the dump as I have described, the sale of recyclables forms the bulk of their income. Following Gidwani and Baviskar (2011), we should be careful not to exaggerate the distinction between capitalism and the commons in the search for the “everyday communisms” (Graeber 2010) that exist in the interstices of capital. The *cantera*-commons fits Gidwani and Baviskar’s (2011: 43) account of commons that can double up as “relay points in the social life of commodities and as such may subsidise and supplement capital accumulation”. But then, as Thompson (1991: 184) argues, neither were the original English commoners “primitive communists”. Instead, their “communal forms expressed an alternative notion of possession, in the petty and particular rights and usages which were transmitted in custom as the properties of the poor” (ibid). By conceiving of the landfill as a “mother”, Montevidean *clasificadores* radically reframe it as a space of care, reliability and provision.

Conclusion

When cycling into the University of Cambridge across the expansive Midsummer Common or gardening at my allotment in neighbouring Little Shelford, I have often wondered whether English commons have only been saved from privatisation and development in places of privilege, where councils are not in such dire need of revenues or where residents are well-organised and well-connected enough to preserve them. Such green spaces certainly seem a world away from my fieldwork at Montevideo's Felipe Cardoso landfill. Yet in this chapter I have argued for expanding our definition of the commons into the uncommon territory of modern landfills, in a way that recognises not just the legacy of the original English commons as an inspiration for activists, but the very real continuities that can be found with how poor and vulnerable groups claim, practice, and defend access to urban resources today.

Although commodification and exchange value are certainly more prominent at the *cantera* than in certain traditional rural commons, the conditions of modern Uruguayan capitalism make it difficult for this to be otherwise. In spaces like the *cantera*, use and exchange value, sharing and selling coexist – but in recognising this, we take nothing away from the importance of such messy commons for the poor, the injustice of hygienic enclosure, or the bravery of any resistance to it. The *cantera* also represents an autonomous space similar to that of the traditional commons; one with potentially greater earning potential than low-paid, unstable waged labour and thus an ally against precarity. What Millar (2015) calls the “relational autonomy” of wage-less work at the landfill holds an attraction that cannot be explained by narratives of urban survival alone. This chapter's comparison with the historical English commons has hopefully demonstrated that, as well as spaces of risk, landfills can be sites where refuge can be sought and generosity flourish. The Felipe Cardoso waste-pickers might not be pure post-capitalist subjects and they certainly challenge Uruguayan ideas of “infrastructural modernity” (Graham and Marvin 2001, Collier 2011) in waste management. But without wishing a return to “salvage ethnography” (c.f. Clifford 1989), I would argue that there are many things, from materials to social relations, which are worth salvaging from the dump and saving from enclosure.

Chapter Four

“Born of the rubbish”: Material Encounters and Urban Nature

On a recent return to Montevideo, I became more intensely and corporeally reacquainted with the materialities of Felipe Cardoso than I had anticipated. Because of its continually made and re-made landscape, and the everyday geo-spatial practices of municipal dumping taking place inside, *gateadores* were having to walk increasing distances over treacherous terrain to carry their heavy bags of recyclables out of the fenced perimeter. Consequently, Juan had taken to rolling his *bolsones* off the waste cliff daily, simultaneously anticipating and creating a path that made them cluster at roughly the same point below, in a movement that seemingly fused the precision of lawn-bowls with the strength of iron-man. He would then wait until the weekend before removing them from the landfill, intermittently checking to ensure that no-one had stolen any of the hard-earned fruits of his labour.

On a hot February weekend in 2017, I joined Juan in the activities of surveilling and then removing the bags. On Saturday, we travelled on scooter with his four-year-old son Sean, slowing down as we approached nearby scavenging birds so that Sean could give it his best with a slingshot, with Juan laughing as his son skewed his stone wide again and again. When we arrived at the landfill, he asked me to enter and check on the number of bags, since he was wearing only flip-flops and I, trainers. The path to reach them was an improvised one composed of patches of hard ground and pieces of waste – ladders, tires, tree trunks and densely packed plastics – strategically or accidentally placed to carry me across knee-deep pools of leachate. I counted the correct number of bags of clear plastics, paper, and metals – eleven in all – and skipped back to deliver the happy news to Juan.

The next day, another neighbour joined us as we piled onto Juan’s scooter anew for the short journey to the dump. He slowed down again, this time so that I could film a new fence that the Intendencia was erecting around the landfill and which had everyone talking. “Perhaps as of Monday we won’t be able to get in”, Juan suggested, an outcome that would affect scores of waste-pickers. But I had heard this before, and Juan didn’t seem particularly worried. Between the three of us, we took turns to hoist the bags onto each other’s shoulders. Juan’s gait was strong and assured, despite him carrying the heaviest bags, of up to a hundred kilos. His shoulders and head upright, he looked from behind like a human-material assemblage (Deleuze and Parnet 1987), his upper body replaced by an enormous strong plastic bag of the kind normally filled with aggregates or soil. The neighbour and I, meanwhile, were clumsy, stooped, but also stubborn, urged on by friendship and male pride. We left several bags scattered along the trail at points where our backs had buckled or ankles had slipped into the oily black leachate. “You’ll get there like that”, Juan commented, after one of my ungainly lifts, “with your neck broken perhaps, but you’ll get there”. For several days afterwards, my neck ached like never before, and I wondered if I had indeed done myself serious harm.

This was the landscape of Felipe Cardoso: a “dirty commons” constituted by improvised paths, customary rights and life-forms that bubbled, staggered, and flapped. As Tim Ingold (1993b:167) has noted, “we experience the contours of the landscape by moving through it, so that it enters...into our ‘muscular consciousness’”. My ethnographic apprenticeship in waste-work had attuned my muscles to the landscape but by the time of my recent return, their memories had faded, and with them my skill in navigating what we might call, synthesising Ingold’s (1993b) landscape and “taskscape”, the “wastescape”: a geography-in-movement that is also alive with the rhythms of waste labour. There is little doubt that for most *gateadores*, the subject who currently dwells in the wastescape is both muscular and masculine, endowed with a capacity for both heavy lifting and jocular male sociality. In this, we can observe a correspondence with the Greek subject that was the prototype for the Western. As Kuriyama (1999) notes, the Greek subject was intrinsically bound up with the muscles of the spear-throwing, wrestling, masculine body.

Yet what happens to our ideas of agency and subjectivity if we start not with the Greek – we might add, Ingoldian – subject but with a figure recently proposed by the philosopher Anne-Marie Mol (2008) – the eating subject? In the first part of this chapter, this is precisely what I do, turning to the consumption of melted ice-creams at the landfill to explore the role that the agency of materials plays in their designation as both waste and commons. The second material encounter draws on a different type of *requeche*: “plastic potatoes”, recovered not from the currently active Usina 8 but from the inactive and overgrown Usina 5. It is my argument that in ingesting and sharing such materials, *clasificadores* demonstrate themselves to be ethical subjects open to the human and non-human. Both melted ice-cream and plastic potatoes form part of the waste commons. But what is it about their properties, histories, and affordances that has led them to be wasted then subsequently recovered? This chapter introduces and builds on work on the agency of waste and anthropological explorations of the mutual constitution of persons and things.

What the two material encounters have in common is that they are both examples of the social (after) life of waste, its agency beyond human control, and its capacity to escape enclosure. Both ice-creams and potatoes are forms of de-commodified *requeche* that catch one’s eye from a position on the waste commons, which I here extend beyond the active landfill to include the waste-lands of the former dump. The fact that both materials are recovered by *clasificadores* through similar practices suggests that these do not differentiate between what might otherwise be separated as urban and rural commons: a sugary product of culture and an earthy sprouting of nature. Situating the waste-commons alongside the English rural commons, as I have done in the last chapter, is thus not designed to stress the neatly urban status of *clasificador* practice. There is a work of blending and blurring boundaries as well as classifying into neat categories. In this chapter, I seek to emulate such practice, if not quite tearing down the fence separating agentive subjects and passive objects, then at least making a rather large hole in it.

This endeavour is in part an attempt to respond to the increasing recognition of the proliferation of agency in processes of waste-making, to literature on urban political ecology, and to the call to include the non-human in accounts of the contemporary commons. As Amin and Howell (2016) have recently argued, “practices of commoning need to be extended to a more-than-human community as well as to a more-than-capitalist one” (2016:9). Although these authors seem to point to non-human animals – and despite many dogs, cats, chicken, rats, cats and bacteria also relying on the waste commons – my focus here is on plants and products as opposed to the animal world. While urban political ecology largely focuses on the transformation of the urban environment as a result of the “domestication of nature to produce commodities with use and exchange values (for capital accumulation)” (Lawhorn, Ernstson and Silver 2013: 501), my case constitutes a different process: the reintroduction of de-commodified waste materials into the urban nature and commons of the landfill. To help conceptualise such entanglements in the borderlands of the *cantera*, I turn to Gay Hawkins’ (2006) framing of recycling ethics, Jane Bennett’s (2001) version of enchantment and Matthew Gandy’s (2006, 2013) writings on urban nature.

Junk Food and the Ontological Instability of Melted Ice- Creams

A large part of the work carried out at the municipal waste laboratory – from the periodic sampling of chemical make-up, to the detailed documentation of particular truckloads – is concerned with determining the nature, composition and consistency of the multi-fold materials that enter Felipe Cardoso on a daily basis. Each truck that unloads materials at the landfill generates a corresponding numbered file at the Laboratorio, such as Entry No. 31801: “522 boxes each containing two frozen four cheese pizzas, 900 grams”, dumped by Henderson and Company, removed from their original packaging, rendered unusable (*inutilizados*) with sodium hypochlorite, and given a “special burial”. Or Entry No. 31800: “shredded sanitary towels and nappies” created by IPUSA, whose composition is “40% plastics (polyethylene, polypropylene), 40% cellulose, and 20% absorptive resin”.

The ability to definitively determine the composition and capabilities of waste has recently been challenged in discard studies. Taking a feminist epistemological perspective, Myra Hird argues that

“the indeterminacy – the heterogeneous, unique mix of each landfill material intra-acting with seasons, weather, precipitation, the varying angles of the sun’s rays bombarding landfill material and so on – means the management of waste ultimately fails. Fails to be contained, fails to be predictable, fails to be calculable, fails to be a technological problem (that can be eliminated), fails to be determinate” (2013: 465)

Josh Lepawsky (forthcoming) has argued that “e-waste is categorically indeterminate” because “electronics in a host of forms are ubiquitous, but unevenly distributed things... incorporated into a vast range of other things that one might not intuitively associate with e-waste” (115). New generations of cars, tanks and aeroplanes have electronics deeply entangled within them but are only sporadically classified as e-waste.

For Hird (2013), waste is indeterminate because it cannot be definitively pinned down, managed and contained; for Lepawsky e-waste is so because it cannot be neatly separated out from the heterogeneous assemblages in which it is often embedded. Hird’s willingness to celebrate such indeterminacy from a feminist standpoint has been critiqued by Gille, who notes that embracing indeterminacy “can also undermine the popular epidemiology... practiced by victims of toxic landfills”, who are in need of “more, not less determinacy” (2013: 5). Gille thus highlights the negative effects on the human of Hird’s “inhuman epidemiology”. But are there situations where waste’s indeterminacy, or what I call its “ontological instability”, can be beneficial rather than detrimental for vulnerable subjects? As Latour (2004:70) notes, things only “speak” and act in association with other entities and I argue here that *gateadores* at Felipe Cardoso, in denying and even reversing processes of “wasting”, become allies who help materials recover or conserve their value, usefulness and identity, obtaining energy from them in return. In effect, they challenge claims made by municipal scientists and technocrats to be the sole “spokespersons” (Latour 2004:62) for materials. While the latter categorise things as waste based on a system linking regular chemical analyses, sell-by-dates, and customs regulations, *clasificadores* challenge this hegemonic conceptualisation through multi-sensory engagement and the prioritisation of value over risk.

Let us turn to an afternoon spent at the landfill, and a sticky encounter with “junk food” and melted ice-creams, to better situate the point. It was February 2014, the middle of a hot Uruguayan summer, and I was sitting with a group of young *gateadores* at the lower part of the Usina 8. Earlier in the morning, we had entered through a large hole in the fenced perimeter, leaving horses, carts, cars, motorbikes, and scooters at the entrance. The ascent up the waste mountain had been surprisingly easy, for the entangled mass of discarded things has a habit of settling into a temporary stasis, and it is possible to find one’s footing on the springy surface. Nevertheless, there were hazards to be avoided: pools of dark, bubbling leachate and syringe needles that protruded from compressed bales of medical waste melted down with a red plastic. Car tyres, thickets of branches, and tree trunks were the largest identifiable landmarks. The purple, black, orange, and red hues of bin-bags composed a torn and bedraggled mosaic. The vibrant colours of diverse plastic containers and packaging stood out, much as they would amongst the dull pebbles of a beach: empty red and white milk bags, crushed green crates, cracked pink buckets, tangled blue cables. It had rained overnight, so organic material was moist and darker: browns and blacks punctuated with the odd green leaf. A pair of trousers flailed in the wind like an airport windsock, never more to clothe the legs of an owner.

Morning is the most intense period of waste-picking work at the landfill, as each *clasificador* tries to fill a few *bolsones* before the sun rises high in the sky. We had already welcomed the arrival of a few hundred trucks and skips and scoured their contents for materials of interest, so we sat down to rest, converse, and eat. The *gurises* were dressed in what might be considered a standard *cantera* uniform: workers' steel capped boots or shoes, usually recovered from the landfill itself, and which most likely previously protected the feet of workers in the booming construction industry;¹² dark trousers; and upper-body wear that allowed for a touch more colour in the reds and blues of a Barcelona football shirt or the lighter violet of Fiorentina. Heads were crowned by ubiquitous black Nike sports caps that protected faces from the hot sun.

Juan was sat beside me, his face animated and smiling, his arms gesticulating as he told stories of previous escapades with the police at the landfill. Like the others, Juan toyed with a small knife in his hands, distractedly using it to scoop some dirt out from under his fingernails. Alongside a magnet to differentiate metals, such knives are the *clasificador's* most important tool, principally used to cut pieces of recovered string or cable to tie the *bolsones*. Overhead, thousands of lapwings and gulls animated the sky. These have developed something of a *modus vivendi* with the *gateadores*, devoting themselves to food scraps while the latter mostly collect and classify inorganic stuff. The ubiquitous presence of birds at such sites is, Reno notes, “an indication as to the complexity of political ecologies like those propagated at landfills, which spiral out of the control of human intention and regulation” (2008: 121).

Although it is not their stock in trade, *clasificadores* are also interested in organic matter, and I sat down with them for a spot of *requeche* lunch. While he responded to Juan, Oscar slowly toasted discarded hamburger buns from Los Sorochos bakery on an improvised grill placed over an open fire which sizzled below. Another colleague flipped MacDonald's hamburgers retrieved from a plastic bag thrown out by one of the chain's fast-food outlets in the city. Unlike most bags of materials appropriated by individual waste-pickers at the dump, sacks of MacDonald's waste are, by an unspoken convention, an object of near-immediate sharing. The worker who chances upon a truck with MacDonald's discards will identify a few promising clear plastic bags filled with still-boxed burgers and fries and set them aside for a group lunch. Junk food: literally. MacDonald's claim, and many agree, that their products taste the same anywhere in the world, so it is perhaps hardly surprising that they should also taste similar after having briefly been placed in a bin bag and then taken out again. Each *clasificador* assembled his own “meal deal”, usually comprised of an intact burger

¹² This type of discard, which I regularly encountered in the waste stream might be seen as an example of the disposable society but it was one with a particular history: the close collaboration between the construction workers' union and the Frente Amplio government that led to the passage of Decree 125/014 governing health and safety in the construction industry. Amongst other clauses, this decree stipulated that employers should provide construction workers with new boots for every new job, and that boots showing signs of minor damage should be immediately discarded (art. 382).

or two, a tangle of fries, and a few half- drunk cokes mixed together to complete a drink. We opened small sachets of Delicia mayonnaise and Heinz ketchup, squeezing them generously onto the burgers.

Such a scene will be familiar to those who have heard of, read about, or even engaged in practices of dumpster diving or skipping. The fact that *clasificadores* consume MacDonald's burgers offers a clue that "freegans" they are not. But those who draw a fixed line between ethical actors in the Global North who consume from the waste stream by choice, and (presumably unethical) subjects who do so by necessity in the Global South, somewhat miss the point. Barnard (2016: 13), for example, argues that freegans are privileged relative to other scavengers because they don't need to consume household waste or sell raw materials. Instead, he observes, they mostly recover "ex-commodities" from commercial establishments. Yet these ex-commodities are also the part of the waste-stream most prized by *gateadores*. And although these did not explicitly critique capitalism, the act of consuming from the waste stream in such circumstances itself represents a challenge to a system that creates superfluous food and then consigns it to the dustbin despite it still being *sano*. Not that the consumption of all waste is anti-capitalist of course – we need only think of Marina Welker's memorable anecdote about Indonesian mining company officials who "flamboyantly demonstrate the supposedly benign nature of mine tailings by licking and drinking [them]" (2014: 163).

We washed down our burgers and fries with ice-cream manufactured by the popular national dairy cooperative CONAPROLE. A cold ice-cream would certainly not have gone amiss in the searing heat, but there is little chance that one might reach the landfill in a frozen state. In fact, the most likely reason that the ice-creams have been binned in the first place is that they have melted at some stage of the distribution process and thus cannot be sold. Instead of a solid ice-cream then, we tore open plastic wrappers and poured a tepid chocolate dairy liquid down our throats. One after the other. Gulp. Splashes of the sticky cocktail missed our mouths, further staining our already soiled overalls. Drip.

The melting of ice-cream, like any ice, is caused by the application of heat, in a process explained by chemists with the help of both the Lindemann criterion, which refers to "vibrational instability" and the Born criterion based on the idea of "rigidity catastrophe", when ice crystals no longer have sufficient rigidity to mechanically withstand load (Zhou and Jin 2005). Melted ice-creams appear to have undergone a clear, irreversible process of transformation that has altered their state and identity. They have changed from a solid to a liquid and although they could be refrozen, it would be difficult to reconstitute them as ice-creams "on a stick" (*en un palo*), as the Uruguayans have it. More importantly, potentially harmful bacteria will have multiplied, the reason why refreezing ice-cream once it has melted is not generally recommended. The bacteriological composition of the ice-cream will have been irrevocably altered. Aside from the chemical process, melting entails further transformations. The reason that *clasificadores* can get their sticky fingers on the stuff is because it has gone from being a commodified substance to waste. Even if a consumer could be found, a formal

sector supplier would be unable to sell it to them because of health risks associated with the multiplying bacteria. Melting joins a host of other processes and events – spilling, staining, shattering, smashing, chipping – that turn materials into wastes, and transforms ice-cream from solid to liquid, from object of desire to object of risk and, relatedly, from commodity to waste.

We can draw two conclusions from these transformations. First, wasting is not simply a spatial process but also a temporal one. A dynamic process rather than a static property of ice-cream has led to its classification as waste. Agency for this outcome is distributed between whatever actor allowed the ice-creams to melt; the chemical reactions of the materials themselves; food safety regulations; and the replicability of the commodity form whereby identically marketed food products are meant to have the same consistency, shape, and taste (see Reno 2015: 104). If wonky carrots are banned from supermarket shelves, then melted ice-creams would certainly not make the grade. The melting, spoiling, or rotting of food illustrates Viney's (2011) point that “waste occurs as I [sic] encounter the time of things, their propensity to coincide with my actions and projects, their capacity to be superfluous to those same actions and projects”. The second point is that wasting is not simply a process that, as Kantaris has recently argued, “represents the annihilation of a physical commodity, the disaggregation of the raw materials from which it is constructed” (2016:58). The very materiality of this particular commodity has in fact undergone a profound change, transitioning from a solid to a liquid. As Ingold suggests, “the properties of materials...cannot be identified as fixed, essential attributes of things, but are rather processual and relational...neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced” (2007: 14). The dynamic properties of ice-cream prefigure its emplacement in the waste stream but also enable its consumption as a hot sticky liquid that could be recovered from the waste commons.

Experiencing the properties of melted ice-creams through their ingestion might have been a rather sickly affair, but it can prove fertile ground from which to probe what we might describe as the “ontological instability” of ice-cream and waste more generally. Once melted, the substance is no longer ice or frozen (*helado*). Is it even accurate to describe it as ice-cream or, as in the Spanish, *helado*? If not, then what do we call the sticky solution with which I, Juan, and the others washed down our junk food? One potential answer, given the processes of transformation described, would be that we were consuming “hazardous liquid waste”. Such a description transforms the ice-cream into a clandestine material at a landfill that is, after all, destined for unhazardous solid waste. Many such rogue materials still enter unperceived, so these melted creams would simply join this motley crew of castaways. But as Juan polished off his seventh “ice-cream”, does it make any sense for us to argue that he was consuming a “hazardous liquid waste” and not the *helado de chocolate* described on the plastic packaging that he discarded at his feet?

Certainly, the ice-creams had undergone a process of “wasting” as they were sealed into large black rubbish sacks. But is such a process irreversible? As Thompson (1979) illustrated in his classic study,

goods very often pass through stages of being considered rubbish, only to be later revalued, re-emerging as valuable commodities like antiques. Yet in this case, and consistent with Graeber's (2012) critique of the circular model of recycling, neither the MacDonald's burgers nor the ice-cream makes a circular journey from commodity to waste and then back to commodity (C-W-C). Instead, they have taken a linear path, from commodity, to waste, to commons. They have become part of the landfill's economy of immediate sharing, analogous to that of some hunter-gatherers. Like these, *clasificadores* consider the landfill an environment of abundance, and in their gratuitous sharing of *requeche* can be compared to the Huaroni feasting party described by Rival, a "momentary collectivity made up of free and independent individuals who share no more than the transient pleasure of consuming abundant food together", where "feast sharing is not really sharing at all but rather the partaking of naturally abundant food from a tree-like source" (1999:74).

The indeterminacy indicated here is more immediate than Hird's (2012) discussion of landfills, where bacterial and geological time undermines human control over centuries. Melting turns ice-creams to waste in an instant but the presence of waste-pickers at the landfill challenges such a characterisation. *Clasificadores* cannot easily reverse material or chemical processes, "recycling" an object back into its prior physical state, and this is especially true with foodstuffs. But they can aid these things to cling on to their identities, in accordance with philosopher Francois Dagognet's (1997: 32) "thing thesis", where "that which is, sooner or later, should seek to continue to be, by virtue of the tendency of the being to persevere in being". "I'm an ice-cream, a foodstuff, here to give pleasure and be eaten!", signals the ice-cream's colourful sealed packaging. And *clasificadores* are only too willing accomplices in helping such objects fulfil the purpose of their creation. Gulp.

In this act, we might say that *clasificadores* enact an ethics of generosity towards human and non-human others, one which is encouraged by the vibrational and ontological instability of ice-creams themselves. This brings us to the writing of Gay Hawkins (2006), in whose work recycling is "an activity of salvage, in which the purpose is to extend the useful life of material, to avoid and arrest materials loss", as well as being "illustrative of what is meant by an ethics of generosity towards materials" (Gregson et al 2010: 1069). In particular, Hawkins draws on philosopher Rosalyn Diprose's (2002) concept of "corporeal generosity". Diprose defines this as "an openness to others that not only precedes and establishes communal relations but constitutes the self as open to otherness" (2002:4). For Hawkins, applying the idea of corporeal generosity to waste practices implies a body that is "open to the difference of waste and the non-human world...not indifferent to waste's alterity but aware, instead, of the intersubjective links that always connect us to what we discard" (2006: 115).

Broadly, Hawkins' ethics is Foucauldian and Deleuzian, centred on the embodied practices and micro-politics of the domestic recycler. But I think that her formulation, modified slightly, can prove useful for highlighting the ethical nature of *clasificadores'* *requeche* consumption. Hawkins turns to

Diprose having already concluded that “recycling cannot escape the logic of obligation and reciprocity” (2006: 114). Yet as I have argued, the immediate collective consumption of *requeche* at the *cantera* is an example of sharing rather than reciprocity. In Hawkins’ terms, such sharing would constitute an ethically generous act because it is performed without expectation of a return. But Hawkins’ framing of generosity supports my postulation of *clasificador* praxis as ethical in another sense too, through her argument that “it is wrong to assume that agency comes before actions, that the thinking self makes the body change its habits” (2005: 114-115). Hawkins uses this line of enquiry to suggest that the recycling subject is created through embodied micro-practices, but we can borrow it to make two further points.

First, we can venture that the act of consuming *requeche* partially creates the *clasificador* subject, so embedded is the practice in the habitus of Uruguayan waste-pickers and so clearly does it demarcate the boundaries between those within and outside their community. Rather than feeling shame at eating from that waste-stream, *clasificadores* positively rejoiced in the disgust that the practice evoked in the NGO managers of new recycling plants. One of the latter asked me whether, as an anthropologist, I wasn’t able to advise on how he could change *clasificador* culture so that they might abandon such undignified habits. When the same manager observed me crunching into a piece of *requeche* pizza with *clasificador* colleagues, he realised that I could not be trusted as an ally in his *mission civilisatrice*. My untroubled consumption from the waste-stream, a practice rekindled from my days as an intermittent student dumpster diver, certainly assisted my acceptance by *clasificadores* interlocutors and commensals. Secondly, Hawkins’ framing helps to reinforce the point that it is the act of eating and sharing from the waste-stream, not the explicit rationalisation before or after the act, that constitutes *gateadores* as ethical, generous subjects in this context, open to human and non-human others. And thus, the apparent division between Northern ethico-political dumpster diving and Southern survivalist waste-picking cannot be so easily sustained.

In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that we might think of the landfill as a place with the power to enchant, where “to be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday” (Bennett 2001:4), and where enchantment sparks a sense of powerful attachment. In one respect, the enchantment of the chance encounter with the unexpected is part of what binds people to the *cantera* despite other labour possibilities, as their stories of miraculous and providential finds suggests. But Bennett also argues that enchantment can precede an ethic of generosity, so that while it is not a moral code in itself, “it might spark a bodily will to enact such a code and foster the presumption of generosity” (2001: 32). For Bennett, what she calls “presumptive generosity” is directed not only towards humans, but also toward “the animals, vegetables, and minerals within one’s field of encounter” (2001: 30). And she challenges us to discover “under what circumstances...such magnanimous sentiment or fullness of will arise?” (2001: 80). My suggestion here is that the landfill commons, as a liminal de-commodified realm, can fleetingly provide such a ground. Whether or not we agree that a “subdispositional attachment to the

abundance of life...is deeply installed” in the bodies of most humans (ibid: 158), there is little doubt that through their extraction and consumption, *clasificadores* helped to extend the functional life not only of the materials that arrive at the landfill, but indeed, as the municipal foreman readily admitted, of the landfill itself.

The indeterminacy and instability of materials was not suddenly fixed by the decisive actions of the *clasificador*. There was no collective consensus that we had been dealing with food all along, of the junk variety or otherwise. Municipal technocrats and Catholic social workers continued to understand anything placed into rubbish bags as waste – and thus as unfit and undignified for human consumption – while *clasificadores* declared them *sano* – healthy, intact or fit for consumption. We have a situation of simultaneous, contested, determinations of matter, made by actors differentially emplaced in relation to waste and power. It is not only in Amazonia that “(the act of) ingestion is a fundamental classificatory operator” (Strathern 3-4; c.f. Vilaça 2008: 88, 103-104). In our case, the ingestion of *requeche* provided the possibility of bio-political framings, as *clasificadores* considered their bodies to have acquired resistance to microbes, and *acompañantes* imagined them as embedded in a tragic culture of poverty.

Beyond these categorisations, matter continued to act, change and grow. Ice-cream had gone from foodstuff to waste, back to foodstuff and then, through a metabolic example of the first law of thermodynamics, it became energy used by the body to perform activities. Was bacterial salmonella now at work too? *Clasificadores* at the landfill become ill surprisingly rarely, but they do gain weight, as did I during my work there. Nuts, crisps, biscuits, chocolate bars, sweets, cakes, hamburgers, soft drinks, and ice-cream: all products that regularly arrive at the landfill. Despite being “wasted” these are often edible, in many cases because sugar, salt and other preservatives have been used to ward off microbial spoilage. With years, they convert into the fat of bulging paunches exhibited by the older *clasificadores*. The landfill as a mirror of production and consumption led them to replicate and exaggerate the unhealthy eating habits of workers on their lunchbreaks in office, factory floors, and building sites across Montevideo. There was a price to be paid for a generous and forgiving openness to the non-human. Munch.

But even before metabolic processes begin, the lines between the subject (*clasificador*) and object (ice-cream) are blurred, as in Mol’s comparison with the muscular, agentive subject, where:

“The eating self is not an agent in even a remotely similar way. It does not control ‘its’ body at all. Take: I eat an apple. Is the agency in the I or in the apple? I eat, for sure, but without apples before long there would be no ‘I’ left...I have become (made out of) apple; while the apple is (a part of) me” (2008: 30)

In applying this idea to the case at hand, one might adapt it to conclude that I, in joining *clasificadores* in the consumption of *requeche* ice-cream, have become waste and waste is now part of me. This is the

implication that troubles the NGO workers and upper-class Catholics who accompany waste-pickers. Yet as I have suggested, a material's classification and ontological status as waste is neither fixed nor determinate. In consuming these ice-creams, are we not in fact denying their status as waste, reversing if not the Lindemann or Born criteria or the process of de-commodification then at least that of wasting? If waste-pickers have been called alchemists for their capacity to transform trash into treasure, might they also turn back time through the act of "unwasting"? Yet they do not do so alone, for what I have sought in turning to the "eating subject" is a model that accounts for a proliferation of agency and the multi-lateral nature of the ethical encounter, where the emergent and processual properties of non-human materials play a role in their categorisation as both waste and commons.

In truth, the separation of the controlling muscular and the fragmented eating subject is an analytical one, and the same ice-cream consuming body would soon be hoisting loads of recyclables onto shoulders. One moment, *clasificadores* were allies who momentarily prolong the identity of certain things as foodstuffs, the next they were receiving in return sugars that give them the energy to get through a shift of heavy lifting. Such labour was bound up with a masculine, muscular mode of subjectivity to a degree which the consumption of *requeche* clearly was not. Yet both would be targeted and ostensibly prohibited in new recycling plants in a biopolitical project to create healthier bodies and more governable subjects, as I go on to discuss in chapter 6.

Plastic Potatoes and Urban Nature

The geographer Matthew Gandy (2006) begins his exploration of "urban nature and the ecological imaginary" with a close reading of Lucian Freud's "Wasteground with Houses, Paddington" (1970-72). "In the foreground", he writes, "is an expanse of rubble-strewn wasteground" (2006:62). But "despite the twisted remains of abandoned furniture and rusted metals this former bomb site is now brimming with botanical interest: the faded spikes of the ubiquitous *Buddleia davidii* are interspersed with other characteristic colonizers of London's post-war landscape such as ground elder...and rosebay willowherb" (ibid). Gandy uses the painting to explore the idea of urban nature, "seemingly unremarkable...yet a critical reminder of the intricate combination of nature and human artifice which had produced urban space" (ibid).

A similar scene to that of Freud's "*Wasteground...*", greets anyone who treads along the dirt path that links Felipe Cardoso street to that which runs in parallel, Oncativo. Having travelled the path on foot, horse and cart, bicycle and scooter, I know it well, including the treacherous parts where rainwater and red earth combine to create muddy pools in which a tire might slip. Following the track means traversing the line that separates two of Montevideo's lettered municipalities, D and F. It means moving from land officially categorised as Montevideo Rural to that registered as Montevideo Urbano. And it means crossing from one small shantytown, strung out along Felipe Cardoso and

never more than a couple of homes deep, to the houses on Camino Oncativo that open out into the Cruz de Carrasco neighbourhood. There is no rivalry between the two areas. Instead residents, many of them *clasificadores*, are linked by webs of kinship, amity, and labour.

The landfill and its surroundings, I argue, can be considered not only as a commons but also as an example of “urban nature”, a hybrid terrain of inter-species activity that attracts certain organisms while repelling others (see Fig.10). If the Usina 8 served as the focal point for an exploration of the commons, it is to a material encounter at the site of the old Usina 5 to which I turn for an interrogation of urban nature. In the following pages, I counterpoise the uncomfortable contemporary urban-natural hybrids that proliferate in this wastescape with the original “metabolic” ideal of the Usina 5: the conversion of urban rubbish into a fertiliser that would be returned to the soil in a cyclical vision of urban-rural relations. The section involves a spatio-temporal meandering along the paths and landscapes of the Usina 5 before we reach our destination. The writing to an extent mirrors the method, that of travelling, not only on foot, as has been celebrated by Ingold and Vergunst (2008), but also on more modern forms of transport such as the mass-produced Chinese scooters now ubiquitous in Montevideo’s popular neighbourhoods. This kind of movement in the environment is itself a form of commoning: a claiming of ambiguously owned territories as unobstructed pathways and arteries of human interaction.



Figure 10 Urban nature

The land is effectively municipal property, and the path was created as an internal road used by municipal landfill workers, machinery, and *clasificadores* when the *Usina 5* was operational. But residents effectively used and (re)created the path as a commons by treading along it, providing another historical continuity with the types of common struggled for in 18th-19th century England.¹³ Although one side of the *Usina 5* path used to form part of the landfill, this isn't immediately evident because it is now populated by a dense forest of trees, bushes, shrubs, and vines. Entangled in this vegetation are another generation of discarded products, the consequence of people continuing to use the area for fly-tipping. The other side is made up of seemingly virgin Uruguayan pampa. It is necessary to dodge the charred remains of incinerated rubbish as you advance along the path, until you reach the more formidable obstacle of a burnt-out car found near Camino Oncativo, abandoned after a night of joy-riding perhaps, or merely ditched to avoid the costs of disposal and disassembly. Beneath the surface of the ground lurk tonnes of waste materials that emit gases that are captured by pipes at the more recently built *Usina 6* and *7*, but not here. Any sustained scratching at the soil will likely release lead into the body, where it mimics other metals, latching on to enzymes and undermining metabolic processes.

At least this is what happened to the children of the *Villa del Cerdito*, some of whom suffered lead poisoning from playing in front yards constructed upon the old landfill site. Lead contamination from industrial and scrap metal sites was a huge environmental scandal in Montevideo in the early 2000s, one which has been explored in depth by the anthropologist Daniel Renfrew (2007, 2009). The case of lead, like that of asbestos (Gregson et al 2010), is a useful reminder that, beyond the celebration of waste's indeterminacy (Hird 2013) and semiotic status as a sign of life (Reno 2011), "some materials are just not nice for humans to know corporeally, at least when they are in certain states" (Gregson et al 2010: 1067). But just as Gregson et al (2010) recognise the economically performative nature of asbestos, as its undetected presence slows down work and complicates contracts, the presence of lead is also productive, and not always to the detriment of the human. Informants told me that the diagnosis of lead poisoning in *Villa del Cerdito* children undoubtedly forced the *Intendencia* to accept the need for the relocation of residents. The idea that the local government, as the owner of the land, was poisoning its own young wards was simply too much to bear in the context of the public lead poisoning scandal. If sweet and fatty *requeche* snacks can be considered temporary allies in providing waste-pickers with energy but undermining their health in the long run, lead can be thought of as immediately ruinous for children's' bodies, but in this case also an ally that helped to establish better conditions for them in the longer term.

¹³ To take just one case, when London's Richmond park was enclosed in the 1750s, a court battle was won to preserve an ancient highway that cut through it. When the brewer John Lewis was forced out of the park, he sued the gatekeeper for the obstruction of ancient footways, won his case, and was offered either a stepladder or a gate as a device that would maintain access despite high walls. He chose the former, and had it adjusted so that "not only children and old men, but OLD WOMEN too may get up" (in Thompson 1991: 113)

Now, barely a trace of the shantytown remains. I took my neighbours Martín and Luz's ten-year old son Matias, and Carlos Trastos's daughter Lorena, of a similar age, to the site to explore their memories of where they had spent their infancy. We crunched the odd pile of flattened plastics underfoot, but most of the land was now a patchwork of nettles, thistles, dandelions, and blossoming elderflower. "Marisa lived here", Lorena told me, pointing behind some clumps of pampas grass, "and I lived there, where the jaggy nettles are". What was your house like? "Made of sheet metal (*chapas*), like all of them...we had stables for the horses...", she faltered, perhaps unsure of what else I might be interested in. "The beds were inside", she clarified, much to Matias' amusement, "the mattresses, the wardrobe, the toilet, the bedside table... everything!", they laughed. Did she miss living in the country (*campo*)? "But this wasn't countryside like it is now Patrick", Lorena corrected, "there was *material*".

The conversation highlighted the fusion between the urban and rural, and the natural and man-made, that both makes urban nature a helpful concept here and problematises it. As Gandy (2013) notes, an interest in urban flora is hardly new, with urban nature a multifaceted problematic with multidisciplinary interest from social and natural scientists. Despite his use of the term, Gandy warns that in naming the "urban" we should be careful not to "fetishize the city as a discreet entity because the process of urbanization is increasingly ubiquitous and encompasses spaces that lie beyond the administrative confines of metropolitan boundaries" (2013: 1311). This is an important point, and one that is aptly illustrated by the case of the landfill wastelands. These technically lie in Montevideo Rural, a municipal demarcation that itself brings together the rural and the urban in a way that would perhaps seem oxymoronic for other cities (imagine Rural London or Glasgow, for example). The wastelands are also composed of a mixture of the original clayish soil, decades' worth of urban detritus, faint traces of the material ruins of shanty housing, and the post-landfill vegetation that is now its most prominent feature. This narrative could, of course, be told as a disenchanting story of the inequity of capitalist urbanism, which contaminates pristine countryside with waste while growth and accumulation happen elsewhere. But as we have seen, accumulation and growth also occurred in unexpected ways in and around the *cantera*.

The countryside (*campo*) had colonised the former settlement of the Villa del Cerdito but not the memories of my young friends. "Look Patrick, here was Sara and Gordo's house", Lorena continued, as we stopped in a small clearing. I asked if there was anything left. "Some stones", gestured Matias. And there is a reason why so little remains of a community that until very recently housed a few dozen families: it was purposefully razed to the ground. "We are proud that it was one of the few shantytowns that was cleaned (*se limpio*)" – Santiago Vegas, one of the upper-class Catholics that accompanied the relocation, told me in language that eerily recalled the social cleansing campaigns of the dictatorship - "a Caterpillar went over it and now there are no houses, nothing". Many of the *acompañantes* who helped residents secure a housing relocation came from a background in left-wing Catholicism, inspired by liberation theology or at the least the post Vatican II conference

“preferential option for the poor”. Santiago, now a land surveyor by profession, had attended the state Universidad de la República during the dictatorship, a time when, he told me, it was “very fashionable” to be left-wing in student circles. But he was, in his own words a “posh kid, from a posh neighbourhood, right-wing, fascist”. Santiago justified his political orientation by telling his student antagonists that he was going to take advantage of his position in life, and “from there, help the other [*el otro*]”.

Part of Santiago’s project of helping *Villa* residents involved destroying anything that remained of their former shantytown. Diggers had even uprooted Gorda Bea’s tree, an *Elaeagnus angustifolia* (Russian olive) known locally as a *paraíso* (paradise). “The *paraíso* fell”, Santiago recalled somewhat biblically, and entangled in its roots were not clods of earth but plastic bottles. “How impressive is nature [*lo que es la naturaleza!*]” – he exclaimed in awe – “the tree had been born of the rubbish”. Despite Santiago’s grudging respect for the tenacity of “nature”, the tree was not spared from the bulldozer’s jaws. Just as many Catholic *acompañantes* considered it undignified for humans and pigs to live among or from the trash, so too was detritus flora to be extirpated, condemned by its connection with human petro-produce. It can be argued that the fencing in of the landfill, and of the pigs in the new COVIFU development, were meant to prevent further instances of species-contact and urban-nature hybridisation. In this, an interesting parallel can be found with the enclosure of Uruguay’s open grass-lands in the 19th century (known as *alambamiento*), which was designed in part to prevent cattle from “engaging in indiscriminate cross-breeding with inferior livestock” (Kurtz 2013: 123). In keeping with my argument that *clasificadores* demonstrate an open, generous ethics towards waste and the non-human, they also had a much more tolerant attitude towards urban nature than the Catholic *acompañantes*. Matias, for example, was helping me with my vegetable patch at COVIFU and as we wandered the site of his former neighbourhood, he became interested in the surrounding plants. “Is this parsley?”, he asked, offering me a similarly-shaped leaf whose difference I discover with a bite. He then proceeded to collect a few samples to take home. It is to another example of botanical extraction that I now turn in the material encounter named in this section, one with “plastic potatoes” found along the same path.

María Trastos’s family recycling yard, where I worked for a few days a week during the last months of my fieldwork period, was located on Camino Oncativo, a hundred metres or so south of the path that I had to traverse in order to arrive at the site. I had also spent time with the family foraging for glass bottles dumped in amongst the vegetation of the old Usina 5. These generally had a very low market price, but the family had a contact who would pay a premium for bottles of spirits that still bore a sticker verifying that customs and excise duty had been paid. What then happened to these bottles was unclear, but since the buyer wanted both the sticker and the bottle, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the vessels were refilled with authentic or bootleg alcohol that could be resold without import tariffs having to be paid. But the Trastos did not only forage for manufactured products like glass, and I hope that the case of plastic potatoes can illustrate not just urban nature but

also the way that *clasificadores*, far from being purely urban commoners, maintain a continuity of commoning practice across the wider Felipe Cardoso area as they recover synthetic, organic, and hybrid materials.

Most of the time, I would return home from work at María's on my scooter, often taking one of the Trastos siblings with me back to COVIFU, or on to an Evangelical church service. On occasion, however, I would hitch a ride back with Nona, María's eldest daughter, and a few of her children on their horse and cart – an altogether more exciting way of making the trip (see Fig.11). It was on one of these journeys that Nona started to point out some of the plants that littered the side of the track, identifying potatoes, tomatoes, and aromatic herbs. I had just started the vegetable patch, so we agreed to return and pull out a few crops that could be replanted. In my ignorance, I had little idea of what a potato plant looked like, so Nona signalled and I dug them out. Their roots gave an indication of what lay beneath, as embedded in several tubers were small pieces of plastic and polystyrene. Nona and I decided to plant them anyway, and we boosted their growth with the help of bags of free compost that I collected when visiting TRESOR, the municipal composting facility on the outskirts of the city.

Wild potatoes are not often found in the urban peripheries of Montevideo, although if one growing manual is to be believed, the first wild potato ever collected for scientific ends was unearthed by the French explorer Philibert Commerson in 1767 “on the outskirts of Montevideo” (Ochoa 1972: 68). In digging around for tatties in the margins I was in esteemed company then, even if my discovery of the plastic potatoes was not likely to be of the same order of historical magnitude. They were an interesting find nonetheless, and posed a series of questions. Were the potatoes wild or might they have grown out of a load of potatoes dumped at the Usina 5? Every day at the Usina 8, tonnes of surplus fruit and vegetables from Montevideo's central market are buried after *clasificadores* have salvaged what they can, hauling bags of ex-commodities onto their shoulders and then back home. How many potatoes and other tubers manage to survive, growing upwards in search of light as layer after layer of refuse was piled on top? When the Usina 5 was closed, did the most tenacious crops finally reach the surface? Could the layering of waste upon potatoes constitute an extreme example of “earthing over”, where dirt is piled upon potato plants to increase yield? If so, did a plethora of these plastic potatoes lie beneath the earth's surface? Potatoes, which can be perceived of as an urban commons when recovered from the landfill because they have passed through urban markets, become urban-natural commons as they are harvested from fields reclaimed by “nature”.



Figure 11 Nona returning home from work at the family yard

In planting the potatoes in our back gardens, Nona and I were dealing with several types of waste. There were the potato plants themselves, which might be the descendants of a particularly virile surplus potato dumped at the landfill years, if not decades ago. There was the tenacious plastic that had attached itself to the potato's roots, creating a biotic-abiotic hybrid or, more precisely, a graft. Finally, there was the compost collected at the municipal facility, the end-product of the shredding of urban and agricultural organic waste. I would suggest that the compost and plastic potatoes represent not just different wastes but also different manifestations of nature and the ecological relation between town and country. As Gandy (2006) observes, the transformation of urban waste into fertiliser harks back to an earlier epoch in which urban-rural relations were constituted along more reciprocal, circular lines. The countryside supplied meat, grain, fruit, and vegetables for the city, and it received human and other wastes to be used as fertiliser in return. Interestingly, such a practice also constitutes the materialist origins of Mary Douglas's famous symbolist assertion that dirt is "simply matter out of place". As Douglas's biographer Richard Fardon highlights, Douglas was modifying a quote from Lord Palmerston who, in an 1852 after-dinner speech, asserted that "dirt is nothing but a thing in the wrong place...the dirt of our cities corresponds with that definition" (2013: 25). Palmerston's specific suggestion was that urban waste should replace Peruvian guano as fertiliser: "the dirt of our towns ought to be put upon our fields... there could be such a reciprocal community

interest between the towns and the country...the country should purify the towns, and the towns should fertilise the country” (ibid).

This ideal was also the origin of the Usina 5, when centre-left Frente Amplio councillors had established the plant in order to simultaneously “eliminate the tremendous problem of waste and solve definitively the difficulties that [rural] producers have in finding adequate fertiliser” (El Popular 1972). This goal was never to be realised, due to competition from chemical fertilisers, the poor quality of the municipal product, increasing amounts of plastic in the waste stream, and the military dictatorship’s abandonment of any attempts at import substitution industrialisation. What remained of this dream was a more modest composting facility which dealt in bulk organic, principally rural waste, rather than mixed household urban waste. But were it not for the original Usina 5 plan, it is unlikely that waste would have found its way to Felipe Cardoso at all. Instead of a virtuous cycle of rural-urban production, what predominates today around the Usina 5 are the kind of rural-urban hybrids typified by the plastic potatoes. Rather than being composted and thus feeding circulatory process, loads of potatoes took a more linear journey from the market to the landfill, and might have been expected to finish their lives at this “ecological sink”. Instead of becoming sterile and inert, however, they continued to grow beneath the surface, awaiting the moment when the buzz of techno-human activity would cease and they could rise up. Entangled with discarded products of human manufacture, they are an example of urban nature that belongs firmly in our time.

Admittedly, plastic potatoes are not hybrids in a biological sense, for the plastic remained separate from any potato that might be consumed, and thankfully so! I am not in any way advocating or celebrating the consumption of plastics, which in minute beaded form increasingly enter the food chain, with unclear but ominous consequences (Liboiron 2016). But such primitive amalgams as the plastic-potato grafts are the inevitable fare of the anthropologist who conducts fieldwork at the landfill rather than the laboratory. And indeed, in identifying hybrids we need not think only of species like the potato and *paraíso* whose roots were physically entangled with synthetic materials. Any of the species growing atop and inside the old landfill can be thought of as hybrids that might have rural roots but owe their continued existence to the detritus of urban living. Just as the bombed craters of post-war Europe gave birth to a resurgence of *Epilobium angustifolium*, “a species that had hitherto been considered relatively scarce under natural conditions” (Gandy 2013: 1304), Montevideo’s landfills also favoured certain forms of vegetation that have yet to be ecologically mapped.

What the “plastic potatoes” symbolise is the landfill “not as the dumping ground of industrial processes of resource extraction and production, but instead, as a figure for describing hybrid, transformative ecologies” (Gabrys 2009: 670). A positive engagement with such materials can be an example of an environmental politics that “addresses the complex and dynamic impurities of techno-natures” rather than being “grounded in a purified version of nature” (Michael 2009: 102).

The Usina 5 path, as a boundary between the “natural” Uruguayan pampas grass and the “contaminated” site of the former landfill, becomes a useful ground from which to reimagine waste and nature-culture articulations. Our relationship with the tenacious species that survive and thrive in the urban spaces of our making – rats, foxes, or in this case, potatoes – can be critically explored. As Gandy (2006: 71) argues, “by moving away from the idea of the city as the antithesis of an imagined bucolic ideal we can begin to explore the production of urban space as a synthesis between nature and culture in which long-standing ideological antinomies lose their analytical utility and political resonance”. Of course, social anthropology has a long tradition of challenging the universal applicability of precisely this division between nature and culture, of which the work of Carol MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern (1980) and Eduardo Vivieros de Castro (1998) is only some of the most canonical. What the Montevidean case at hand and the concept of urban nature adds to this disciplinary discussion is a challenge to the nature/culture binary that emerges from what should be relatively safe terrain for Western epistemology: the hinterlands of Europhile Montevideo.

When digging in my potatoes, I unearthed other wastes in my garden – metals that the former squatter-resident Fabi used to classify and sort. Perhaps such soil conditions would be auspicious for the growth of my plastic potatoes. Accustomed to growing up around human discards, would they have survived if released into the wild? I left before I could harvest the tubers of my labour, leaving the vegetable patch to be tended by Matias and his friends. They are unlikely to have persevered however, since agriculture, unlike animal husbandry, doesn’t much interest my *cantera* colleagues, who like hunter-gatherers “procure” rather than “produce” much of their food (Bird-David 1990, 1992; Rival 1999) as they common the landfill and its surrounding environment.

Conclusion

The Uruguayan Priest Padre Cacho once called *clasificadores* “ecological prophets” (Alonso 1992) due to their exercise of a recycling praxis that he imagined would in time become a necessary feature of urban-environmental citizenship. But we can think of them as ecological prophets in another sense too, in their reluctance to differentiate between the natural and manufactured fruits of the commons. In this, they follow the earlier prophetic gestures of non-human animals, for “when birds scan an area from above, one can surmise that they do not see choices between nature and culture, or between protected wilderness, cultivated fields, and contained pollutants” (Reno 2008: 114), while bats, spiders and other creatures exploit niches that resemble natural habitats like caves, hollow trees, and meadows (Gandy 2013: 1306).

Nona and I harvested potatoes and foraged for tree trunks strong enough to support the roof of a shack. But we also scoured the landscape for glass bottles that could fetch a decent price. Such are

the forms of productive life, the “urban nature” that has been allowed to proliferate around the old landfill of the Usina 5. This lively place forms a sharp contrast to the adjacent, fenced, Usinas 6 and 7, whose gases and leachates are carried out by municipal pipes for treatment. Whilst they have been unsuccessful at limiting the growth of human and non-human life at active landfills, municipal authorities police it effectively here. Enclosure and management succeed in preventing the growth of uncomfortable urban-natural hybrids, but these Usinas are as ecologically barren as any manicured suburban lawn.

Clasificadores might also be thought of as “ecological prophets” in their stubborn assertion that, despite having been temporarily wasted, food like melted ice-cream is still *sano* – good to eat. Through their practice of *requeche* consumption, I have argued that *clasificadores* are not merely enacting a desperate survivalist logic but, like the dumpster divers and freegans of the Global North, constitute themselves as ethical subjects who demonstrate a generous openness to both the human and non-human. Waste is shown to be ontologically indeterminate and capable of being reversed through acts of contestatory classification and consumption. The eating subject, who consumes both melted ice-creams and potatoes whose roots are entangled with plastics, is open to otherness and urban nature.

The consumption of both forms of *requeche* – leftovers that attract and catch the eye – had its detractors. Ice-creams were lucky to have sneaked past the regulations by which the Intendencia stipulated the transformation of waste-as-discard into waste-as-useless material, and the new fence being erected around the landfill was an indication that this practice might not be allowed to continue for long. Some Catholic *acompañantes* who inherited my COVIFU house sneered at my use of materials recovered from the landfill, as I imitated the recovery practices of my neighbours whilst creating my own aesthetic. They would “do things properly”, I was told, creating an example that neighbours could follow. This would presumably involve a challenge to multi-fold forms of hybridity: waste and commodities would be put back in their rightful place, and examples of urban nature uprooted like Bea’s *paraíso*. The Intendencia was also unhappy with the forms of urban-natural commoning taking place around the Usina 5, from the recovery of plants and glass, to the grazing of horses and treading of a path between neighbourhoods. Instead of erecting a fence that could easily be pierced, they took more imaginative action in 2017, dumping a load of sewage on either side of the path to keep people out. Yet more dirty politics then, with human waste weaponised in order to shut off a vital artery linking colleagues and kin, although I am certain that new forms of urban nature will soon be seen sprouting out of this latest, steaming, addition to the wastescape.

As Bruno Latour (1993) reminded us long ago, the distinction between nature and culture takes work and is never fully successful, leading to the proliferation of hybrids. What has been much more successful, it appears, is the human encroachment into ever greater planetary depths, with a landmark article on the Anthropocene (Zalasiewicz and Waters 2015) finding “plastics, smelted metals, novel radionuclides and raised carbon levels in every cranny of the earth’s crust, as well as new rock forms

made of squashed-up toys and nappies and all the other stuff that ends up in landfill” (Turner 2017). As Myra Hird notes, “whether in the form of mining, nuclear, industrial, hazardous, sewage, or municipal, and whether it is landfilled, incinerated or buried deep underground, waste constitutes perhaps the most abundant and enduring trace of the human” (2017: 188). Rather than being parochial, exceptional, or remote, the urban nature around Montevideo’s landfill may well be indicative of our time and *clasificador* practices and ethics prophetic in a way Padre Cacho would never have imagined.

Chapter Five

Classifiers' Kinship and the Aftercare of Waste

With the *cantera* as their mother, we might say that rubbish acts as an agent of fraternisation, making brothers and sisters of landfill waste-pickers. In this chapter, I provide a more detailed ethnographic account of the ways in which discards are commoned, appropriated as sources of value, and act to constitute relations of care between kin in and around the landfill. I echo Clara Han's (2012) concern with exploring the dynamics of care in situations of poverty and precarity, and adopt her definition of care as "a problem in everyday life rather than a category with defined borders" (2012: 24). Care is an emerging area of interest in anthropology (Alber and Drotbohm 2016) but a focus on care-as-labour (affective, remunerated, unpaid, immaterial etc.) has to some extent been kept separate from studies of care-as-kinship. I attempt to bring these together through an exploration of the intimate links between the material labour of "unwasting" and *clasificadores'* ability to look after their families. In the context of a "crisis of care" (Fraser 2016) in many parts of the world, where different pressures squeeze the social capacity for raising children, supporting family members, caring for friends, and sustaining households (ibid: 99), can the flow of discards sustain care between kin? Can the "informal" waste trade be considered a space of hope as well as one of suffering and exploitation?

These are some of the questions that I address in this chapter, in what is in part an ethnographic contribution to a debate on the organisation of Latin American recycling. The overwhelming majority of social science research on waste-pickers in the region has focused on (and been sympathetic to) the minority grouped in associations and cooperatives who are in contact with the state (e.g. Fajn 2002, Angelico & Gutierrez 2004, Carengo and Fernandez Alvarez 2011, Gutberlet 2016, Rosaldo 2016). These "organised" waste-pickers have often been championed and contrasted to those working "individually" in the informal sector. Represented as individual and individualistic workers, informal sector waste-pickers are often extracted from the family relations, webs of kinship, and neighbourhood affiliations in which they are embedded, and portrayed as uncooperative and even neoliberal subjects (Carengo and Miguez 2010). Where the extended families of waste-pickers are recognised, they have been loosely described as "clans" (e.g. Sarachu & Texeira 2013: 13) but it would take a great leap of the conceptual imagination to correlate the colourful prints of lions, horses, and tigers that my neighbours liked to hang in their living rooms with totemic animals. An ethnographic engagement with the intimate dynamics of waste-picker family life has largely been absent from the literature, something I seek to remedy in this chapter.

In chapter two, I argued that *clasificadores* pose a challenge to state imaginaries of infrastructural and hygienic modernity in Montevideo through their use of work-horses, their undermining of a municipal monopoly on waste collection, and their unprotected engagement with rubbish as a source

of value. To this list, we can add the practice of familial waste classification and intergenerational continuity in the waste trade, institutionally critiqued as reproducing both child labour and poverty (MIDES/ FOCEM 2011, IP & MA 2012). The accompanied, formal-sector cooperativisation of *clasificadores* encouraged by the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) sought to end the exploitation of children by parents and of *clasificadores* by recycling sector intermediaries. One report specifically sought policies that would “generate a rupture in the mechanisms of generational reproduction of the activity [*clasificación*] and its associated cultural traits” (IP & MA 2012: 1). My neighbourhood interlocutors became entangled in experiments with both housing and labour cooperatives, whose numbers have doubled following a decade of promotion by the Frente Amplio (MIEM et al 2014).

Many *clasificadores* may well work in nuclear families but this was not the situation for those who lived around the *cantera*. Many of my adult neighbours and workmates had started classifying waste as children but did not want their own sons and daughters to repeat their experience. Whilst they saw no shame in waste work, they wanted their children to attend school and, if possible, develop different careers. Adult sibling clusters instead formed the backbone of diverse *clasificador* labour collectives: the Trastos brothers in the Pedro Trastos cooperative; the next generation Trastos sisters at their mother’s recycling yard; the Azucarero brothers at the landfill; and multiple sibling groups at the Cooperativa Felipe Cardoso (COFECA) and the short-lived COVIFU women’s recycling cooperative. I lived in COVIFU with the Trastos, the Azucareros and others, and out of only twenty-four households were ten different sibling groups, often pairs but including up to six adult siblings from a single family living in different homes (see Fig.12). As Lambek (2011) and Thelen (2010) note, much of the recent literature on kinship has focused on the early life of children and on what establishes kinship relations in infancy. Attention to adult sibling relations, meanwhile, allows for a more longitudinal focus on the ways that sibling ties are made, broken and remade across the life course. Such ties were not of course the only important social relations for *clasificadores* living around the landfill – like elsewhere they formed part of “the construction of a dense web of inter and intra-generational kinship relations” (Alber 2013: 91), coexisting alongside relations with non-kin and indeed attempts to minimise social relations.

By choosing to concentrate on kinship relations here, I seek to challenge a binary narrative that contrasts the individualism and atomism of certain sections of the urban poor with those who organise according to class, territory and political orientation. Much Southern Cone urban ethnography of recent years can be classified according to this matrix, focusing either on the atomism provoked by neoliberalism and its residues (e.g. Macedo 2012, Saravi & Makawski 2011, Auyero 2013) or non-kinship based political forms like the cooperative and neighbourhood associations that emerged in response to neoliberal governance (e.g. Bryer 2010, Centner 2012, Betrisey 2012). What forms of mutuality does this binary exclude? It is my argument here that the extended family

structures of informal waste-pickers constitute the primary “social infrastructure” (Simone 2004, 2010) that underpins Uruguay’s recycling industry, at the same time as waste sustains relations of care between family members into adult life. The “persistent life of kinship” (McKinnon & Cannell 2013) among the Uruguayan popular classes troubles the relational ideal on which labour and housing cooperatives are based: relations of equality between individual workers in the first instance, and between nuclear households in the second.

In the first part of this chapter, I concentrate on adult sibling relations in three local labour collectives, reconsidering in the process the connection between kinship, poverty, and waste. Waste, in my account, is not merely hazardous, risky or the excess of social relations of production: it also co-produces practices of precarious care-giving. The background to such care-work is the historic exclusion of informal workers like *clasificadores* from the benefits of labour-based citizenship and social security. In the second part of the chapter, I turn to the COVIFU housing cooperative, detailing how kinship relations based around the sibling bond and extended family undermine the independent, stable, nuclear family household as the foundation upon which cooperative democracy is built. As well as exploring the dynamics of the housing cooperative where I spent over a year, this section draws out some of the reasons – weak conjugal bonds, transient father figures – why sibling groups rather than nuclear families form the basis of much social organisation in my fieldsite.

Taken together, the chapter suggests that the distribution of the waste commons and housing in my fieldsite is largely organised along kinship lines. This tendency nuances rather than undermines my conceptualisation of waste as a commons since the latter rests on waste’s temporarily de-commodified status, the claim to it made by vulnerable groups, and the manner in which it provides a refuge outside of wage labour. Indeed, it is the position of *clasificadores* outside of wage labour and in a special relationship to waste as de-commodified substance that allows them to distribute materials and labour to vulnerable relations. The chapter’s second section allows my definition of the commons to be productively compared with that of David Harvey, because the relocation of residents from the Villa del Cerdito shantytown to the COVIFU housing cooperative entailed a move from homes partially built of the waste commons to houses that fit Harvey’s (2012) definition of commons as non-commodifiable and collective goods.

Kinship amongst my informants, as elsewhere, can involve “differentiation, hierarchy, exclusion and abuse” (Carsten 2003: 247), as well as “promises and breaches of promise, acts and violations of intimacy, and acts of forgiveness and revenge” (Lambek 2011: 4). Lest my focus on care-giving be accused of painting an overly generous portrait of *clasificador* family life, I should underline that the childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood of my now-adult interlocutors was far from easy but that they worked hard to avoid reproducing personal experiences of extreme poverty and upbringings that might now be considered neglectful or abusive. The chapter is thus testament to the striving of my interlocutors to progress (*salir adelante*).

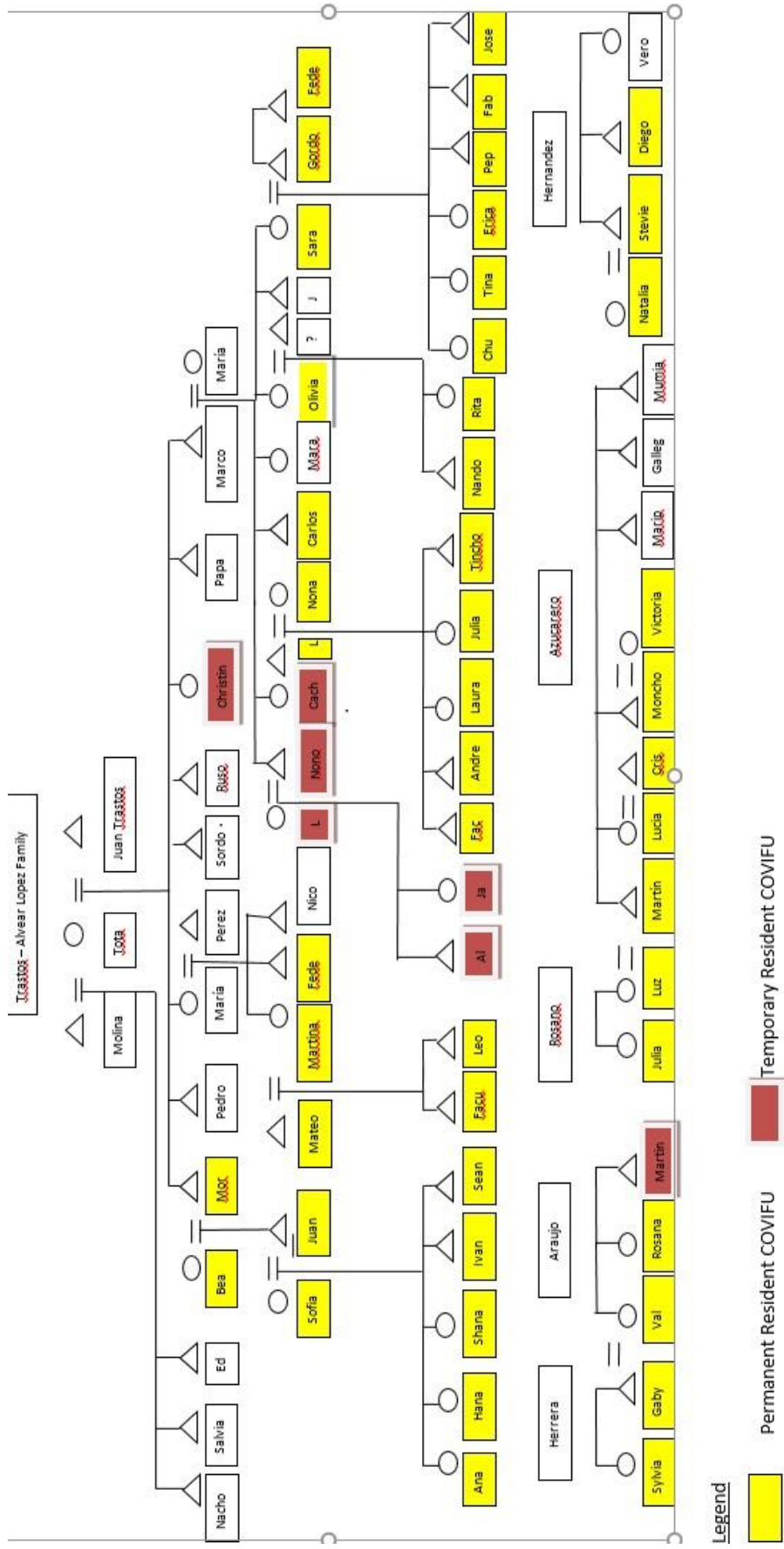


Figure 12 Local families

Part One: Labour

The Cooperative

In late March 2014, I was sat in the back of the Pedro Trastos Cooperative truck as we returned from Unilever's large Montevideo distribution plant. The Cooperative had a regular *levante* (pick-up) of the company's waste, and was one of the few third sector organisations to have accredited waste-transporter status enabling them to take discards to Felipe Cardoso. The Unilever cargo consisted of damaged products and waste created in the distribution process, as goods manufactured in neighbouring Brazil and Argentina were unpacked. The contents were doubly enclosed, first within rubbish sacks, then hidden in the truck, their diversity obfuscated by their categorisation as generic "commercial waste". Such waste was, according to technical guidelines, assimilable to the category of household waste rather than hazardous, but it still represented negative value for the multinational company, which had to pay the Cooperative for the disposal service.

We didn't quite make it to Felipe Cardoso, however. Instead, we turned off a few streets before and passed recently built social housing complexes, a smallholding, some shacks, and a Catholic social centre. At the end of the street, we reached what appeared to be a cul-de-sac but then continued down a dirt path that opened out onto mixed terrain. To our left was a large aluminium shed and several self-built homes, to our right, green vegetation interspersed with discards and pigsties. It was a wasteland alright, but not the one we should have been arriving at. This was Trastos territory, where spaces of cooperative waste labour mixed with family homes. It was where I had spent the summer of 2010 and cut my teeth as a *clasificador*, conducting fieldwork with the Trastos cooperative for my undergraduate research.

It had begun to rain when Nico stopped the engine of the truck. He was the President of the cooperative, a charismatic and enterprising figure whose previous occupations included shantytown bar-owner and recycling intermediary. He was from a large waste-picking family however, so when his uncles and relatives working at the landfill began to get organised in 2002, he quickly rallied to their cause. After a fact-finding trip to visit waste-picker (*catador*) collectives in Brazil, Nico and other visitors became convinced that the cooperative model was the best way forward for Uruguayan *clasificadores*. His first cooperative experience was with COFECA, but he subsequently led a group of his uncles to form a smaller, breakaway group: the Cooperativa Pedro Trastos (named after another, deceased uncle). The name Trastos, meaning "junk of little value" (RAE 2017), had been given to Nico's grandfather due to his work in the waste trade, and was passed down to subsequent generations. While their legal surname was the patrician Alvear Lopez, for all intents and purposes they were *Los Trastos*, one of the largest waste-picking families in the Cruz de Carrasco neighbourhood.

The cooperative had downsized somewhat since I conducted fieldwork with them in 2010: two members were in jail for drug-related offences, Nico's uncle Savia had suddenly passed away, and founding member Uncle Sordo had left after a dispute. So, on return from Unilever, only Nico's uncle (and Juan's stepfather) Morocho was there to help him open the truck's tail gate, soon joined by Uncle Kela who had wandered over when he heard us arrive. Nico positioned himself at the back of the hold and began pushing full transparent rubbish sacks towards us. As we emptied them one by one, out tumbled a colourful assortment of cleaning products marketed by Unilever in Uruguay: black cans of Axe deodorant, packets of yellow Jif oven cleaner, bars of white Dove soap, bags of pink and blue Nevex washing up powder, and one-wash sachets of Sedal shampoo. The packaging of many of these products had been damaged during importation, causing flecks of white washing up powder and squirts of shampoo to mix with the falling raindrops and form a frothy lather when trampled underfoot. Rather than dump homogeneous "commercial waste" at Felipe Cardoso, we began the work of separating unopened sachets from closed and empty plastic bottles from those half-full. Nico's family were not, after all, primarily in the business of waste disposal. They were *clasificadores* who had been finding and recovering value in the waste-stream for generations.

Uncle Kela was no longer part of the cooperative but he was still family, so no-one objected to him taking away the odd product to freshen up his kitchen or his armpits. I picked out a few deodorants and rolls of shampoo sachets for myself, recalling the occasion when Trastos members had given me an ample supply, apparently worried by my bedraggled appearance that I could not afford to wash my hair. Eduardo also gave me hundreds of Jif oven cleaner sachets to pass on to his sister and other neighbours back at COVIFU. In all, around half the load could be recovered and was mostly split between Morocho and Jessica, whose husband Nacho was a Pedro Trastos member imprisoned several months earlier for the possession of marijuana. He still figured on the cooperative's books, and his wage, along with a share of *requeche*, went to support Jessica and their three children. The kind of materials that would have been destroyed at Luisina and Homero's Stericyclo plant were here used to sustain family relations in precarious circumstances.

What was wrong with the Unilever discards that caused them to be thrown away in the first place? They had not gone rotten, become toxic, or spoiled. Their chemical makeup had likely stayed the same and, judging by the floral aroma that drifted towards the Trastos's pig sties, they hadn't lost any of their scent either. What had been damaged was what Josh Reno calls "bundling waste"- packaging materials that "serve to dematerialize exchanges by promising a relative detachment of the commodity from normal spoilage" and "help other things last... display their durability to others [and] prepare the representational grounds for the commoditization of discrete and saleable things" (2015: 106). Unilever sold their products to commercial outlets in numbered bundles, meaning that if one small shampoo sachet in a roll of thirty had burst, the remaining twenty-nine were also converted to waste. For single items too, packaging enabled transport and constituted a crucial component of

exchange value. A cracked bottle disturbed the homogeneity and replicability of the *Sedal Wheatgerm and Honey Formula Shampoo* that Kela cheerfully carted off to Jessica in a large tub. Unilever had no use for substances that maintained their chemical integrity but not their plastic shells and commodity status.

Instead of heading for the dump however, these substances were diverted towards acts of kinship maintenance (c.f. Carsten 1995), as Eduardo helped to look after the family of his imprisoned uncle. Jessica might use the products herself, relieving the family of a household expense. Or she might realise the latent “commodity potential” (Appadurai 1986) by selling them to neighbours, receiving in return money that was used to buy bread, *yerba mate*, biscuits, and cigarettes that we brought her husband in prison, helping him to get through a spell behind bars. As Boarder-David writes of the work of dumpster-divers, discarded things “could become many things... could indeed be reintroduced into the market... [but] may undergo a parallel kind of nonmarket economic circulation that obviates in some way the logic of the market” (2014: 108).

Elsewhere, Boarder-David (2016) suggests that transforming commodities into waste takes work, beyond the simple act of putting something into a bin. The agency behind commercial disposal is multiple, including product design, consumer preferences, stock rotation, and aesthetics, with the author dividing “waste-making labour” into that of obsolescence and the “refusal to recirculate surpluses” (2016:132). The Trastos cooperative did not have much hand in the labour of obsolescence but they were entrusted to ensure that Unilever surplus was disposed of rather than recirculated. Instead, they engaged in what we might call a labour of “unwasting”, through which Nico was able to sustain the flow of care to family members like his uncle Nacho, perhaps hopeful that the latter could be lured away from the lucrative but dangerous world of the *narcotraficantes* and back to the quieter life of the *clasificador*. Nico’s relationship with the notoriously lethargic Uncle Morocho could also be characterised as one organised around care. During a conversation at COVIFU, a neighbour who was frustrated with Morocho’s productivity in the joint pig rearing venture asked how Nico had put up with him in the Pedro Trastos cooperative for so long. Nico answered that he would “rather have him tag along, doing something a little more decent, than end his days at the dump”.

An uncle and a brother-in-law who formed part of the cooperative in 2010 also had problems with *pasta base*¹⁴ addiction and would have struggled to find work anywhere other than the landfill. Through redirecting discarded substances like shampoo and the income from the sale of stock recyclables, Nico attempted to hold together both his extended family and his dreams that they might progress together. Many *clasificador* cooperatives have foundered, and it is thought that this is partly

¹⁴ *Pasta base* is a crude extract of the coca leaf which contains 40% to 91% cocaine sulfate along with companion coca alkaloids. In recent years its consumption has become widespread amongst young men in low-income neighbourhoods of Montevideo (see Suarez et al 2014)

because kinship hierarchies complicated egalitarian relations (e.g. Sarachu & Teixeira 2013: 8), a concern that stretches back to the foundational work of Peter Worsley and his argument that “traditional ties of kinship and neighbourhood, caste and ethnicity, too, often work against the requirements of strict economic solidarity” and thus “established solidarities may be dysfunctional for the cooperative rather than a social foundation on which modern cooperation can be based”(1971: 24). Indeed, Hannah Arendt (1998 [1958]) argues that the very emergence of the political in ancient Athens rested on breaking the power of kinship over collective life and relegating it to the private sphere. But Pedro Trastos endured as one of the few formalised waste-picking enterprises partly because of its “social infrastructure” of kin-based labour.

The Family Yard

When the path at the end of the Trastos’s terrain becomes too narrow for a car or truck, it is possible to continue on foot through shrub and light forest, reaching a settlement adjacent to the old Usina 5. This was the home of another of Nico’s uncles, the recently deceased Marco Trastos, whose family continued to live and work on the site. Marco and his wife María had divided the space into a domestic sphere and a much larger area where they could receive, classify, and landfill discards. In the last years of his life, Marco was mostly to be found sipping sweet red wine from a plastic bottle at the entrance to their home, and that was where I met him back in 2010. It was his wife, the converted evangelical and now tee-total María, who took charge of the family business, employing her children Carlos, Juancho, Olivia, Sara, Cachula, Nono, Nona, and Mara in the task of classifying waste. I came to know the family well because many of the siblings were our neighbours in COVIFU (see Fig. 12).

Unlike the Cooperativa Pedro Trastos, Marco and María’s business was fully “informal” and the waste it received from the up-market supermarket chain *Grands Magasins* was of poor quality. Pedro’s family didn’t own a truck, so instead accessed waste by way of a division of labour with another neighbourhood family. The *Motas* collected *Grands Magasins* discards in their truck daily, appropriated the most valuable, least labour-intensive materials, and then dropped off the rest at María’s. The relationship between the two families was clearly unequal and hierarchical. The *Motas* had more capital and resources, while Marco and María’s family received low grade waste, much of which could not be recycled and was simply heaped in mounds around the large plot they first occupied around thirty years ago.

Nevertheless, the family yard acted as a site of flexible resource-extraction for the siblings, who were paid US\$30 by their mother for a day’s work. Even those who did not work at the site regularly were able to rely on it as a source of labour. Carlos, something of a loveable rogue, was addicted to

pasta base, causing his appearance at work to be erratic. Olivia, who by her own admission easily became bored with an activity, dropped in and out of work there during my fieldwork period. Sara's husband Gordo preferred that she stay at home to look after the house and kids but she worked at María's for a few months to earn money to pay for her eldest daughter's 15th birthday celebrations. Cachula, the youngest daughter, mostly cared for her two infants, but turned to her mother's yard while her partner was out of work. That this was a space of care rather than exploitation was recognised even by Mayor Ana Olivera, who had visited the site after a neighbour complained about the smoke resulting from the family's burning of rubbish. According to the Trastos who were present, and much to the annoyance of the municipal waste official who accompanied her, Olivera conceded that she did not see a place of child labour but one where women were working hard to support their families (see Fig. 13).



Figure 13 A family birthday lunch with the Trastos. A line of pallets separates the domestic space from the work-space of waste classification.

It was through classifying waste at María's yard towards the end of my fieldwork period that I came to understand how the constant flow of materials helped to sustain bonds of kinship. I had considered working at María's for a while but was put off by her reputedly fierce temperament. Still, when we met at her home – whose uncluttered interior of Evangelical imagery contrasted with the cornucopia of waste materials that surrounded it – she seemed happy to have the offer of another pair of hands that would get dirty without requiring payment in return. “People outside of the family don't seem to like it or stay very long”, María warned me, and I soon realised why. I was hardly unaccustomed to waste-work given that I had been classifying it at various sites for much of the year. But the supermarket waste María received consisted principally of packaging, damaged products, and spoiled food. The small amounts of plastic, cardboard, metal, and paper that we sought out were thus mixed together with large quantities of rotten loaves of bread, mouldy grated carrots, and foul unidentified cocktails that stained our clothes. One valuable material that appeared regularly consisted of bloody, transparent plastic meat bags, which attracted flies and maggots that Nono and I wiped from our arms in the summer heat. These were trucks that *clasificadores* at the *cantera* would likely have ignored. Even the *Grands Magasins* loads contained the possibility of an exciting chance discovery however. On occasion, I would find luxury items not sold in the local supermarket: a burst bag of cashew nuts, an unopened packet of Lavazza coffee, an imported German lager. Alongside these exceptions, there was the regular *requeche* of mixed vegetables that María transformed into lunchtime stew or pigswill. There was no need to bring a snack either, as I followed Carlos's lead in tearing pieces of bread from salvageable loaves and improvising sandwich fillings with the rind of different cheeses or the ends of ham loins that arrived from the supermarket's delicatessen counter, the only time during the course of my fieldwork that I would eat serrano ham or manchego cheese.

Then there were objects of less immediate consumption. Josh Reno (2009: 35, 2015) has written of how garbage workers at the Michigan landfill where he conducted fieldwork assembled discards into “masculine projects” such as building cars. María's son Nono was also something of a self-taught mechanic who loved attempting to fix and restore things. You don't find too many car parts in supermarket waste unfortunately, but we encountered plenty of broken toys from their children's section. One day, I watched him pull out several electronic toy dinosaurs, each with a particular defect. Over the next few days he began putting them together – the sound box from one, the arm from another – assembling Frankenstein-esque figurine to give to his six-year old son. Nono didn't earn enough money to be able to buy new toys from *Grands Magasins* very often, but with these efforts he could live up to the desirable role of the caring and crafting father. Olivia, meanwhile, made sure that her daughter's fourth birthday was the envy of the neighbourhood by earning money working at her mum's, and saved some by fashioning decorations from coloured paper recovered from the trash. The supposed absence of economic value brought materials into the waste-stream, while the recognition and recovery of its latency enabled the constitution of particular values, such as responsible parenthood (c.f. Graeber 2001, 2013).

It is not that the Trastos were always caring for each other: there were of course clear material and psychological limits to mutual assistance. María's children had a difficult upbringing, something they tried to learn from when bringing up their own children, nephews, and nieces. But what appeared limitless was the arrival of *Grands Magasins'* s waste at María's, meaning that there was always work to be done, and a pot of *requeche* stew on the table. If they ran out of money, María's children could always be sure of a day's work at her yard – no small help given that both Olivia and Mara were single mothers and Nona had to care for six children alone while her husband was in jail. Wounds between the siblings could be healed, and flared tempers calmed while picking through mounds of trash or hoisting *bolsones* of recyclable materials onto each other's shoulders. Whatever the unpleasant sensorial dimensions of the work, its rhythms were leisurely and even therapeutic as we hid away conversing behind mounds of trash. "I've worked at the landfill and COFECA", Olivia told me, "but there's nothing like working at your mums, with your family all around". Whether through the dinosaurs Nono repaired for his son, or the ornamental Chinese warrior that Sara glued together and used to guard her property, the siblings were not involved in "waste-making labour" (Boarder-David 2016) but a labour of unwasting through which they reconstituted things and simultaneously constituted themselves as subjects who cared – for each other, for their children, and for their homes.

Despite my focus here on the positive aspects of such material encounters, the nature of the *Grands Magasins* arrangement and the composition of their waste stream indicated that the risky and exploitative side of waste (work) was no fiction. The supermarket and its millionaire owner paid very little for the collection of their waste and were spared some of the costs of disposal at Felipe Cardoso because much of it came to rest on María's occupied land, affecting the family's quality of life. Over the years, the lake that Nono remembered swimming in as a child had been polluted by accumulating rubbish and drowned pigs. Interestingly, María and her family argued that they were performing a service by levelling the land with waste, a waste disposal method previously advocated then discarded by the state. We can thus observe how past ways of dealing with leftovers also "generate their own leftovers, not just all that is most toxic or corrosive but also other ways of defining the problem that open the way to solutions at a different scale" (Harvey 2013: 70). Ideas, as well as material processes, of disposal leave behind their own residues.

One couldn't help noticing that both before and after María's family in the waste and recycling chain were actors who boasted greater capital, income and status. On the one side were the Motas, who were paid for dropping off the waste but barely got their hands dirty; on the other, the recycling intermediaries who bought materials already neatly classified and sold them on for a tidy profit. The Trastos sisters were also exposed to the risk of what I considered the unscrupulous advances and abuses of power of recycling middle-men, and there were cases in the neighbourhood of intermediaries who took *clasificadoras* as mistresses and fathered (unrecognised) children with them. It is not only, then, that waste has a dual nature, possessing both a "potential to turn into money" and a

“tendency to toxic decomposition” (Harvey 2013: 67). It is also that access to different wastes at different points in the waste-recycling chain is unequally distributed, while waste’s structured flows can expose actors to social risks and stigmas that go beyond the materiality of waste itself. Such a realisation warns against a purely celebratory narrative of human care built out of discards.

The Landfill Brothers

María’s children had all been raised on the site, and the Azucarero brothers were never too far away. Sara and Gordo, and Martín “Azucarero”, were all now in their early thirties and neighbours in COVIFU Rural but they didn’t speak to each other during most of my year’s fieldwork. When I interviewed Sara and Gordo in the last weeks of my stay, I asked about the circumstances of their joint upbringing:

Sara: I know them all, we were brought up together. From the age of nine we used to go to the *cantera*. They were all brought up at my mother’s house: Mariposa [Butterfly], Martín, el Gallego [the Galician], la Momia [the Mummy], el Pegado [the Battered One]

Patrick: They were brought up at your house?

Sara: They would stay at my house, they were called the *guachos* [orphans, abandoned kids], those who wouldn’t stay in their parents’ houses.

Patrick: Your parents used to drink a lot, but they still had the time to bring up other kids?

Gordo: They were brought up like pigs... “go and look for some *requeche* in the *cantera*!” And they all ate what they liked...

Sara: Don’t lie! My father used to make pots of food. Be quiet, *lambeta* [bootlicker].

Gordo: Yeah, from *requeche* and everything that came out of the rubbish...

Sara: And, so what? What’s that got to do with anything?

The conversation highlights conflicting opinions about caring-through-waste. Gordo’s father was a plumber, so although he grew up near the landfill and went to school with kids who hung out there, he was a step removed from the world of waste-picking. For him, the care Sara’s parents provided for the Azucarero boys was risible: it was really the *madre cantera* who provided them with sustenance. Sara, on the other hand, lauded her parents for distributing *requeche* beyond their offspring to unruly neighbourhood *guachos*, who at least got fed and had some adult oversight. The Azucarero boys were

a handful, even by their own accounts. Martín told me that he only went to school to steal other children's pocket money, while his brother Moncho, another neighbour, was kept home permanently after a violent incident. I introduce them here because as they grew up, the Azucarero brothers also used access to waste to sustain relations of kinship care. While Nico did so by adopting a promising cooperative form being promoted by the state, and María distributed access to waste in the informal sector as she had done for years, the Azucareros had yet another arrangement. To find them, we need to continue our journey from María's yard along Camino Oncativo, past the urban-nature of the Usina 5, and to the active Usina 8 where they worked.

Like Trastos, "Azucarero" was a family nickname born of an association with a particular material, in this case the sugar cane (*caña de azúcar*) that the boys' mother cut down from the surrounding commons and mixed with mud to build the family's first home in the Cruz de Carrasco. Even amongst waste-pickers, these building materials were distinctive enough to merit a sobriquet. They indexed poverty rather than resourcefulness and were considered rustic in comparison with the metal and wood that most *clasificadores* scavenged from the landfill and surrounding area to build their shacks. When I arrived to conduct fieldwork, the next generation of Azucareros lived in cooperative *casas de material* (material houses). They might still have been waste-pickers, but they were successful ones, enjoying exclusive access to the landfill in the afternoon. This right had been earned through another affective relationship mediated by waste (work): the friendship between the Azucarero brothers and municipal landfill workers.

Such relations began when the eldest son Mariposa used to gather *requeche* to support his mother as a boy. This was a time when, both *clasificadores* and landfill employees informed me, municipal workers would commonly appropriate the contents of dump trucks in order to supplement their meagre salaries. Mariposa told me that he spent time at the smallholding of one municipal worker, Molina, separating the contents of trucks in exchange for a share:

"They dumped trucks from the markets at the farm and we used to separate the fruit and vegetables for the animals. That's how I made friends with him: I worked for him, as they say. I got 7 or 8 boxes to take home to my mother and the rest was for the animals. It was a mutual agreement."

The labour-friendship nexus took on different iterations as Mariposa grew older and Molina's son became landfill foreman. For a while, he assisted with the ostensibly municipal task of *atracando*: rapidly directing the trucks to where they should dump their materials ("it's a job that needs real skill to avoid a queue of traffic, a skill that I had but many *municipales* didn't"). During my fieldwork period, he worked as a waste-picker but still performed a municipal function in restricting the number of waste-pickers who could enter in the afternoon to his siblings ("ask the foreman if he's ever had any problems with us in the afternoon, ask him..."). Mariposa was clearly proud of his friendship

with the *municipales* (“I’ve been to their houses to eat, they’ve come to mine”) and the sentiment was obviously reciprocal, for when I interviewed the landfill foreman and told him that I was living in COVIFU, his eyes lit up: “I’ve a friend who lives there: Martín Azucarero!”. Friendship with the foreman paid dividends for Martín the day that he was offered the opportunity to receive and classify several valuable trucks that were being diverted from over-stretched recycling plants on a daily basis.

Through their access to waste, Martín and Mariposa managed to combine individual progress with the care of more vulnerable siblings. The younger Azucarero brothers – Moncho, Gallego and Pegado – had all suffered problems of addiction to *pasta base*, likely an outcome of their coming of age at a time when the drug started to destroy the lives of young men in Montevideo’s poorer neighbourhoods (Suarez et al 2014). Of the brothers, I knew Moncho and his life story best: the homelessness, the overpowering addiction, the multiple attempts at rehabilitation, the relapses. During all his tribulations, he told me, Martín was “always there for him”, either lending him money that he had earned through selling recyclables, or facilitating his access to work at Felipe Cardoso. Mariposa did the same for Gallego and Pegado.

The density and multiplicity of *clasificador* kinship relations described in this section suggest that asserting the parent-child dyad to be the key relationship of care, or indeed exploitation, is mistaken. Dimensions of social life that have been recognised in regional scholarship on low-income neighbourhoods (e.g. Fonseca 1995; 2000), such as weak conjugal bonds, large family sizes, shifting father-figures, and the practice of taking in abandoned children (*hijos de corazón*) means that the make-up of families can be extremely heterogeneous. Nico, for example, was older than his Uncle Nacho, who was not a biological relation but had been raised as a Trastos after running away from home and being taken in by Nico’s grandmother, an example both of “kinning” (Howell 2003) and of how care itself can create kinship in the absence of biological connections (Drotbohm and Elber 2015: 8). The Azucarero siblings had different fathers, and older brothers like Martín and Mariposa often took on the principal care-giving role for younger siblings.

In the broad field of kinship studies, this chapter situates itself in a minority stream that focuses more on what maintains kinship over the life-course than what creates it in infancy. The different family cases cited here indicate the productive “second life” of waste and the ways in which discards hold *clasificador* families together. My informants distributed access to waste based on pre-existing kinship bonds (uncle, brother, child) but it was also through waste that practices of care-giving between adult family member were enacted. Kinship was not only biological connection or mutual upbringing but the stitching together of a patchwork safety net from the offcuts of industry. Through distributing waste and waste work, Nico, María, Martín, and Mariposa embodied the figures of the caring uncle, mother and elder brother, enabling the “fulfilment of an expected form of behaviour associated with a specific kinship role” (Drotbohm and Alber 2015: 7). We can draw an ethnographic and a broader analytical conclusion from this. The first is that the attempted formalisation of waste-

picking in Uruguay that aims to break up family-labour relations could undermine such precarious care-giving and ethical subjectivities. The second is that, amidst a flurry to recognise emergent new subjectivities associated with waste and contamination (e.g. Hawkins' (2006) "anxious recycler" and Hecht's (2012) "being nuclear", we should not forget that waste-work also sustains more traditional subjectivities such as those expressed through kinship idioms.

Part Two: From Territory to Kinship in Cooperative Housing

When they lived in the Villa del Cerdito, residents like Gordo, Moncho, and Martín partially constructed their homes from materials recovered from the surrounding urban-natural commons, as they turned to a variety of ready-to-hand resources such as free-growing cane and wood, as well as plastic and metal recovered from the dump. Per my theorisation, such material can be considered part of the commons because they are temporarily de-commodified, can be accessed freely rather than paid for by the wages of labour, and are claimed to by vulnerable groups. These features, I have suggested, also characterised many of the historic English commons. But when the Catholic *acompañantes* working with *Villa* residents sought to procure funding for a relocation, they chose an organisational form that many scholars have also sought to place within a commons framework: the cooperative. Rather neatly then, residents appeared to transition from homes constructed of what I call the "waste commons" to non-commodifiable and collective housing that fits with the broad definition of the commons set out by David Harvey (2012). The fact that such a model was advocated not by residents themselves but by the upper-class Catholics who accompanied them allows us to engage productively with the idea of the commons set out by radical scholars, and ask what happens when people are "commoned" by erstwhile class antagonists who in fact have little ideological commitment to cooperativism themselves. My purpose is not so much to critique the idea of the commons as collective and uncommodifiable as to explore what interesting hybrids and tensions emerge out of a meeting between ideal-type social forms and the kinship-based social organisation largely favoured by my *clasificador* interlocutors.

The *Cooperativa de Vivienda Nuestro Futuro* ("Our Future Housing Cooperative") was designed as a relocation project for residents of the Villa del Cerdito, the shantytown was "discovered" by Oscar in 2002 soon after he returned to his native Uruguay after a long spell as a missionary in El Salvador. Oscar collaborated with a social worker already active in the neighbourhood and applied for funds to relocate residents in collectively-built cooperative housing. The pair then brought together other neighbourhood social actors to create a working group focused on improving the quality of life of *Villa* residents and securing a relocation. The group began to remedy immediate problems such as

water quality, but when several children were also diagnosed with lead and cadmium poisoning, the Intendencia, which owned the land, sped up the dismantling of the shantytown.

Slowly, different sources of funding came together to help finance and facilitate the move. The philanthropist head of a local NGO had purchased 50 hectares of land between Felipe Cardoso and Cochabamba, on the other side of the landfill from the *Villa* and on the fringes of the Flor de Maroñas neighbourhood. After a series of hesitations and delays, he was persuaded to donate enough land for the cooperative housing. On the other side of sports pitches owned by a Catholic seminary, Opus Dei Uruguay donated further hectares through its *Asociación Técnica y Cultural*. The bulk of the funding for the construction of the houses, some US\$600,000 came from the US government's independent overseas aid program, the Inter-American Foundation (IAF), and was administered by a local NGO founded by affluent and Catholic Carrasco mothers called A House, A Dream (*Una Casa, Un Sueño*). Other supporters included the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES), the embassies of Ireland and Japan, and organisations that brought together the alumni of the Christian Brothers school.

COVIFU now consists of two separate groups of houses, one rural and the other urban, each containing 12 homes. The urban part of the cooperative is officially within Montevideo's city limits, whereas the rural section, where I lived, lies in Montevideo Rural, meaning residents there have differential rights to both claim municipal services, and practice activities. Specifically, this meant that rural residents had the right to keep livestock – mostly pigs and horses – but were expected to shoulder the costs of official connection to the electricity grid (e.g. the installation of poles and wires). The two parts of the cooperative are separated by the sports fields owned by alumni of the elite Catholic seminary and by the Trigos (Wheat Fields) socio-educative centre, set up and financed by upper-class Catholics so that they could continue “accompanying” the families – children in particular – following the completion of the housing project.

Acompañantes opted for the juridical form of the housing cooperative even though the sources of funding and the diversity of actors involved made this project very different from the standard Uruguayan housing cooperative model, which is strongly embedded in the labour movement and where workers generally pool resources to build their own homes (Bertullo 2003; Nahoum 1999). COVIFU families were not in legal possession of their homes and nor could they sell them, because they belonged to the cooperative as a whole. The homes thus meet Harvey's (2012: 73) criteria for being considered a commons in that they are “both collective and non-commodified – off limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations”. Drawing on Harvey (2012) and Nonini (2007) – who suggests that what distinguishes common from private property is that the former is not considered a commodity by its members – Amanda Huron argues that housing cooperatives “are a manifestation of the commons... because they fit the two main traits of the commons: collective ownership and noncommodification” (2013: 37). In this, she joins scholars like de Peuter and Dyer-

Witheyford who argue that cooperatives should be “situated in the context of a wide set of struggles over various forms of commons” (2010: 32).

Unlike the limited equity cooperatives studied by Huron (2013, forthcoming), COVIFU homes were even built by the residents’ own hands, complemented by the rather negligible contribution of a certain visiting Scottish exchange student. Yet, and this is a complication unforeseen by radical commons scholarship, the cooperative model was not endogenous or autonomously emergent but was instead promoted by upper-class Catholic *acompañantes*. Its key tenets of collective ownership and non-commodification were challenged by the would-be commoner-residents, who argued that whatever the *de jure* status of the homes, they *de facto* owned them individually. While most neighbours were happy at COVIFU and had few plans to leave, they felt that they would be within their rights to sell “their” houses on the market if they so desired. During my fieldwork, one resident rented his house out for a time, while Olivia almost sold hers in a fit of nostalgia for a return to the Cruz. Rather than disputes over market exchange however, what prevailed in the cooperative were low-intensity conflicts involving the kinship-based subversion of egalitarian principles, and it is to these that I now turn.

The relocation scheme and rights to a place in it were initially based on territory – the housing was designed and destined for residents of the Villa del Credito – and prioritised egalitarian relations between individual family households. According to an IAF (2009) report on the project, the aim was that families “learn to face challenges together, to organize, [and] to assume social responsibilities” whilst developing their “sense of community and their understanding of cooperating for mutual benefit”. Yet in fact, the kinship relations of my informants began to challenge, from an early stage, both the territorial nature of the cooperative project, and its basic constitutive unit: the nuclear family household. As original residents of the Villa del Credito began to drop out or were expelled before and during the construction phase – due to delays or failure to fulfil labour obligations – cooperativists began to replace these with relatives, siblings in particular. As Gordo and Sara explained:

Gordo: Really, her relatives who should be here are El Morocho (uncle), el Carlos (brother) and her. Then with time, spaces began to appear and we started putting relatives in. I put my brother in. We put in Olivia and Nona (sisters). Who else did we put in? Nacho (uncle), Rojo (Nacho’s brother-in-law) and Mateo (aunt’s husband). People left and someone had to be put in their place.

Sara: And since we’re all related, we voted for our relatives! (laughs)

Patrick: And so you voted as a family bloc?

Gordo: That’s right

There were other cases too. Martín's wife Luz managed to include her sister Julia, who lived in the Felipe Cardoso shantytown while Martina, with the support of lay missionary Oscar, was able to gain a place for her then single brother. Stevie, who began an affair with Natalia and moved into the Villa del Cerdito when plans for the move were already afoot, managed to get his brother Diego, who lived nearby, onto the waiting list and eventually into a house. Most of these siblings lived in the surrounding area but not in the Villa del Cerdito itself. Effectively, through a combination of chance and design, families managed to convert COVIFU from a housing project based predominantly on territory to one based on territory *and* kinship. Naturally, there were exceptions to this trend, such as the expulsion of one of the Azucarero brothers, la Momia, who had lived in the *Villa* but had been caught dismantling the large donated bus that the group used for meetings and selling it for scrap, with no amount of family support able to save him.

As the organising principle of territory was gradually undermined, it was no surprise that kinship played an increasingly important role in ostensibly egalitarian cooperative decision-making. As Cristian, a resident without a large family directly behind him, explained about the initial cooperative meetings:

“since they are big families, they base themselves on that. They see you according to the support you've got, do you know what I mean? They always take advantage of those who don't have a lot of relatives. They have big families and big guns as well...”

Although seemingly fascinated with guns himself, Cristian was extremely earnest and polite in cooperative meetings, something that left him open to the mockery of others. Thankfully, he became integrated into his wife Lucía's family, earning him the protection of brother-in-law Martín Azucarero.

How did the increased sibling presence in COVIFU affect the everyday democratic management of the cooperative post-construction? In effect, it was often to siblings that neighbours turned when they sought allies in particular disputes. Such was the case when, towards the end of my year's residency, María's daughter Cachula and her partner David occupied a building on COVIFU grounds that had been used as an office for a failed brick-kiln venture (known as *la ladrillera*). I had been away for several days and was surprised on my return to find the couple converting the space into a home for their small family, fitting pipes for water, and connecting a cable to the long, much duct-taped and straggled electricity wire that residents ran from the street and branched out into homes. Gordo, Sara, Nono, and other family members helped Cachula install herself as the sixth Trastos sibling to take up residence at COVIFU in what was effectively a kinship-based appropriation of cooperative space.

The occupation sparked consternation from COVIFU social worker Dolores and *acompañante* Santiago Vegas. They organised a cooperative assembly to discuss the issue, distributing hand-written notes to each household that summoned neighbours to discuss “the occupation of the little shed”.

Prior to the meeting, David and Cachula visited each resident to ask for signatures in support of their move. Faced with the physical presence of the young family on their doorstep, neighbours assented unanimously, even if there were quiet murmurs of dissent. The Trastos arrived at the meeting *en masse* and brought along sister Mara, who wasn't even a resident in COVIFU. Dolores, Santiago, and his wife Mercedes huddled together in the Trigos canteen where the meeting took place. They enquired about the identity and presence of Mara and complained about the method of collecting signatures as a usurpation of the assembly as the cooperative's sovereign decision-making body. Yet the *acompañantes* were faced with a *fait accompli*, and had to content themselves with vague assurances that the young couple would vacate the building when it was needed for storage.

Such alliances undermined the formal cooperative principles enshrined in COVIFU's statute, whose ninth article stipulated that the rights and obligations of the members would be "regulated according to the principles of equality and cooperative solidarity, with no privileges granted and each household represented by one vote". The Trastos had been ready for a fight, but were able to secure at least temporary consent for the occupation without much difficulty. They had been expecting resistance from neighbour Valentina Araujo, who had been complaining before the meeting. Rather than protest, however, Valentina used the occasion to stake her own brother Martin's claim to one of the two vacant lots on which another house could be built. He had lived in the Villa del Cerdito but lost his place in COVIFU, as well as his family, after becoming waylaid by addiction to *pasta base*. He had, however, been kept on the waiting list, had been clean from drugs for several years, and was back in COVIFU temporarily living with Valentina. Although he now held down a steady job as a construction worker, he told me that he would not feel complete until he had won back access to his children, and had his own home in which to host them. He sought to re-join sisters Valentina and Rosana in the housing cooperative.

It would be wrong to depict sibling relationships at COVIFU in purely positive terms – as consisting solely of solidarity, care, and mutual interest. In fact, siblings spent much time in conflicts between themselves. Gordo for instance, was not on speaking terms with his brother Eddy due to a dispute over the family plumbing business. Sara and her sisters were constantly falling out for short periods of time, often over seemingly trifling issues. For example, Sara argued with Cachula after the latter ate a cake that was destined for a third party; with Olivia after she was understood to have overstayed her welcome at their home, and with Nona after a dispute about book-keeping at María's. This tendency for intra-familial disputes was remarked upon by an acquaintance, who noticed how the Trastos "loved a fight".

These disputes would usually only last a few days or weeks before being resolved though, and Sara explained that their family would unite to defend themselves against outsiders if under threat, as they had done in the case of Cachula's occupation. "If anything happened we'd all be together, don't you worry about that. If anyone tried get tough with us...", she tailed off. In coming together in the

assembly, the Trastos re-enacted kinship dynamics that Cristian had identified in the period before and during the construction of cooperative homes. There is something of the logic of the “complementary lineage system” (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Meyer-Fortes 1949: 15) at play here, where branches of the family would fight amongst themselves but then unite against outsiders. This certainly had been more pronounced in the past, when the Trastos were known as a family of toughs (*una familia pesada*). As Olivia explained “*Los Trastos!* Ask anyone: you messed with one and we were 400! But all that started to change when my father and others passed away”.

Despite arguments, it was relations of care that predominated when siblings found themselves in crises, serious difficulties, or hardship. Three years ago, when Olivia was jailed and separated from her children for possession of stolen cars, it was letters from her brother Nono that kept her going. When I interviewed her at home, she rifled through a confused folder of paperwork and found, amongst various unpaid bills and hospital records, a letter that “made her cry every time she read it”. “Hey *mamita*, I hope you’re well”, she began to read:

“these coming days I’ll send you a photo of me and the kids, that way you’ll have me there with you. I miss you a lot – you know I love you lots. Be good, and that way we’ll have you back with us soon. Unfortunately, you got caught up in some stupid stuff but I hope you’ve understood that no-one is worth your freedom. I don’t know what to say. My little sister in prison, I never imagined it. But I love you.”

Amongst the Azucareros too, siblingship was vital in times of need. When he was penniless and consuming *pasta base*, Moncho would often appear at Martín’s door in the early hours of the morning to borrow money. Martín had “always, always” given him a hand and had paid for supplies when he was in rehab in Brazil, Moncho told me. When he finally managed to stop consuming, Martín secured work for him at COFECA, and his sister Lucía let him move in with her and Cristian at COVIFU. “With a little bit of help from him, from my mother, from Lucia, from Cristian, I started to float again with a lifejacket, after feeling that I was drowning”, he explained. He entered into a relationship with Lucia’s friend Victoria who lived opposite, soon moving in with her and conceiving a son, who joined Victoria’s four other children.

Sibling relationships were a particularly attractive and enduring base of care, reciprocity, and social life firstly because cooperative relations between neighbours were felt to be lacking, and secondly because conjugal bonds and father-figures were relatively transient. One of the difficulties with the housing cooperative form was that it had been traditionally associated with the working class, not upper-class Catholics or informal sector waste-pickers, and neither the *acompañantes* nor the *acompañados* were ideologically attached to it. Many COVIFU residents reflected that they had got on better with neighbours back at the *Villa*. “It’s not like before in the *Villa*”, Olivia told me, “now there are fights between neighbours... everyone comments on each other’s’ misdeeds instead of getting

their own house in order”. “You know when they say this is a cooperative? When someone messes up and they call a meeting”, Martín Azucarero complained, “when they don’t have the balls to complain to your face about you having a tip in your house or burning rubbish and call an assembly instead”.

Interestingly, Martín’s examples of cooperative behaviour concerned the question of rubbish, highlighting differing conceptualisations of waste and its relation to the domestic sphere. Inevitably, all resident *clasificadores* had things in their home that had once formed part of the waste stream: Bea’s multi-coloured floor tiles; Juan and Sofía’s wall-hanging depicting a Hindu myth; a bracket that Nono had adapted to support his television; the bags of chocolate that Martín and Luz distributed to neighbours. When people were accused of “having a tip in their house”, what was at stake was the extent to which materials had shrugged off their previous waste status. It is also possible that upwardly mobile residents like Martín, who often talked about wanting to progress, became more sensitive to the kind of messy or busy aesthetics that might have gone unnoticed back at the *Villa*. At any rate, he viewed the cooperative’s democratic structures not as a positive means of resolving disputes collectively but as a cowardly way of avoiding individual face-to-face encounters.

One of the few occasions that COVIFU Rural neighbours came together was when the electricity cables that were precariously hung at street level blew and had to be reconnected. Even here, however, Stevie and Juan would generally assume the risks of manual reconnection, while I shone a torch. Most other neighbours stayed in their homes in darkness, feigning sleep. That is to say, it was not organised cooperativism or egalitarian commoning that plugged this gap in state infrastructural provision (c.f. Dalakoglou 2016), but a mixture of kinship obligation and individual courage and skill. The origin of Martín Azucarero’s falling out with Juan’s family was that the former had become fed up with shouldering the burden of reconnecting collective wires alone and had decided to connect only his own home, cutting off the other residents in the process. The fact that he was Juan’s cousin both increased Sofía’s outrage at the outage and provided the grounds for an eventual reconciliation. Both Juan and Martín sourced the electricity wires they connected from the *cantera*.

If the dream of fully independent households engaging in collective action and decision-making was subverted by the organisation of kin within the housing project, the ideal of the stable nuclear family household as the unit between whom cooperative relations could be established was also substantially undermined, partly due to a number of extra-marital affairs. Natalia, for example, was meant to move into a home with Roberto and their two children, but eventually moved into COVIFU with Stevie and the two daughters they conceived. Rojo should have moved into a home with his wife and their three children but a series of affairs on both sides meant that only she moved in with their children. In the most obvious challenge to the logics and legalities of cooperative ownership, Nacho gave “his” house (which he never occupied due to his own family complications) to his sister, nicknamed the “the golden pussy” (*la concha de oro*) because marriage to a publicist had made her rich. After she

decided to move out, Nacho offered the house to me, then the keys passed to an old Cruz de Carrasco childhood friend, before eventually it was rented out.

The most unusual amorous encounter was between prospective resident Valentina Araujo and the construction project foreman who left his wife and children in order to move in with her and her teenage son. Another unorthodox arrangement reigned between Pedro Trastos cooperativist Mateo and his wife Martina. The couple managed to successfully take up residence together in COVIFU with their two sons, only for Martina to discover that Mateo had a younger woman and child back in the Cruz. Unable to let him go, she allowed him to split his week between the two households. Victoria, meanwhile, had moved in with her husband only to throw him out after a particularly violent episode of domestic abuse, and began a relationship with Moncho. In all of these cases, the units between which a certain form of socialisation and relatedness was meant to be constructed during the house building process (nuclear families) were themselves not stable but fluid, and the fragility of conjugal relations contrasted with the stability and longevity of the sibling bond.

Conjugal relations at COVIFU bear some similarity with Ferguson's writings on Zambian family structures in *Expectations of Modernity* (1999). There, an assumption was made that years of colonialism, evangelising, urbanisation, and industrialisation – in sum 'modernisation' – would lead to the weakening of extended kinship ties and polygamy among Zambians, and their replacement with "modern" nuclear families. Yet whatever colonial-era anthropologists professed should be the case, modern nuclear families were in fact nowhere to be found. Instead, "anthropologists who directly observed Copperbelt domestic groups in the 1950s found a range of living arrangements that confounded the 'decent' nuclear family model" (Ferguson 1999: 173). Epstein (1981:344), for instance, reported for the Ndola that "it frequently turned out on closer inspection that the resident children were not the householder's own but belonged to a relative either of his own or of his wife". While "the more recently constructed housing in the location was evidently designed for married couples and their children, the reality was very different", surmises Ferguson (1999: 173).

In the case of COVIFU, the composition of households differed significantly from that originally planned, but there remained a majority of pseudo-nuclear family households, with a man, woman, and children. Except that, as in the Zambian case studied by Epstein, many of the households "included some kinsman of the householder or his wife among its inmates" (1981: 344). In COVIFU, it was particularly common for adolescent brothers or nephews to come to stay with their aunts or sisters as they sought respite from overcrowded and often conflictive family homes. Such sojourns were generally for a period of several weeks or months, and one way of hosting relatives was for a *rancho* (shack) to be built in the back garden. Victoria hosted her younger brother for several months in this fashion, while Rosana Araujo hosted her nephew and Mariposa's stepson Junior in a room shared with her four small children.

The Trastos also hosted extended family members in *rancho* extensions, Carlos putting up his brother-in-law, and Sara and Gordo hosting Nono and his family for almost a year while the latter built their own cooperative home in a development nearby. I remember watching in amazement as Sara and Nono's wife Lisa built a new housing structure (*armaron un rancho*) in a matter of hours while their husbands were at work. The possibility of building house extensions or shacks to host transient family members recalls the link Han explores between kinship ties and the *auto-construcción* of homes, understood as the "process of constructing and achieving relatedness", while also risking "estrangement and disconnection" (2012: 16).

In COVIFU, tensions flared when guests were perceived to have overstayed their welcome. While I made my cooperative house minimally habitable, Gordo had invited me to stay in a small shack in their yard with his teenage son (and 22 caged birds), and I experienced the tensions of being a family's adjunct resident. Because of the presence of his teenage daughters in the house, Gordo became enraged when I briefly emerged from the bathroom dressed only in a towel, while externally I had to fend off the assumption (and implicit criticism) that I had been enfolded into Gordo's family as opposed to being a more neutral neighbour. "He's one of the Gordos now", Morocho would sneer disdainfully. Sara said that I had at least been through the same process as them, progressing from a *rancho* to a *casa de material*, only at a miraculous speed.

I encountered little explicit moral critique by Catholic *acompañantes* of my neighbours' family composition, but the building of "*rancho* extensions" was criticised, with Santiago Vegas arguing in an *asamblea* that the accumulation of ramshackle constructions of wood and sheet metal risked transforming the "dream" cooperative back into something resembling the nightmare of "pig town". This was essentially an aesthetic critique, with Vegas and others embarrassed by the sight of such shacks when they brought upper-class friends and potential donors to visit. Martín had added a patio extension and bedroom for his stepson and partner and was incensed at the suggestion he might have to take it down. "Don't they see that we want to progress?" he fumed. Interestingly, in COVIFU's statute patriarchal stewardship of the cooperative properties was deemed incompatible with structural changes to the fabric of the homes. This stipulated that residents should "care for the house with the dedication and zeal of a good father [*padre de familia*]" but that "any reform of the façade is especially prohibited and will be considered a serious offense". Indeed, unapproved structural reforms were one of the few infractions for which a resident could be expelled from the cooperative. Notwithstanding the lack of Catholic moral critique, kinship relations and the closeness of the adult sibling bond still troubled the cooperative housing scheme, based as it was on stable and permanent structures of house and household. The COVIFU dream of nuclear families progressing together through cooperative work was, in the eyes of *acompañantes*, put at risk when families attempted to distribute progress by caring for and sheltering wider kin. And, highlighting the dysfunctional nature of the

cooperative, residents were more worried about *acompañantes* criticising them for an infringement of cooperative rules than fellow residents.

This section's shift in focus from labour to housing has helped to sketch out a more rounded picture of my interlocutors and the way that their kinship and sibling relations extend from the workplace into the home. My conceptualisation of the commons fits with the way that residents recovered materials to be used in the construction of shacks of metal, wood, and cane, a practice that residents continued in order to build temporary housing for extended family members at COVIFU. Through this activity, they were able to maintain the bonds and responsibilities of kinship whilst constructing themselves as relations who cared. Feelings towards the cooperative-commons were rather more ambivalent. It has been recognised that collective sentiment and action in Uruguayan cooperative housing is generally strongest during the construction phase (see Sosa 2015: 112), and so the fact that this had fallen by the wayside during my fieldwork period hardly made an exception of COVIFU. Nevertheless, in the interviews I conducted with residents, they also demonstrated a lack of ideological commitment to cooperativism, whilst regularly asserting claims of *de facto* individual private ownership. Cooperatives and commoning are hard work, and a lack of ideological attachment is a serious hindrance to the translation of juridical cooperativism into everyday practice. Living with neighbours in COVIFU brought to the fore the fact that – whatever the cooperative's formal similarities with Nonini (2007), Harvey (2012) and Huron's (2013) commons criteria – residents often acted as if they were home-owners rather than “home-commoners”. Instead of this demonstrating the individuality of *clasificadores* as neoliberals or lumpen proletariats, however, I have argued that collective lives and relations are to be found in the socio-material practices involved in the construction and maintenance of kinship ties and liveable spaces.

“You won't believe how things have changed around here”, Nona warned me on Facebook messenger as we chatted prior to a brief return to the field in December 2016. Yet the changes I encountered were in-keeping with the kind of fluid household composition that I have described here. Nona's husband was back out of jail and living with the family, quietly sipping *mate* while his violent reputation quietly terrorised his neighbours. After being usurped by a young suitor, Gabi had initially moved out of the home he had shared with Rosana Araujo and their children and taken refuge a few doors down at his sister's, but had been forced to flee further afield after setting fire to his love rival's motorbike in the middle of the night. Mateo had left for good, or had been dumped, and after an alleged affair with a married neighbour, Martina had moved out too, trading her house in COVIFU for Nono and his family's cooperative home in the Cruz de Carrasco. With yet another sibling living in COVIFU, it had become, in Nona's words, “*la Cooperativa de los Trastos*”.

But it was not only the Trastos who had increased their number. One further change underlined both the importance of sibling relations in COVIFU, and the way that the nuclear family household was continually giving way to a more heterogeneous extended family co-residence. Juan and Sofia had

always been somewhat isolated in the cooperative, despite the presence of Juan's mother Gorda Bea and stepfather Morocho (see Fig. 12). For Juan was something of a rarity in these parts – an only child – while Sofia's family lived a distance away in the neighbourhood of El Sayago. But when we returned, Sofia's brother Leo, his partner, and their three children had moved into a shack at the back of the house. Her sister María, and nephew were staying in their living room floor, and another younger brother, Brian, was in with the kids. Juan and Sofia had given María and her *clasificador* boyfriend Gato permission to build another *rancho* on their land. Whereas before, Juan and Sofia's children mostly stayed in their own garden, now the enlarged family confidently occupied a shady cooperative space out front. With Juan and Gato, I wandered around the cooperative land looking for some trunks that would serve as strong corner poles as they prepared to “put up the shack” (*armar el rancho*) over the weekend. They hoped that some sheet metal (*chapas*) that could serve as a roof might soon turn up at the *cantera*.

The presence of Sofia's sister, sister-in-law, and younger brother Brian also had positive labour implications for the family. It meant that Sofia had a greater support network around, so could leave her children during the day in order to partner up with Juan to become just the third woman working at the *cantera*. Sofia and Juan had become what the Uruguayan social policy sought to transform: an informal-sector family-labour unit. But there was no child labour here, with their children looked after instead by Sofia's kinship network, or by Gorda Bea. In the afternoons, they attended the Trigos, even Ivan, whose behaviour had somewhat improved since an attempt to rip up all the books in the school library. On the day before leaving, I helped Sofia to separate *blanco* (white paper) from other materials she and Juan had collected at the *cantera*: diverse metals and *requeche* like clothing and half-full soft drinks. We were on the patch of cooperative land in front of Bea and Morocho's house where they stored and classified recyclables, much to the annoyance of Catholic *acompañantes* who complained about this “rubbish” being the first sight that greeted visitors to COVIFU. I filmed Sofia listing the different sorting categories as my daughter Rosie and her daughter – and my god-daughter – Yanaina played under the watchful eye of Gorda Bea. Sofia's 21-year old sister María, was “learning to work in the rubbish” alongside us, having previously worked only as a cleaner. With Sofia as a sister and Juan as a brother-in-law, if her relationship with lifelong *clasificador* Gato endured, she might need to get used to it, I commented. But as she joked with Sofia, and with access to the fruits of the *cantera* guaranteed by Juan and Gato, this didn't seem like such a terrible prospect.



Figure 14 COVIFU neighbours

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to explore the persistence of kinship relations in waste labour and their interaction with the cooperative form in the COVIFU housing cooperative. As Vargas-Cetina notes in her article on anthropology and cooperatives, early studies assumed that “cooperatives were modern forms of organization that superseded or were to supersede, in the long run, more ‘primary’ forms of association based on the family, age groups, kinship or tribes” (2005: 231). Rather than representing a narrative of succession, this chapter has attempted to show how cooperative and kinship relations are intertwined in my fieldsite, but maintain somewhat contradictory logics.

Beyond loose notions of *clasificador* clans, I have elucidated how acts of precarious caretaking between siblings which begin in childhood continue into adult life and become entangled with the provision of waste (labour) and housing. In explaining why sibling clusters form the backbone of *clasificador* labour collectives – the social infrastructure that supports the Uruguayan recycling industry – I have pointed to the shared suffering of childhood, the fragility of parental figures, and the relative weakness of conjugal bonds. The nuclear family could not have been the productive unit of my informants’ labour because adult siblings would not allow their under-age children to work alongside them. Waste was, in this case, not only the excess of production but also co-productive of particular

forms of adult sibling caretaking. Such forms relied on my informants' status as a non-waged poor with privileged access to the value and labour possibilities that inhere *en potentia* in the surplus materials of industrial production.

Strong adult sibling bonds also subverted the idealised egalitarianism of the housing cooperative where I lived during fieldwork. A housing project based on territory (residence in the Villa del Cerdito) was increasingly supplanted by kinship, as residents co-opted their siblings into cooperative homes. Independent households as the basic units of cooperative democracy were replaced by alliances along sibling-lines, and stable permanent nuclear families with fluid, transient, and heterogeneous households. This meant that two understandings of the commons and commoning co-existed and were often in conflict, since the recovery of materials from the waste commons to provide temporary housing for kin clashed with the formal cooperativism of COVIFU. Finally, we might note that governments and policy-makers increasingly classify housing as a form of vital infrastructure (Williams 2016, Ramnani 2017). Even if this has not yet carried into anthropology, it is hard to see how housing could be excluded from more inclusive definitions of infrastructure such as those which focus not on “single built structures but the material conditions of possibility for life” (Harvey in Venkatesan et al 2016:3). For electricity connection, waste disposal, sewage maintenance, city-wide recycling, and also housing, then, it was most often the social infrastructure of *clasificadores'* kinship relations, not the single individual, nuclear family, or cooperative, that provided the foundations for action.

Chapter Six

Care, (Mis)Classification, and Containment at the Aries recycling plant

“Tell that old woman that I’m happy shitting in the woods”

Martín Azucarero, on being told of the new sanitary facilities in the *Ley de Envases* plants being promised by Montevideo Mayor Ana Olivera

“It was a complete change. One always has to progress and not always be stuck doing the same thing. I’m happy at the plant”

Ana Clara, Planta Aries (formerly COFECA) worker

Thus far in the thesis, I have described how the dynamics of *clasificador* waste stream value recovery run parallel and in opposition to a municipal risk-based approach to waste. But at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st, the municipal approach to Montevidean *clasificadores* and waste began to change. What emerged in municipal policy, I will argue here, was an appropriation of *clasificadores*’ approach to waste, and of a Catholic praxis towards the poor. I explore these dynamics in this chapter through a focus on care, (mis)classification and enclosure at the Aries recycling plant, where many of my COVIFU neighbours were recruited to work in a state attempt to enclose both workers and materials in the formal sector. While the attempted cooperativisation of *clasificadores* had been hegemonic government policy from 2006-2013, the implementation of the *Ley de Envases* (‘Packaging’ or ‘Containers’ Law) in Montevideo spurred the creation of recycling plants funded and managed by a complex array of public and private bodies.

I begin the first section on care by tracing a brief genealogy of the change in municipal waste-picker policy, highlighting the influence of Uruguayan priest Padre Cacho over municipal policymakers as the elimination of “rummagers” made way for the social inclusion of “classifiers”. I suggest that in prioritising jobs for waste-pickers in recycling plants, authorities maintained the link between waste and vulnerability inherent to my conceptualisation of the waste commons. But the criterion of vulnerability was codified and gendered in ways that proved challenging for male subjects, whose skills were devalued and bodies exposed as frail. In order to be cared for by the new paternalism of the Uruguayan state, *clasificadores* were obliged to become entangled in a citizenship project and embrace a particular process of subjectivation.

The second section turns from *homo vulnerabilis* to *homo oeconomicus*, arguing that institutional authorities misclassified both the workers and the materials that would enter the *Ley de Envases*

plants. Confusing *clasificadores* for the extreme poor, authorities imagined that they would be happy with a minimum wage, disregarding their heterogeneity and the composite incomes available to them in the informal sector. The payment of what I term a “waste wage” – non-pecuniary recognition of their environmental service and sacrifice – proved insufficient, particularly given the ban on the recovery of *requeche*, a move that I compare to the interdiction of dockers’ recovery of wooden “chips” in 17th century London. Yet given the over-valuing of the domestic recycling fraction that entered the plants, workers had to turn to informal sector practices such as the sale of *requeche* in order to supplement their meagre salaries, an example of how informal economic activity continues to subsidise and even underwrite formalisation projects.

The final section on enclosure draws on a translation of the Ley de Envases as the “container law”. The law entails, I suggest, certain forms of continuity with the hygienic enclosure of the past, even if municipal waste containers were reprogrammed to protect property from theft instead of the population from harm. Alongside the attempted containment of materials and workers within the formal sector, the plants entailed an attempt to contain the excessive masculinity of workers, with vulgar and violent behaviour discouraged in ways that resonate with Bakhtin (1984 [1965]) and Mbembe’s (1991) discussion of the “aesthetics of vulgarity”. Popular forms of rowdy and carnevalesque behaviour were not entirely prohibited but there was an attempt to keep these away from the conveyor belt and contained within proscribed spaces for license, such as “social tourism” trips to the countryside.

Both the idea of the “informal sector” and its celebration (e.g. de Soto 2002), have come in for a sizable amount of criticism in recent years, even if the concept has been largely reified in policy circles. Keith Hart, who coined the term to describe the activity of young men in Accra (1973) now laments its transformation into a ‘jargon word’ and the ensuing loss of analytical precision (2006). There is a current intellectual fashion to address instead the question of precarity, precarious labour, and the precariat (e.g. Standing 2011, 2014), although this concept has its own problems (Bremen 2013a). With regard to Uruguay, Fernandez (2010, 2012) avoids using a formal-informal binary to separate *clasificadores* from official waste management actors, opting instead for the terms “spontaneous” and “institutional”. Municipal waste management is not entirely formal, she argues, because the Intendencia cannot guarantee that all collected waste stays in the formal sector. *Clasificador* activity is spontaneous instead of informal, meanwhile, because it is self-emergent and because, like elsewhere in the Global South, there is not much of a formal recycling sector to which it can be compared (Fernandez 2012:2).

Yet my research, unlike that of Fernandez, deals with an explicit attempt to formalise part of the waste recovery and recycling chain and transform workers from cooperativists in a workplace of flexible labour hours and cash-in-hand payments to employees in one of fixed working hours and formal wage deductions/ contributions. In a key change since Keith Hart’s original conceptualisation,

the informal/formal binary has ceased to be a purely analytical device that can be adopted or discarded by social scientists. It is now also an ethnographic term that one encounters in the field when studying the implementation of labour policy across the globe, one that is explicit in policy documents and rather influential in shaping people's orientation to life and labour.

In this chapter, I accept a conventional definition of the informal economy as economic activity for which taxes are not paid and social security benefits are not contributed to or accrued. This understanding fits with the commonality identified by Chen (2012:488) in an otherwise diverse informal "sector" globally, where "they [all] operate outside of the reach of state enumeration, regulation and protection". It also corresponds to Guha-Khasnobis et al's (2006:7) restriction of the "formal-informal continuum" to the question of the "relatively high and relatively low levels of the reach of official governance mechanisms", avoiding both value judgements on the benefits of formalisation and the association of "informal" with "unstructured" and "chaotic". Finally, it builds on Lazar's recognition that despite criticism, the formal/ informal binary remains a "productive heuristic tool" (2012: 16).

Care

The Ley de Envases was first approved by the Uruguayan parliament in 2003 but only began to be implemented in Montevideo in 2014. The law seeks to levy companies that release un-returnable packaging into the economy and environment; recover and recycle such packaging; and bring *clasificadores* into the formal sector. Designed as a measure of corporate responsibility, the law does not involve the direct taxation of businesses but instead relies upon voluntary contributions producers and importers of packaging waste make to the Uruguayan Chamber of Commerce (CIU). The CIU then pays for plant machinery and workers' wages; the Intendencia coordinates the supply of waste material; the Ministry of the Environment (DINAMA) approves waste treatment; the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) deals with *clasificadores*; and diverse NGOs manage the plants. Four such plants were built in Montevideo in 2014 to employ 128 workers and I conducted participant observation at one of them: Planta Aries. This plant was built principally to house workers from the Cooperativa Felipe Cardoso (COFECA), the landfill-based cooperative that was simultaneously to be disbanded as part of a shift in municipal policy away from *clasificador* cooperatives and towards NGO-managed plants.

We can think of the plants as sustaining some of the characteristics of the commons, as they maintained the link between vulnerability and access to the waste stream as a source of labour. Work at plants was classified as "protected" and access to jobs based on a codified and measured criterion

of social vulnerability that gave priority to those who had already worked in the informal waste trade. Such criteria transformed the customary claims that *clasificadores* made on the waste commons and put forth a particularly gendered interpretation of vulnerability. Before exploring this, I will briefly trace a genealogy of the *Ley de Envases*, suggesting that the roots of the ideology of caring for and accompanying *clasificadores* as vulnerable workers can be found in Uruguayan Catholic social work.

Attempts to alter the perception of “rummagers” in the late 1980s partially focused on changing the terminology used to describe them. The Catholic Priest Padre Cacho played a key role in the discursive re-categorisation of *burgadores* as *clasificadores* and their delineation as a vulnerable population that could be the target of social intervention rather than elimination. The Catholic social workers around Cacho were influential in the *Frente Amplio*, and played a role in reshaping municipal social policy when the party’s candidate, current Uruguayan President Tabaré Vasquez, was voted Mayor of Montevideo in 1990.¹⁵ A cross-party group was set up to deal with the question of informal sector waste work and, according to founding member María del Carmen, whom I first met at a meeting of *clasificador* assistants (*técnicos*) in 2010, Cacho was consulted on its nomenclature. He assembled waste-pickers in the Intendencia to discuss the matter and the term *clasificadores* was approved by a large majority. It was not the first time the term had been used, with a 1968 newspaper article making reference to a *Comité Provisorio de Clasificadores de Basura* [“Provisional Committee of Rubbish Classifiers”] that complained to the *Intendencia* about being denied access to waste, and thus the practice of their livelihood (El Debate 1968). In adopting the title for their *Clasificador* Working Group (*Grupo de Trabajo con Clasificadores* or GTC), María del Carmen told me that institutional sympathisers wanted to “recognise their [waste-pickers] role as a positive link in productive processes”.

Cacho had particular influence over Tabaré Vasquez’s Director of Public Works, Martín Ponce de Leon. According to María del Carmen, “Ponce” had brothers in the priesthood and “a sort of personal, familial and ethical debt with Cacho”. Then Director of Sanitation Carlos Paz was also supportive, with María del Carmen considering him a “pioneer” in “understanding waste in its social, cultural, and economic complexity”, an example of the global but often vernacularised “integrated waste management” model (c.f. Sorroche 2015; Harvey 2013: 63). Ponce’s time in office was remembered fondly by older *clasificadores* at the *cantera*. El Tío, whose house sits on occupied land directly opposite the Usina 5, told me that Ponce “gave us a hand, getting them to dump materials for us at night for a few years...and he even used to come almost every night to see how we were getting on”. “He was our ally”, Tío explained, “what a shame he didn’t make it to Mayor”. In 2002, on the tenth anniversary of Cacho’s death, Ponce delivered a long eulogy in parliament and spoke of his time as Director of Public Works. “During the dictatorship, it had been common to confiscate *clasificadores’* carts and burn them, often in the *usina* – as if this would eradicate them!” he recounted. “We changed

¹⁵ The Frente Amplio has held the position ever since.

that policy and had to promote another...that of respecting and dignifying the work”, he claimed, attributing this change to the legacy of the radical priest.

Ponce de Leon’s last point is important: the GTC was not content with the legalisation of *clasificador* activity but also sought to “dignify” conditions of work, principally through proposals for collectivisation and formalisation. In order to act on waste and *clasificadores*, the new team had to construct both as objects of knowledge, combining surveys of *clasificadores* with studies of waste composition. In 1996, the group coordinated and published an Intendencia report in conjunction with the UNDP entitled “Classification and Recycling of Solid Waste” which included a detailed study of the sector and proposals for “improving the socio-economic conditions of *clasificadores*”, who were then estimated to number approximately 3500 (IMM/PNUD 1996). *Clasificadores* emerged as a population in the Foucauldian sense, a “mass of living and coexisting beings who present particular biological and pathological traits and who thus come under specific knowledge and technologies” (Foucault 1998: 71).

The content and language of the report was noticeably influenced by the agenda of the Rio '92 Earth Summit. It featured advisors from the Brazilian city of Curitiba, held up as a model of sustainable urban design and management, and a quote from Rio’s Agenda 21 on the title page of the first chapter advocated an “effective strategy to attack the problems of poverty, development, and environment simultaneously” (1996:1). It emphasised the need to involve *clasificadores* in “a slow evolution towards participative and associative production that allows for their productive and social inclusion” (IMM/PNUD 1996: vii) and called for “a strong emphasis in activities of technical assistance, training, and accompaniment of *clasificadores* who voluntarily join the proposed experiments” (1996: viii). A first classification and recovery plant was envisaged for the *clasificador*-heavy Aparicio Saravia neighbourhood, to be followed by others in different parts of the city as the scheme expanded and more homes collaborated. In the plants, *clasificadores* would be “accompanied and organised by NGOs”, which would slowly hand over control of the plants to the workers once they were adequately trained (1996: vii). Informal economic activity, meanwhile, was to be discouraged and solid waste reconceptualised as “rubbish that is not rubbish” (*basura que no es basura*) and the “raw material of an industrial process” (1996:210). In effect, the logic of recovering value in discards, long the operating principle of *clasificadores*, was to be appropriated by the state, and the operational function of containers was to be reprogrammed from hygienic enclosure to the enclosure of value.

The project’s environmental impact assessment boasted of the positive impact changes would have not only on the environment but also on the *clasificador*: improvements in self-esteem, skills, personal development, and their perception by others (1996:209). Alongside “more efficient recovery of recyclables from the waste stream”, the urban environment and the *clasificador* would also recover from the ills inflicted by informal work. Classifying in recycling plants rather than at home, the

clasificador population would have less exposure to “infectious and gastrointestinal diseases”, engage in less strenuous physical labour, and enjoy a more hygienic environment at home and in the neighbourhood (1996:210). These aims seem to hark back to governmental designs at the “birth of biopolitics” in the 19th century, where the management of the population required “a health policy capable of...preventing epidemics, bringing down the rates of endemic diseases, of intervening in living conditions in order to alter them and impose standards upon them” (Foucault 1998: 71).

The report represented a shift in logic, from the repression of the sovereign, to the management of the *clasificadores* as a (vulnerable) population. Whereas for the dictatorship, rummagers and residues were a socio-material problem to be jointly eliminated, *clasificadores* and waste brought together under the policy banner of sustainable development could both be recovered into the formal economy. Waste workers were no longer seen as infra-human but as a measurable population with a clear socio-economic profile, concentrated in particular areas, and suffering deficient hygiene and high risks of disease. Capable of recovery and dignity if collectivised and brought into the formal sector, they were nonetheless considered incapable of autonomous production, at least initially, and thus needed to be “accompanied” by appropriate NGOs. Waste, meanwhile, was re-conceptualized as a raw material or resource that could be recovered into productive processes.

Although the findings of the 1996 IMM/PNUD report were not implemented immediately, I dwell on them at length here because they laid the basis for the future Ley de Envases. A focus on “accompaniment” (*acompañamiento*) emerged partly because of the influence of Catholic social activists in developing waste-picker policy, and this carried into the institutional design of recycling plants like Aries. “We contracted organisations with a strong socio-educative background to coordinate the plants”, noted municipal official Leticia Beledo, “because we took into account that although the workers had experience with classification, this had been gained in very precarious and informal conditions” (IM 2015: 109). Each recycling plant was managed by a different NGO: most of these had religious backgrounds and more socio-educative experience managing vulnerable populations than managing waste infrastructure. The NGO given responsibility for managing Planta Aries – Christo Para Todos (Christ for All or CPT) – was one such group.

Clasificadores at the plants were officially classified as “protected workers”, a move that had several implications. It entailed relatively flexible workplaces discipline, at least during a transition period from informal to formal sector work. It meant the provision of socio-psychological support, so that several social workers formed part of the NGO team in Planta Aries. Finally, it meant that workers were given other forms of support – such as the possibility of finishing primary school or taking skills courses in areas like computing – aimed at making up a qualifications gap. One of NGO plant coordinators, Richard, conceptualised his role in the plant as one of “accompaniment and building citizenship” amongst *clasificadores*. In a presentation given to Aries workers in August 2014, María del Carmen inserted the associated benefits of their formal work into a long narrative of workers’

struggles and victories in Uruguay, where the historic injustice of waste-pickers being left out of the labour-based citizenship of the Battlist state and its successors was finally being addressed. If Neilson and Rossiter (2008) write of the “death of the citizen worker” in 21st century Europe, in Uruguay it is more accurate to speak of her rebirth.

This particular citizenship project involved a retraining of the senses. As Gidwani (2015: 591) notes, “livelihoods in the urban need economy implicate a ‘political history of the senses’”, where “what appear to be banal and dirty jobs...require a sensory resilience (visual, aural, olfactory and tactile) that is extraordinary”. “That which bourgeois sense condemn as ‘filthy’ or ‘revolting’”, he concludes, “is very often the normal order of things for the city’s underclasses” (ibid). Classen, Howes and Synnott, meanwhile, remark that “evoking or manipulating odour values is a common effective means of generating and maintaining hierarchies” (1994:8). The problem for *acompañantes*, as framed by the Intendencia’s head of social work María Sara Ribeiro, was that *clasificadores* had naturalised the foul smell of rubbish. In an inversion of Orwell’s famous aphorism, the issue here was that “the lower classes didn’t smell”, that is to say, they had apparently lost the capacity to distinguish, and be disgusted by, trash odours. Some *clasificadores* agreed, with Ruso from the *cantera* telling me that *gateadores* “lose their sense of smell: all they smell is rubbish”. But when María Sara celebrated one worker’s complaint about foul smells within Planta Aries as an indication that his senses had been reawoken, and of his inclusion in the sensory norms of the body politic, he retorted that the plant was simply smellier than the *cantera* because odours were concentrated in a restricted indoor space.

Some male workers flaunted their experience working in “real” jobs in the formal sector, resented special treatment and preferred plant work stripped of its citizenship component. For some men, classification as vulnerable subjects represented a challenge to masculinity and autonomy. There appears to be little research into the threat that incorporation into the formal sector can pose to male workers’ sense of masculinity in different circumstances, something which is perhaps a consequence of the (allegedly) greater focus on the recent feminisation of the global labour force (Mills 2003: 55). One exception is Phillippe Bourgois’s (1995) classic ethnography of Puerto Rican crack dealers in Harlem who resist entry into service sector jobs because of low pay, demeaning conditions, and obligations of deference (often to female superiors) incompatible with their understandings of “respect”.

Other studies of masculinity and labour do focus on the challenge that vulnerability can pose to men’s sense of self-esteem and masculinity, but this is overwhelmingly in cases where (immigrant) labourers suffer injury and are unable to work and thus fulfil their duties as *pater familias* (see Walter, Bourgois and Loinaz 2004; Qureshi 2012; Ye 2014). In the case of my fieldsite however, demonstrating vulnerability was not cause for losing a job in a recycling plant: it was effectively a prerequisite for gaining one. It should be highlighted that my focus here is largely on the experiences of male workers at Aries, with whom I more easily established rapport. Men also represent, as we have

seen, an estimated 80% of *clasificadores* in Uruguay (PANES 2006), so how they perceive work at recycling plants is of utmost importance should the government wish to expand the scope of waste-picking formalisation schemes.

From the outset, the provision of socio-psychological and educative services caused a split in the workforce between those who embraced and those who resisted them. This division was to a large degree gendered, with many men resenting what they interpreted as moves to infantilise them. “They treat us like children”, complained Hojita, who joined several men in going out to smoke whenever socio-educative activities took place on a Thursday. When I asked CPT coordinator Richard whether such an attitude might have less to do with *clasificadores* per se, and more to do with generalised male working class ideas of work, he agreed that “the only way that you could get leather workers or the like to do such courses would be if they were getting paid: workers prefer to be working”. In fact, Hojita and some others objected to being managed by an NGO altogether, arguing that:

“They [the Intendencia] contract someone who doesn’t know anything to manage us. Neither us nor them: they outsource management. If I have a heart attack, I want a heart surgeon to operate on me, not a paediatrician. Who is better trained than *clasificadores* to know about rubbish? But they contract an NGO... who have never opened a rubbish bag to eat or to get something out for the kids. I see no sense in it.”

Hojita disparaged the professional qualifications of those involved in the social management of waste and waste-pickers, considering them an unnecessary bureaucratic layer providing care services that he neither needed nor desired. The NGO and the institutional bodies involved in implementing the law represented multiple levels of intermediation that replaced the small-time neighbourhood intermediary the Ley de Envases sought to exclude by selling directly to industry. Not only did such institutional intermediaries necessarily charge fees that might otherwise have gone directly to *clasificadores*, they also made the management structure of the plants rather opaque, with workers unsure which institution could solve particular problems or disputes. “Our problems [at the plant]”, recounted one worker, Julia, “are due to the number of institutions that accompany us: each has different responsibilities and this is difficult for us to understand” (IM 2015: 145).

Hojita and his mates were also unhappy with the newly established division of labour in the Intendencia, where responsibility for *clasificadores* had passed from the operational waste management to the social work department headed by María Sara Ribeiro. This meant that they found it harder to get hold of waste officials with relevant technical knowledge of the composition and provenance of waste trucks. *Clasificadores* had enjoyed logistical negotiation and the exchange of such knowledge at the landfill and COFECA, where it was valued and appreciated. Landfill foreman Molina was almost in awe of *gateadores*, telling me that they were “very intelligent, more intelligent than us”. “I’ve put in ditches so that they can’t get past”, he explained, “and they have responded with inventions that an

engineer couldn't have come up with". Part of the reason that non-literate forms of knowledge were appreciated by such municipal workers was because many came from backgrounds where manual skill was valued over and above academic qualification. "Just because they didn't go to school doesn't make them less intelligent than us", Molina continued, "my father didn't know how to read and write but he could still drive a machine [at the landfill]".

At the recycling plants, however, certain forms of knowledge held by *clasificadores* – such as what *requeche* was fit for consumption – were devalued by institutional actors as practices thought to index an undignified "culture of poverty" that the plants sought to replace with a dignified and modern fixed wage. Hojita was worried about the loss of autonomy, income, and *requeche* that the move to the plant would entail. "What we had at COFECA, we achieved with our own efforts", he explained, referencing both workers' political lobbying to access valuable waste trucks, and their construction of the concrete classification platform at the Usina 5. "Now all we will get is the minimum wage".

Yet compare Hojita's reaction to NGO management with that of Ana Clara, a middle-aged Afro-Uruguayan woman who combined work at COFECA with a small dress-making home business, often incorporating *requeche* cloth into designs that she sold at our local market in Flor de Maroñas. Ana Clara told me that had a COFECA representative been put in charge of the plant, she would have refused to work there. "I want the NGO to stay", she told me, "because if the NGO goes then within a month everything will be completely filthy like it was at COFECA". "Unfortunately, we have to have a boss, a manager from the outside, because nobody followed the rules in the cooperative and that's how it ended in such a mess". Ana Clara took full advantage of the different opportunities made available to her in the plant, participating enthusiastically in Thursday activities and obtaining a primary school qualification.

Such differences of opinion were partly related to gender, as well as to the different backgrounds of those who ended up at the Planta Aries. One afternoon, I classified materials at Aries with Ana Clara on one side and Michel on the other. Ana Clara was a kind and polite grandmother born in rural Rivera. She worked for many years cleaning for a notary until the latter was jailed for corruption, and when Ana Clara was widowed at 40, a friend persuaded her to turn to the *cantera* as a way of getting by. Since she lived in Flor de Maroñas, the landfill was only a short walk away, and although she "never got used to the smell", she grew to appreciate the flexibility and bounty of the "mother dump". Michel, on the other hand, had lived and worked in and around Felipe Cardoso his whole life. He was Sergio's nephew and the son of a *clasificador* turned intermediary. He never spoke of a mother and, in many ways, we can consider him a son of the *madre cantera*. As we worked, Michel talked loudly with a male colleague about "pussy" and the number of women that he would like "to fuck", while Ana Clara was forced to listen on, uncomfortable.

Ana Clara and Michel came from different worlds but had both ended up at the *cantera*. Both were structurally vulnerable, albeit in different ways. Ana Clara was a poor, female, Afro-Uruguayan rural migrant; Michel a *guacho* who had grown up around the landfill, never finishing school and becoming an intermittent user of various harmful substances such as *pasta base*. Support at the plant ostensibly catered to both trajectories and many more in between, but workers had to be open to some form of social, psychological, or educative intervention. Whilst Ana Clara – skilled, entrepreneurial and upright – happily adjusted to life at the plant, Michel felt patronised and uncomfortable in a classroom environment, although he too was intelligent and hard-working. His priority was to earn enough money to care for his family but he also enjoyed the macho chat of the landfill, to which he soon returned. At the very least, he had gained a uniform out of his stint at the plant, and began to wear overalls emblazoned with the Ley de Envases’s ‘Your Packaging is Valuable’ (*Tu Envase Sirve*) logo at the *cantera*, gently mocking the government’s failed attempts to incorporate him into a project of formalisation and social inclusion. The trickle of workers returning to the *cantera* did not escape the notice of the NGO and public authorities and although nothing was done to prevent them in the short-run, this may well have increased pressure to close the landfill in the longer term.

If schooling was an attempt to educate minds, then formalisation also entailed what we might call the “vulnerabilisation” of bodies. As explored in chapter 4, many landfill *clasificadores* thought of their bodies as having acquired resistance to microbes, while male *clasificadores* represented them as strong, muscular, and capable of carrying heavy loads on their broad shoulders (see Fig. 15). On entering the plants, not only was the consumption of *requeche* food frowned upon, bodies were also “enclothed” in protective equipment like gloves, uniforms, boots, hats, back support belts, and protective masks. Heavy lifting was off limits, living labour replaced by the dead labour materialised in cranes and forklifts. Such changes posed a problem for male subjectivities built around the idea of strength and resilience. In fact, heavy lifting was so bound up with ascriptions of gender at the *cantera* that it recalls the work of Rita Astuti (1998) on the Vezo in Madagascar. For the Vezo, Astuti argues, gender is not assigned at birth but performed in activity. Anatomically male Vezo could become female by adopting a “female way of doing things” (1998: 42). The activity of lifting was one means of differentiating between genders, such that “women carry heavy loads on their head, while men will always carry them on their shoulders” (1998: 43). Whilst I am not suggesting that female *clasificadores* could become male through lifting techniques or vice-versa (although recall Gorda Bea’s assertion that she was “more macho than the men”), in both cases we can point to how people “become gendered by way of acting and doing” (Astuti 1998: 43-44).



Figure 15 Female and male lifting at COFECA

In other words, the representation of their bodies as frail and vulnerable could be a challenging and emasculating experience for male *clasificadores*, even if the change in working conditions ultimately exposed their bodies to less risk. Take the example of Pedro San Roman, one of four brothers who lived in Flor de Maroñas and worked at COFECA and then Planta Aries. Only in his mid-thirties, Pedro already suffered terrible back pain from a decade of work heaving loads at Felipe Cardoso, and after a few months at Aries had to undergo a serious operation. One might think that he would be happy at no longer having to constitute, at least in such a back-breaking way, the “vital infrastructure” of recycling (Fredericks 2014). And yet I often found Pedro and others engaging in manual lifting and disregarding safety equipment when NGO staff weren’t looking. The gender policing of “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 1993) certainly played a role in ensuring the continuity of such behaviour. For example, I was amused when Pedro recently uploaded a picture to Facebook of himself and his brother wearing new protective face-masks supplied by the NGO, so I left a comment online asking if I could use the photo in an academic presentation. Another comment, from a fellow male worker, abused him in harsh language for being a “covered-up sissy” (*marica tapada*) and the two were soon engulfed in a digital slanging match.

Workers were expected to take care of their bodies, but also of the plant itself, in a way that they had not done at the Usina 5. This too caused gender problems, with some men refusing to carry out

tasks that they considered women's work, such as cleaning toilets. And the more open participative decision-making spaces, monitored, and facilitated by the NGO encouraged female workers to become more outspoken and assume positions of leadership. So, in a range of ways, male authority and subjectivity was undermined at Aries. Most adapted, but many men who had been prominent leaders at COFECA returned to working at the *cantera*. Yet it was not just men who left: several women did so too, and in circumstances that reveal the limits of this Uruguayan variant of "new paternalism" (Mead 1997) and care at the plants.

Julia was from a large waste-picking family – her uncle had been a close confidant of Padre Cacho and both she and her sister Sylvia, who also worked at Aries, had been baptised by the priest. She became a trade union delegate at the plant ("because none of the men could be bothered", she told me), travelling to waste-picker conferences at home and abroad and featuring in the plant's promotional material. Yet when I returned to the plant earlier this year, I was surprised to find that Julia had been fired. Christo Para Todos had been very tolerant of her late-coming and absenteeism, recognising its socio-psychological basis and providing appropriate support. But when CPT was replaced with another NGO, the latter proved less understanding and, after a string of unexplained absences, Julia's contract was terminated. Although she felt aggrieved and unsuccessfully asked MIDES to mediate on her behalf, other workers were less sympathetic, telling me that the extent of her absences made her position untenable.

At COFECA, Julia did not have access to socio-psychological support beyond that of her colleagues. But she could be absent for days or weeks at time and still reassume her position at the cooperative. Such flexibility had been hard fought for by the cooperative, because the Intendencia was a lot more comfortable with a permanent workforce. In the formal workplace, however, such patterns were ultimately unsustainable, despite workers being "protected" by a flexible approach to their conduct. If workers were "excessively vulnerable" and did not respond to socio-psychological support, then they were ultimately dismissed. Such a predicament compared negatively with the flexibility of waste commons like COFECA and the *cantera* of the Usina 8, where a large pool of *conocidos* (known faces) could work intermittently without ever facing dismissal, and differed from the kin-based labour of spaces like María's yard. And it certainly contrasted with the street, to which *clasificadores* could also turn to in times of need. The creation of the *Ley de Emvases* plants thus narrowed the criterion of vulnerability by which *clasificadores* could gain access to a waste livelihood. In the process, waste itself was transformed from a common into a municipal good, ostensibly restricting the composite income streams previously enjoyed by informal *clasificadores*, as I go on to explore in the following section.

(Mis) Classification

Work at Aries consisted of processing waste delivered by rubbish trucks, with workers divided into morning (6am-1pm) and afternoon (1pm-8pm) shifts that were spent picking materials from a conveyer belt and separating them into a range of plastics, papers and metals. After classification, these were then baled by a small press that, along with the belt, forklift and scales, made up the machinery of the plant. From the outset, Ley de Envases actors were overoptimistic about the volume and value of the recyclables that would enter the plants, and consequently the possible earnings of *clasificadores*, whose minimum wage was to be supplemented by the income from their sale. When the plants were launched, Juan Canessa, then head of Environmental Services at the Intendencia, fatefully declared to the press that formalised *clasificadores* would earn at least US\$900 per month (El Observador 2014). The DINAMA representative whom I interviewed told me that “if a few orange peels end up in the containers and plants at the beginning, this will soon sort itself out”. Months after the launch of Aries, NGO coordinator Richard admitted that 70% of the workers’ time was spent separating and bagging discards. The skipping companies hired to transport such waste to Felipe Cardoso were surely one of the biggest financial winners from the implementation of the Ley de Envases in Montevideo.

Just as it was rather ironic that the Stericyclo employers we met in chapter 2 should hire former *clasificadores* to destroy value in the waste stream, it was rather tragic that so much of Aries workers’ labour was devoted to transferring rubbish from one bag to another. My colleagues found it positively absurd, and it made a mockery of the government’s attempts to increase recycling productivity through a Taylorian division of labour (c.f. Carengo 2016). In the increased productivity expected to emerge from the enclosure of workers and the waste commons in these plants, we find a parallel with the justification for the enclosure of the English commons outlined earlier in this thesis. But whereas that enclosure, whatever its injustices, did lead to increased productivity, enclosure at the Planta Aries did not, as attested to by the steep drop in the income generated from the sale of materials when workers moved from COFECA. As the saying goes, “garbage in, garbage out”, and this was quite literally what occurred most of the time at the Planta Aries. But garbage was also coming in and out because of the garbage data that institutional actors had inputted when estimating how much of that which arrived at the plants would be recyclable. As it turned out, a few bad apple cores were the least of their problems.

As well as miscalculating the value and the composition of the materials that would enter the plants, authorities misclassified the *clasificadores* who would work there. Different Aries workers articulated what they felt were a variety of mistaken perceptions of them. During one training session, Michel criticised NGO workers for thinking of *clasificadores* as “Amazonian Indians”, his shorthand for an

ignorant, uncivilised people. It was another worker, however, Bolso, who elaborated the issue at most length during our interview, as we supped beer at the large *Piedras Blancas* Sunday flea market where he sold *requeche* with Hojita and Sergio:

“I wasn’t born [at the dump], I finished school, I have a plumber’s qualification; I’m not a nobody. They thought that we were extra-terrestrials, that we were cave-men, that we were from the ice-age. And it’s not like that Patrick. Back there [in COFECA], I lived better, I had a better income than here. Since they saw us all dirty, ‘Ah these guys are tremendous *píchis*, we’ll give them 200 pesos and they’ll be delighted’. That’s what they imagined Patrick.”

How fitting that Bolso, ever inviting us round the back of the plant to share a puff on a joint, should come up with such a bizarre hybrid image of how the social apparatus viewed him and his colleagues: destitute alien Neanderthals. Yet as compelling as this figure might be, it is the latter part of his description which interests me here, that COFECA *clasificadores*, clothed in the dirt and smells of their workplace, were confused for the extreme poor. The level of misclassification varied according to state institution, so let us begin with an example from the organisation that had least contact with *clasificadores* generally: INEFOP.¹⁶ This para-state organisation was contracted to deliver a series of “transversal skills” training sessions to prepare workers for their move into the formal sector.

During one such session, Gordo Callao asked about parking facilities for his horse and cart, and was told by the workshop facilitator that these wouldn’t be appropriate at the plant. “What about the two cars I have in the garage?”, he insisted. Parking needs had been “estimated based on the type of people entering the plant”, she responded, and *clasificadores* weren’t expected to own cars. “If we were seen building recycling plants for people with cars”, a DINAMA official explained when I raised the episode in an interview, “then we would be questioned by international organisations who would ask what this had to do with the eradication of poverty”. *Clasificadores* were thus damned if they did and damned if they didn’t: horse and carts challenged norms of “infrastructural modernity”, while car ownership effectively challenged the criteria of economic vulnerability by which state actors could justify investment in the plants to international partners. While the Uruguayan welfare state was built in the early 20th century around the figure of the (male) industrial worker (Pendle 1952), governmentality at the beginning of the 21st, in line with an international development focus on the extreme poor, targeted the inclusion of the waste-picker.

Peattie’s (1987) warning that “‘the informal sector’ is by no means equivalent to ‘the poor’” and that “there is plenty of evidence that incomes among small-scale entrepreneurs cover a great range from extreme poverty to well over average” (1987: 857) remains relevant in Uruguay today. Workers like Hojita, Bolso, and Sergio often doubled their wages working as market-stall holders who sold

¹⁶ Instituto Nacional de Empleo y Formación Profesional

requeche. Gordo Callao's cousin Sapo, meanwhile, had amassed capital as a burglar before he was "born again" as an evangelical Christian. He also owned a car, as did his nephews Cholo and Porteño. In fact, Porteño possessed a large vintage Chevrolet truck, a beautifully restored model popular in Uruguay among fruit and vegetable sellers for whom he worked on market day. On other occasions, Porteño would borrow the four-wheel drive belonging to his father, a long-time glass bottle wholesaler who had turned his hand to importing goods from Brazil. "Being a *clasificador*", Porteño told me, "doesn't mean that you are living in the mud or eating out of a can, that's not dignified for anyone". Perhaps to prove his point, he arrived at the plant's press-heavy inauguration in the four-wheel drive.

High earners in the *Intendencia* were suspicious of those who had made money as *clasificadores* in the informal sector, with the informal coming to be associated with the illegal or illegitimate. One told me that he reckoned Porteño to be a "*delincuente*" who had become rich by appropriating and selling glass bottles set aside by COFECA. Porteño had in fact openly classified and sold these bottles, and this had been permitted by the cooperative because of their low market value. But he made most of his money from removals (*fletes*) and the small shop that his wife ran out of their home. Porteño's cousin Enrique, who earned a lot of money labouring at the *cantera*, occasionally dropped workers off at Aries in his shiny new Volkswagen and was presumed to owe his wealth to the labour of peons working for him at the landfill, whereas in fact he mostly worked alone.

According to Bolso, state and non-state actors presumed that those entering the plants were so poor as to be appreciative of a hand-out. Yet given not only the heterogeneity of the *clasificadores*, but also the financial pressures on the poorest workers, low pay soon became an issue. Workers received a national minimum wage which, after taxation and social security contributions, amounted to only US\$340 (US\$6,800) per month, a sum that was widely considered low for a country with high food and transport costs. This was meant to be supplemented by additional income generated from the sale of recyclable materials directly to factories. For the first few months, as workers amassed enough materials to be sold and waited for the legal apparatus that would enable those sales to be finalised, the *Intendencia* agreed to create breathing space by giving them an additional stipend of US\$150 per month, raising the monthly income to just under US\$500. Yet this still amounted to a small sum if one remembers how much money could be made in the *cantera*, where many of the male *clasificadores* at Aries could enter and work freely.

In discussions with workers and in public statements, authorities emphasised the dignification of work through the provision of "a roof", improved health and safety conditions, and social security provision at the Ley de Envases plants. Yet as Bolso expressed when speaking beside Mayor Ana Olivera at the ceremonial hand-over of INEFOP training certificates, "work-wise it's great that we're under a roof, but just because we're under a roof doesn't mean that we should earn less". When the sales of materials finally started to go through, these turned out to be worth less to the workers than

expected because although better prices per kilo were assured, the recyclable fraction of waste was less than foreseen and social security contributions of almost 50% were deducted.¹⁷ Income from the sale of materials averaged a mere US\$100 per month per worker, compared to the US\$100 workers earned *weekly* in COFECA.

Given the institutional focus on recognising workers' role as environmental agents – recognition materialised through organised trips to schools and businesses, media interviews, and indeed the construction of the plants themselves – we can suggest that the state also designed a “waste wage” into the *Ley de Envases*. By this I do not mean a bonus received for unpleasant and potentially hazardous work, something that municipal waste workers received but *clasificadores* did not. Rather, I mean something more akin to what Patrick Vitale (2011) calls the “war wage” designed for American military and defence workers during WWII. “The war wage”, writes Vitale (2011: 785), “was not a pecuniary wage, rather the state and industry offered a sense of sacrifice, contribution, and national belonging to workers and civilians who faced rationing, wage freezes, extended work hours, and emotional duress”. The “waste wage” would thus also mean a non-pecuniary element of a composite wage (O'Hare 2013, c.f. Guyer 2009), with workers encouraged to put up with low salaries in return for their celebration as heroes who could take pride in a sacrificial labour that benefited not just the nation, but the global environment also. As such, the national citizenship embodied in social security provision was complemented by pretensions to global environmental citizenship (c.f. Stamatopoulou-Robbins 2014).

Without downplaying the importance of such recognition for workers, they still had to put food on the table. “We are *clasificadores*, environmental warriors [*guerreros del medioambiente*]”, Hojita told me, “and they are only going to pay us the minimum wage”. Hojita was thus proud of the important ecological role that informal and newly formalised *clasificadores* played but for him this ideological “waste wage” did not obviate a dignified salary. Financial pressures were aggravated by the explicit prohibition on taking home *requeche* from the conveyer belt, a bounty that was in any case much reduced because the plants were restricted to receiving only household waste. According to a representative from the CIU whom I interviewed, workers were not permitted to take anything from the plants because they might sell these on individually and this would mean “fomenting the informal sector”. Workers' wages were mediated by the CIU but came from voluntary contributions made by adhering businesses who released non-returnable packaging into circulation in the economy. Plant workers' labour should be spent recovering such packaging, the official told me, not objects to be sold individually at the flea market. MIDES established a rule that materials should either be classified as recyclable and baled, or else placed in skips to be taken to Felipe Cardoso. There was room for *material* and *basura* then, but the key third waste *clasificador* category of *requeche* was excluded. Workers had feared such a development, with a worried Sergio telling me that the *requeche* taken from

¹⁷Health insurance and pension contributions were 18,5%, aguinaldo was 8.33%, holiday pay was 10.18%.

COFECA would “not exist at the plant... if you find a watch, you’ll have to hand it in; if you find money, you’ll have to hand it in”. When I asked Aries worker Natalia what she missed about the *cantera* and cooperative, she responded:

“What do I miss? That in the *cantera*, for example, one day you didn’t have anything to eat and from a truck you got chicken, meat...bags of pastries, fruit. There was a truck of burgers from MacDonald’s. You didn’t have anything to eat and you took them home, stuck them in the oven and could eat burgers. These are things that you miss”

The prohibition on the recovery of *requeche* recalls a past situation documented by a historian of the commons whom we have already encountered, Peter Linebaugh. In the *London Hanged* (2003 [1991]), Linebaugh details how 17th century London dock workers took home “chips” as part of the remuneration for their labour:

“What were chips? What were they worth? Broadly speaking, they consisted of wood scraps and waste created during the work of hewing, chopping and sawing ship timbers. The term refers not to the wood itself but to the right of the worker to appropriate a certain amount of it – a prescriptive right since 1634.” (2003: 378)

Chips were, in other words, what *clasificadores* called *requeche*: the material leftovers of a particular process of productive labour. And just as the recovery of *requeche* was often worth more to COFECA workers than the income they received from the sale of stock recyclables, so too “the chief remuneration of yard workers was not their monetary wage” (Linebaugh 2003: 378), but chips, “a perquisite providing between a third and a half of weekly earnings” (ibid: 379). Just as *clasificadores* used *requeche* in the construction and furnishing of their homes and to replace household expenditure, for “those having a right to this prescriptive custom, chips were an essential part of their ecology – in housing, in energy, in cooking, in furnishings” (ibid 379). Chips formed part of wider moral economy of material surpluses – “sweepings”, “overweight”, “gifts”, “the flows” – to which London workers had established customary rights and which had become “a known and accepted part of the class relationship” (ibid: 406).

As Linebaugh writes, “customary appropriations appear as inefficiency or waste to the technologist” (2003: 430) and they did so also to the gestors of the Ley de Envases: a way that valuable labour time would be lost recovering materials for individual gain and valuable materials lost to the “informal sector”. Thankfully, things at Planta Aries never got quite so bad as at London’s dockyards, where such benefits were ruthlessly stamped out and criminalised. The *London Hanged* of Linebaugh’s title refer to those who were executed for persisting in the customary removal of materials from the production process in an age of ruthless transition towards monetary wage labour. “Over our trouserless, thrice-watched, walled and incarcerated shipbuilder”, writes Linebaugh, “was cast, as a last resort, the shadow of the gallows” (ibid: 393). If this excursus seems itself a superfluous

example of gallows humour, let me justify it by noting the structural similarities with the case at hand, where Latin American recycling plants have been termed a “craft in the making” (Carenzo 2016) and constitute a project of formalisation that seeks to replace mixed recompense with a fixed monetary salary (and an immaterial “waste wage”).

I don’t much ascribe to the Great Man theory of history, but it could well be that punishment for the recovery of *requeche* at Planta Aries did not materialise because of a great guy: NGO plant coordinator Richard. Like the first attempts to restrict the removal of chips in England, Richard made sure that the prohibition on the removal of *requeche* was a “dead letter from the start” (Linebaugh 1991: 378). Charismatic, from a large working-class family in Flor de Maroñas, and with a *clasificador* brother himself, Richard simply told MIDES that it was more dignified for workers be allowed to remove things from the conveyer belt than have them rummaging in the bins, which would surely happen if valuable items were placed in discard skips. So, workers were allowed to jostle to load materials onto the belt, since this afforded them first choice on any *requeche*, which thus continued to circulate on weekly stalls at *Piedras Blancas*. Workers like Bolso even managed two separate categories of *requeche* from their place at the belt: one for food scraps that he gave to a neighbourhood dog-owner in exchange for marijuana; another for objects that could be sold at the market (see Fig.16). The continued circulation of *requeche* was something of an open secret: on one occasion, a worker wandered cheerfully past a meeting of the Inter-Institutional Commission with a roll of cables, letting Richard know that he was taking them “in case he thought he was stealing”. “What a moment to say that!” smiled the plant coordinator, embarrassed.

The presence of informal sector economic activity went beyond the recovery of *requeche*. Angered by the limitations of formal sector sale, where a buyer could not be found for the glass or bottle caps stockpiled at the plant, or for the *nylon negro* that became wet and rotten as it sat outside, workers called upon old contacts. Despite objections from the Intendencia, they telephoned an intermediary and sold him the glass bottles, which he paid for in a wad of cash that workers distributed amongst themselves. If Richard permitted the exit of materials into the informal sector, he also admitted the entry of trucks containing materials that did not come from approved sources. As we have seen, trucks were meant to contain only domestic recyclables, which residents placed in containers located outside of supermarkets or in the centre of the city. Workers demanded the right to receive valuable commercial waste, even emblazoning the request on the mural that they created on an exterior wall: “The Intendencia (or whom it may concern) should allow big businesses and shops to give us what they don’t need, and what we can use [*nos sirve*]”.



Figure 16 *Requeche* taken from the conveyor belt at the Planta Aries

This demand highlights a point largely overlooked not just by *Ley de Envases* authorities but also in the wider discard studies literature: it is not only that the largest volumes and hazards of waste are to be found in industrial-commercial rather than household streams (Harvey 2016: 7) – such streams can also contain the most value as well. In fact, the formal-sector recycling of household waste at a global level is not particularly profitable and invariably relies on state contracts and subsidies (MacBride 2011). In line with a global focus on educating and “responsibilising” individual citizens to ensure the efficiency of recycling (MacBride 2011:4; Hird 2017:190), institutional actors blamed the poor quality of the materials that arrived at the plants on Montevideans’ lack of recycling culture. But *clasificadores* knew that even well sorted household waste could not rival the scale, homogeneity, and value of the industrial-commercial waste that they had regularly received at COFECA. Such waste was not included in the *Ley de Envases* and did not generally arrive at the plant but when it did, Richard accepted it. “If a truck comes with useful material for the plant, it’ll enter”, he explained. “I know that the plants were built for the *Ley de Envases* but today the law isn’t covering the workers’ needs... we can’t bury a truck of paper just because it’s not covered by the law”, he added. After listing various income sources *clasificadores* had access to, including odd jobs (*changas*) for neighbours and the sale of *requeche*, Richard admitted that, “the street provides [the *clasificador*] with an endless network of ruses (*martingala*) which make up their daily income and that was forgotten in this policy”.

Indeed, I have suggested that *clasificadores* entering the Aries recycling plant were imagined by relevant institutional actors to be a homogeneous extreme poor who earned a low income from the sale of stock recyclables and would thus be content with low monetary wages supplemented by a non-pecuniary ideological “waste wage”. In fact, they were a heterogeneous group with composite incomes, differing levels of capital, and divergent earning potential. A large part of their income was constituted by the recovery of *requeche* that was sold or reduced the need for household expenditure on things like clothes, food, school supplies, and toiletries. Such actors both underestimated the scale and diversity of informal sector income, and overestimated the value of household recyclables and thus the wages into which they would be converted. In sum, both *clasificadores* and pre-classified waste were themselves misclassified. As a consequence, tension over low pay brought about the resurgence of informal sector practices and institutional attempts to enclose all materials within the formal sector as part of the Container Law quickly came undone. The leakiness of waste, a point recognised by various waste scholars, (e.g. Hird 2013, Harvey 2016: 7) thus extends to its ability to seep out of the formal and back into the informal economy as valuable *material* and *requeche*.

It has been recognised that the informal sector globally is often made up of economic units that are subordinate to formal capital; that its workers serve to “reduce input and labour costs of large capitalist firms” (Chen 2012:488); and that informal economic activity can thus be seen as tantamount to a “regime to cheapen the cost of labour in order to raise the profit of capital” (Breman 2013b:1). In Uruguay, Sarachu et al (2013: 4) argue that informal-sector *clasificación* is a “productive complex” where “the enormous profit margins of recycling firms are based on the hidden exploitation of the work of the *clasificador*”. What proves interesting at Planta Aries is the way that informal economic activity continues to subsidise the formal sector even within a formalisation scheme that explicitly sought to displace it. Although the small time informal sector intermediary was removed, he was replaced with multiple levels of intermediation, and the formal sector businesses involved in the transformation of recovered materials continued to profit from those who got their hands dirty lower down the supply chain.

There is a final case of misclassification that I wish to highlight, where *clasificadores* who had been sorting materials into white paper, metal, cardboard, *nylon*, and *pomo* for decades were told that these categories were in fact inaccurate. The occasion was a visit from the large paper buyer IPUSA, which was based in the outskirts of Montevideo and was involved in the transformation of used paper into such Uruguayan household brand names of toilet paper, sanitary towels, and nappies as Hygienol, LadySoft, and BabySec. The company represented “the factory” that the plants were trying to sell to directly, thereby bypassing the chain of intermediaries to whom COFECA had previously sold white paper. IPUSA, in turn, was attracted to the plants because they realised that although the

formalisation of waste-picking initially only represented a small part of the market¹⁸, consolidation of the model would substantially shake-up the recycling trade.

Yet the quality of paper that the company had begun to receive from the plants was sub-standard, and representatives were sent to Aries to let workers know where they had been going wrong. With the visit, two links of a chain normally separated by several levels of intermediation were meeting for the first time. The visitors were technicians from the operational team that dealt with the mixing of raw materials to produce the paste from which new products were elaborated. Instead of the *clasificador* paper category of *blanco* (white), IPUSA dealt with the categories of white 1, 2 & 3, which differed according to the amount of print the page contained (none, little and lots). They classified coloured paper into “special mixed”, “mixed”, “magazine” and “punched” (*troquelado*). In the process of making new white-paper based products, the whitest and most unadulterated materials were of the highest value in this fine-grained system of classification.

Workers who for years had prided themselves on their classificatory skill and whose very occupation had come to be known as classifier were told that they had been doing it all wrong and had to retrain their perception of materials. “You don’t have the knowledge”, explained the factory representative, “you are putting a lot of things into the bales which shouldn’t be there [but] the idea is that you get trained up...and improve”. The new way of conceptualising materials was met with a mixture of scorn, distraction, and disbelief by the assembled workers. “It would be very difficult for us to sell you those categories...we just sell white and mixed paper”, responded Ratón. “I don’t think it’s going to work”, Moncho later told me hesitantly, “we’re used to a different type of classification...one likes to come in, classify roughly, make a little money and go home”. Still, he said that workers had “started trying to separate out some papers that they [IPUSA] said didn’t go but which for us had been white all our lives”. Paraphrasing Demos (2013), *clasificadores* were asked to “look again in a different way” (2013: 114), and reconfigure not just their olfactory but also their visual encounter with discards.

Paradoxically, one thing that both groups of classifiers seemed to agree on was the low value of household waste: the very material whose exchange brought them together. “For us, household waste is organic waste because it contains food, used toilet paper and *yerba* tea, and we vulgarly call it ‘dustbin’ (*tacho*)”, explained the IPUSA representative. He added that “Uruguayans, regardless of social class, lack a classificatory culture (*cultura de clasificar*)”. Because of this, he continued, the waste arriving at the recycling plants was not neatly separated, unadulterated, raw material but contained many elements of this “dustbin waste”. The possibility of finding paper that had not been dirtied with *yerba* tea leaves or cardboard on which oil had not been spilt was thus slim. “You’re talking as if the

¹⁸ IPUSA representatives told me that they had clients that sold them up to 500 tons of paper per month, whereas the plants sold them only 10 tons.

materials all came like that”, one worker observed, gesturing to a book of sample materials that IPUSA had brought to the plant, “but everything comes filthy (*mugriento*)”.

In leaving the samples, the representative told the workers that this was “the classification that we want you to achieve, this is happiness...you may not reach happiness but we want you to get as close as you can”. Like alchemists, workers were expected to extract from the household waste stream a utopia of industrial quality classification. Instead, they spent most of their time repackaging rubbish. The advertising campaign for the *Ley de Envases* had probably not helped, featuring as it did packaging icons like fast food burger boxes and drinks cartons that could not in fact be recycled locally. But the principal reason for the failure to get closer to classificatory nirvana was the prior legislative classification of waste into household, commercial, and industrial streams of which recycling plants could receive only the first: “dustbin”.

Containment

The material presented thus far suggests that the *Ley de Envases* plants both continue and reconfigure prior dynamics of commoning and enclosure. They maintain but reorder the link between vulnerability and waste but also represent an attempt at hygienic enclosure, where workers would be shielded from the risks of places like COFECA, would be materially and symbolically “enclotted” in the protective garb of the formal worker, and would receive a restricted waste-stream that ideally limited potential exposure to hazardous material. In this final section, I develop two further examples of enclosure. Firstly, I outline the attempt to contain what we might call workers’ “excessive masculinity”, where CPT was charged with managing and containing workers’ behavioural excesses. Secondly, I note how containers were re-engineered to enclose resources from illegitimate and criminalised appropriation rather than protect the public from contaminating rubbish. Such a rechanneling of waste is in turn leading to a possible “tragedy of the commons” at the landfill, at which many disenfranchised kerbside recyclers are now arriving.

The ways in which proletarianisation and the emergence of the factory involved the disciplining of the workforce have long been recognised in classic texts (Thompson 1967; Melossi & Pavarini 1981; Foucault 1995), while more recent studies of the globalisation of labour have linked the increasing feminisation of the workplace to attempts to secure a more docile (and nimble fingered) workforce (Standing 1999; UNDAW 1999; Mills 2003; Gideone 2007). In Uruguay, the scholar to have dealt most thoroughly with the disciplining of Uruguay’s “barbarous culture” and sensibility during a century of industrialisation and growth of the bourgeoisie is national historian José Pedro Barrán (2014), whose work can be seen as a more modest Uruguayan counterpart to Elias’s (2000 [1939])

magisterial *The Civilising Process*. As well as looking to European scholars, I turn to Barrán when asking what the disciplining and containment of labour involves in 21st century Uruguay, when *clasificadores* are included in the formal sector as “vulnerable workers” in “protected jobs”.

As I have already noted, perceptions of the move to Aries were heavily gendered. Many women matched a general enthusiasm for the plant with support for its management by an NGO. After initial suspicions regarding NGOs that “took *clasificadores*’ money”, Negra Vero changed her mind after becoming tired with the airs of superiority embraced by some male cooperativists and their unwillingness to open the books. Both Vero and Ana Clara spoke about how reluctant they and other workers were to take orders from COFECA colleagues, with a little more respect afforded to “someone from the outside”. Just as women had benefited financially from the change from individual to cooperative work at the Usina 5, they hoped for better conditions and changed leadership dynamics at the plant. As it transpired, most delegates continued to be men, at least initially, but women became more outspoken in political discussions. Julia’s sister Sylvia, for example, at one point came forward nervously with a trembling hand to offer a list of group demands she had written down to be included in the plant mural and in a letter to the Mayor, and these were adopted.

It is important not to generalise about the experiences of workers in the plant, because some of those in structurally similar conditions, such as retirement-age men Sergio and El Abuelo, had radically different opinions about the move. Whilst El Abuelo emphasised how lucky he was to be given a job with social security benefits at his age and asked how colleagues could possibly miss working in the dirt and exposed to the elements, Sergio said that he would miss “everything” about COFECA and worried about losing his new job immediately. COFECA had a special meaning for Sergio because, in contravention of the Intendencia’s rules, he had actually slept at the Usina 5 with his cats and a rotating gang of male *clasificador* colleagues who, temporarily dumped by their wives, hesitantly made their way along Felipe Cardoso to bunk up with him. Such men were reluctant to take orders and resisted outside authority. “Being bossed around (*mandado*) and taking orders when I’ve always worked as my own boss will be difficult”, Sergio worried. “If they come and shout “you can’t smoke, you can’t go to the toilet three times, you can’t stop work” at me. So how long can I last in this business? Two days? And then what do I do?” In the end, Sergio managed to stay on, despite earning himself a week’s suspension for slapping a (male) NGO worker in a dispute over the consumption of alcohol in afternoon breaks. But years of self or cooperative employment led to a disdain for those who worked directly for others, whom some referred to as “dogs”. Indeed, one *clasificador* complaint was that they were to obey orders given not directly by an employer or a key stakeholder in the Ley de Envases (such as the CIU, which paid their wages) but by NGO workers, intermediaries who themselves worked for someone else.

In one training session, Michel expressed these feelings through a visual medium. Workers were asked to create a collage that depicted their sentiments towards the transition to formal work and in

his group, Michel cut out a dog's head from a magazine and, with two arrows, signalled that the animal represented two plant coordinators. A speech bubble had the supervisors chastising workers with the orders, "Callao, don't shout!" and "Michel, don't say that!". At the Planta Aries, the dog had apparently become the master. Other images on his collage had clearly been cut out from the textbook of Uruguayan masculinity: a football emblazoned with the Uruguayan flag and a scantily-clad woman saying "I've not been given a uniform, should I work like this?". And in the following weeks, more sexist behaviour occurred in the plant where, unlike at COFECA, it registered as unacceptable. First, explicit sexual language was used between men, in front of and towards women, in the form of outbursts, lewd stories, and unwanted sexual advances. Then, notes were left in the lockers with drawings of penises and sexual insults; a banana was left suggestively in one woman's locker; and the women's changing room door was opened slightly by a man who exposed his genitals to the woman inside. A masculine "aesthetics of vulgarity" (Mbembe 1992) resurfaced at the plant.

These incidents of sexual harassment occurred simultaneous to acts of aggression carried out against the plant's security guard. Although, or perhaps because, they generally came from a similar social milieu, *clasificadores* tended to hate security guards almost as much as they hated the police. One reason for this, alongside the repression that they suffered in their neighbourhoods and at the *cantera*, was that many of the male COFECA workers had suffered from another form of enclosure – incarceration – and were thus accustomed to a prisoner-guard style antagonism that they carried into the plant. Ricardo, the plant's rather dim-witted first security guard, was seen as something of an easy target, and in one incident his bag was urinated and defecated into. On another occasion, Callao was asked to vacate the security guards' chair in which he had sat down, and he replied that if he wasn't allowed to sit there then the next time the security guard tried to sit with the workers he would smash the chair over his head.

Callao had been brought up in and around the *cantera* and was the younger brother of Enrique, the landfill's highest earning *clasificador*. At the plant, he had received a warning for boisterously singing and dancing his way through shifts. He had also taken a dislike to a young NGO worker who came from the neighbourhood bordering the *cantera* and had threatened him with physical violence if their paths crossed on the outside. This supervisor had failed to establish his authority with the workers, and some openly insulted him, with Callao telling one colleague not to give him sugar for his coffee because he was a "cock-sucker who earned at least double what they did". Callao was suspended after the chair incident and his friends in the plant organised a walk-out in solidarity with him. Yet here too, gender dynamics were at play. Some women claimed that they were threatened by some of the "heavier" male figures in the plant that their female kinsfolk on the outside would assault them if they refused to join the walkout. Another "joked" with a female colleague that he would rape her in a *bolsón*. At least some female workers had sympathy with Callao's adversaries. "Imagine you are the

boss and you're being laughed at in the face with that laugh Callao has, that mocking laugh, and you realise you are being ridiculed", said one.

Yet overall, I found the workers in Aries visibly subdued following their move from COFECA, at least initially, and when I enquired as to why, some said that this was because their boisterous behaviour at work, even their liberty, had been curtailed. "They've taken a lot of freedom from people", Bolso told me, "the other day they even said that we couldn't sing and dance. Because we sing and dance at the *pista*, you know? We have a laugh...when I go to get changed, I shout at the top of my voice to everyone!"¹⁹ Most of the shouting and singing was neither obscene nor misogynistic but it was rowdy. Many workers would sing along to cumbia music on the radio; and the popular Matute would often call out wildly to one of the older female workers who would respond by leading the dancing at the conveyer belt. *Clasificadores* were also used to establishing joking and teasing relationships with one another and with intermediaries. So when the visiting IPUSA representative said that egg boxes weren't good for anything, Ratón quipped that they were only good for "breaking eggs" (*rompiendo los huevos*), a play on words since the expression also means to "break someone's balls". The joke was met with laughs from his colleagues but the silence of the visitors who continued to seriously enumerate a list of potential paper adulterants.

The discouragement of noise and "obscene" gestures in Uruguayan industry has a long history. Barrán writes that in turn of 20th century Montevideo, "where a modern factory was established, the norm was work in silence and prohibition of all 'racket'" (2014: 397). The "new sensibility" of the industrial bourgeoisie considered silence – at least in the lower classes – as good taste, while "tuneless and shrill shouting and obscene gestures revealing bodily needs should be hidden" (2014: 397). "Dirtiness, uninhibited gestures, guffaws and unruly shouting had co-existed and been highly regarded during the 'barbarous' period", he writes, while "neatness, bodily discipline and whispering or silence were prized during the period of 'civilisation'" (2014: 398). "Good taste", argues Barrán, "correlated suspiciously with the interests of the industrialists [*patronato*]" (2014:397).

In *Rabelais and his World* (1984 [1965]), Bakhtin famously argues that the grotesque and the obscene were deeply embedded in plebeian life, and he counterpoises the closed impenetrability of the bourgeois modern body with the porous one of "genitals, bellies defecation, urine, disease, noses, mouths and dismembered parts" (1984:319) that predominates in the humour of the European folk tradition. "Whenever men laugh and curse, particularly in a familiar environment", he notes, "their speech is filled with bodily images" (ibid). To the extent that the *cantera* was a familiar environment to *clasificadores* this can also be said to be true here, but male *clasificadores* also policed the tone and language they used in the masculine work environment and in the familial domestic sphere. Michel, for example, told me that he was a different man at home, and when I met him with his wife and

¹⁹ The *pista* is the name given to the platform where trucks dump and *clasificadores* recover material at the landfill but Bolso apparently transfers the name to plant in this quote.

kids, my boisterous co-worker did indeed cut the figure of a meek, respectful, family man. Both the state and male *clasificadores* thus sought to keep dirt in the workplace and out of the domestic sphere, only for the former this meant dirty labour and the latter dirty language.

Achille Mbembe (1992) adapts Bakhtin's articulation of politics and vulgar parody, arguing that in their use of body-based humour, subjects of the "post-colony" do not necessarily challenge state power, since "for the most part, people who laugh are only reading the signs left like rubbish in the wake of the *commandement*" (1992: 10).²⁰ For my part, I seek to avoid reproducing the dualism inherent to both Bakhtin's modern/ popular body imagery and Barrán's account of the move from barbarity to civilisation in Uruguay. But unlike in Mbembe's (1992) case, the locus of vulgarity and humour in the recycling plants still lay largely within the sphere of popular culture rather than state power. The (masculine) *clasificador* body danced, laughed, sang, swore, drank, ate *requeche*, and defecated, in one instance in poor Ricardo the security guard's bag. This act mirrored that which had occurred a few years earlier at the *cantera*, when young *gateadores* had defecated and rubbed their faeces over a police cabin in protest at attempted enclosure, and echoed that which took place during the dictatorship, when arrested *clasificadores* had filled their boots with stinking rubbish and emptied them into police cells.

Although Hojita compared the plant to a barracks, and one can find some similarity in the historical descriptions of Barrán (2014), it is important not to exaggerate the disciplinary measures and climate that operated at the Planta Aries. As we have seen, permissiveness and patience were central to the NGO's approach to these "vulnerable workers". Institutional actors did not try to engineer permanently silent or solemn bodies. Instead, spaces for loud, boisterous, and joyous behaviour were to be contained in particular space-times that were outside of working hours and in keeping with this 21st century attempt at the social inclusion of the vulnerable worker-citizen. MIDES organised two such spaces for Ley de Envases workers during the course of my fieldwork. The first of these was a "social tourism" trip to a river and park, with the group entertained by loud music, games, and a buffet lunch. The second trip was to a national conference for *clasificadores* working at Ley de Envases plants around the country, and featured a live band at lunch, which played covers of popular "tropical" songs and soon had riotous *clasificadores* (and then *técnicos*) on their feet dancing. This was the highlight of the excursions for many *clasificadores*, and a MIDES official told me that they had made sure to include live music (and onerous servings of food) following feedback from *clasificadores* at previous events.

Still, there were moments during such events where popular humour pushed the limits of institutional acceptability. On the social tourism trip, for example, a game was organised whereby the

²⁰ Mbembe (1992) uses this term to denote colonial authority and "the authoritarian modality par excellence" (1992: 3)

bus was divided down the middle and each side had to try and get the maximum number of balloons onto the other side before the music stopped. Yet Sergio decided to create his own fun by bouncing a balloon off the back of the head of a municipal social worker for large sections of the journey. On the same trip, Ratón ordered large amounts of meat to be grilled at an all-you-eat buffet, purposefully creating leftovers that he then bagged up to take home. “It’s for my dog”, he joked to the laughter of his colleagues on the bus home, before letting out a loud woof. Even outside the plant and in invidious country surroundings, Ratón had managed to provoke an episode involving the contested consumption of *requeche*.

In this section, I have argued that the NGO attempted to manage and contain workers’ excessive behaviour, which ranged from the boisterous to the violent. Inclusion into the formal sector as a vulnerable poor to be managed by a socio-educative NGO proved difficult for *clasificador* men to accept, authority figures in particular. It was not that these men lacked imaginaries of progress but that these rested overwhelmingly on high short-term earning potential to provide for their families. In addition, such men valued the distinction between a respectful domestic sphere, and a masculine sphere of labour where men’s talk and behaviour could be as dirty as a *clasificador*’s clothes following a day of work at the *cantera*. For the women, the move to the plant and the formal sector held a lot more promise, but whilst they were happy with more hygienic facilities, some were unhappy that *macho* behaviour couldn’t be better contained, as well as sharing a common complaint about low income. In effect, the majority of workers at the plant “voted with their feet” (Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur & Ostrom 2006) on the process of formalisation by staying, while dominant men did so by returning to the *cantera*.

Yet work at the *cantera* was also under threat by another more direct form of enclosure. Disenfranchised kerb-side *clasificadores* who remained outside of formalisation schemes began to appear there, bringing with them greater competition for materials and undermining the fragile détente that existed between municipal workers and my *gateador* friends. According to the president of the UCRUS, numbers at the *cantera* had risen from 50 during my fieldwork period to over 200 in 2017 because of the difficulties waste-pickers had in accessing waste in containers and entering certain areas of the city (Lopez Reilly 2017). This increase in numbers in turn brought increased media attention and complaints from municipal employees, leading the Intendencia to announce that *clasificadores* would be excluded from the site (Lopez Reilly 2017), a threat that has thus far gone unfulfilled. The attempt to lessen precarity for small number of workers (128) in the plants has, I would suggest, increased it for the much larger number (3,000-9,000) for whom there is no room in the “craft-in-making” (Carenzo 2016) of formalised waste classification. It also increased the chances of the tragedy that the enclosure of an overpopulated *cantera* commons would imply for scores of families.

To understand such policy outcomes, we might turn to Kasmir and Carbonella's (2008) idea of "dispossession as the production of difference". The labour scholars argue that political dispossession is "frequently compounded by structural violence connected to the recategorization and reclassification of working classes" (2008: 13). One example they give is the recategorisation of the London riverine poor in the 18th century, documented in the work of Peter Linebaugh (1991). As we have seen, the previously common practice of workers receiving wood from the shipyards as a form of payment was outlawed, creating in the process a fission between the waged and unwaged, so that "the literal policing of the division between waged laborers and the wageless poor effectively separated the struggles of workers within the labour process from those outside it" (Kasmir and Carbonella's 2008: 14-15). In Montevideo, dispossession-by-differentiation was justified by a fracturing of the *clasificador* trade in an example of what Samson (2015) calls "hermeneutical injustice". Samson uses this term to describe the way that municipal officials at the South African Marie Louise landfill referred to those who recover waste there as "scavengers" instead of their chosen term "reclaimers". Such naming practices, Samson argues, "enable municipal governments and private companies to dismiss them [sic] as nuisances who need to be eradicated" (2015:825). When I interviewed an intermittent director of Felipe Cardoso, he engaged in a similar act of "hermeneutical injustice" by insisting on referring to landfill waste-pickers not as *clasificadores*, as they wished to be called, but as *burgadores* (rummagers):

"We have a problem with the rummagers [*burgadores*]. Rummager is he who rummages. Let's call a spade a spade. Rummagers don't like being called rummagers but whoever is in the landfill is rummaging to see what he finds. The word rummage means to search. They say "we are *clasificadores*". Well, maybe those who work at the plants who classify and work in a certain way, we could call them *clasificadores*".

This "reclassification of classifiers", beyond the misclassification outlined earlier, represents a politically salient attempt to appropriate a term – proposed by the Uruguayan waste-picker movement and its allies as a way of respectfully referring to all practitioners of the trade (Clara 2012) – to grant recognition and legitimacy to a small subsection working within the state. By stripping other waste-pickers of their legitimacy, these can more easily be dispossessed of their materials and livelihood. Unlike Samson's South African example, where all waste-pickers were denigrated as scavengers in order to justify their neoliberal dispossession and exploitation by private capital, in Uruguay, a certain section of *clasificadores* are selected to be socially included and slotted into a socio-religious narrative of increasing rights, recognition, and dignity (IM 2015). Yet as a result, a large majority found themselves in more precarious circumstances.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn out some of the dynamics of *clasificadores*' transition from the informal to the formal economy through a focus on care, (mis) classification, and enclosure. I have suggested that, partly due to the legacy of Catholic social work, *clasificadores* were identified by the state as vulnerable workers whose jobs in Montevideo's recycling plants were "protected" to a much greater degree than in other formal-sector workplaces. For *acompañantes* like María del Carmen, formalisation meant the provision of long overdue access to the benefits of work-based citizenship, while for NGO coordinator Richard, social inclusion "settled a debt between *clasificadores* and the Uruguayan society that had marginalised them". Yet socio-psychological care and educative opportunity could only be provided by the paternalistic state to those workers who embraced certain subjective frames. Sitting in a classroom, accepting socio-psychological support, and embracing the "vulnerabilisation" of their bodies proved particularly challenging for many *clasificador* men, whose identities were based around resilience, autonomy and strength. The codification and formalisation of the criteria of vulnerability needed to access waste meant that certain affordances of the commons were lost as waste's status as a municipal good was reinforced through its enclosure in "anti-vandal" containers, diversion from the landfill, and delivery only to those who embraced wage labour and new forms of environmental, labour-based citizenship.

Turning from *homo vulnerabilis* to *homo oeconomicus*, I then argued that the institutional authorities involved in the implementation of the Ley de Envases misclassified *clasificadores*, confusing them with the extreme poor while failing to recognise their heterogeneity and the diversity of their incomes. Attempts to supplement workers' minimum wages with a non-pecuniary recognition of their services to the environment – what I call a "waste wage" – was insufficient for *clasificadores* who had to put food on tables that had been largely stripped of *requeche*. The prohibition of the recovery of the latter I likened to the case of 17th century English dockers whose customary access to "chips" was criminalised and replaced with a fully monetary wage. But the *requeche* ban was not enforced at the Planta Aries, and this was providential for authorities since informal trade ironically came to sustain the low-wage structure of the formalised plants. Another accusation of potential misclassification was levelled by industrial materials purchasers, who argued that *clasificadores* ineptly categorised the materials they had been dealing with their whole lives.

But it was a final problematic classification that ensured *clasificadores* both failed to reach classificatory nirvana and struggled to make money from the sale of recyclables: the separation of waste into household, industrial and commercial streams, and the stipulation that plants should only receive the former. Having noted the failure of the Ley de Envases to enclose materials within the formal sector, the chapter then turned to attempts to contain workers' "excessive masculinity".

Violent behaviour and vulgar aesthetics that had gone unsanctioned at the landfill or cooperative were now considered unacceptable and punished. Boisterous and carnevalesque behaviour was, meanwhile, contained in proscribed spaces such as organised social tourism trips to the countryside. Even here, however, *clasificadores* managed to transgress certain norms of sanctioned fun and acceptable consumption. The possibility of returning to the *cantera* was complicated by the potential “tragedy of the commons” brought about by the Ley de Envases’s dispossession of kerbside *clasificadores* who then made their way to the landfill.

I want to end this chapter with a story that brings together its themes of care, (mis)classification, and enclosure. As I have suggested, the reconfigured gender dynamics of the plant meant that women gained prominence as representatives, while the reconfigured political dynamics entailed a move away from a confrontational relationship with police at the landfill to a more nuanced relationship with the state, where hostility to certain forms of authority fused with elements of a new paternalism. Unlike the waste commons, which *clasificadores* accessed with few conditions, work at the plant involved entanglement in a citizenship project of rights and responsibilities, meaning that excessive masculinity had to be curbed. But the changes also brought about the possibility of making new demands on the state and invoking traditional forms of worker mobilisation. Towards the end of my fieldwork period, Aries plant workers went on strike, demanding a pay rise and the provision of Christmas hampers for workers and their families.

On that occasion, the workers were unsuccessful in their first demand but successful in the second. In asking for the hampers, *clasificadores* sought to continue a gift exchange that took place not only with intermediaries (such as Michel’s intermediary father, who gave Gorda Bea and other “clients” wine and pan dulce every Christmas) but also with Catholic *acompañantes*. And when the Intendencia acceded, they provided festive treats like fizzy wine, nougat, and pan dulce in orange bags that were left-over from a previously unsuccessful scheme for the household separation of a recyclable fraction. The “orange bag” scheme had been roundly mocked by the media and observers because of the failings of an infrastructure of enclosure: the lack of provision of suitable street-level containers had meant that neighbours simply put the orange bags into normal bins whose contents were disposed of in Felipe Cardoso (CNCS 2006). Now, these leftovers from a failed municipal material classification scheme were given a second life as a result of the classification of waste-pickers as vulnerable workers, their social inclusion in recycling plants, and the resultant increase in their bargaining power. A material infrastructure designed to contain waste was reprogrammed to contain labour unrest in a manifestation of at least one form of *requiche* consumption that municipal authorities found acceptable.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

Habitation

One of the Intendencia's sanitary engineers told me in a recent email exchange that he thought it was acceptable to "work with rubbish" but not to "work in rubbish"; an argument that he used to suggest that *clasificadores* should be able to work with rubbish in recycling plants but not in rubbish at the *cantera*. Throughout this thesis, we find examples of *clasificadores* who both live and work in an environment partly made up either of rubbish or of that which has at some point been classified as such. This includes houses partially composed of *requeche*, boots sunk into layers of tripe at the *cantera*, and homes surrounded by waste-land that doubles up as work-place. As such, we might say that *clasificadores inhabit* the waste that individuals, businesses and the state shed in order to consume conveniently, make room for new stock, and maintain order in their own habitats.

The concept of habitation can, I believe, prove useful for understanding the processes of enclosure and dispossession that many waste-pickers and the waste commons are currently either undergoing or are at risk from. In *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi (2001 [1944]: 36-37) quotes an English court document from 1607 that comments on the dilemma of socio-economic change: "The poor man shall be satisfied in his end: Habitation; and the gentleman not be hindered in his desire: Improvement". For Polanyi, the formula "hints at the tragic necessity by which the poor man clings to his hovel doomed by the rich man's desire for a public improvement which profits him privately" (2001: 36-37). The context is Polanyi's discussion of the English enclosures that destroyed many a poor family's rooms as residents made way for the supposed improvement represented by more profitable animals.

The types of enclosure that I have discussed in this thesis have also often involved the enrichment of private interests like multinational corporations that profit from "public improvements" to the city's waste management, financed in part so that urban elites might find their place in the shifting sands of "infrastructural modernity". *Clasificadores*, on the other hand, have had to wage multiple battles to defend the right to inhabit waste-scapes and to incorporate waste into their habitations. Think of Sergio and his ragged, fluctuating band of dumped husbands, cats, dogs, and chickens that lived in the Usina 5 until they were evicted. Or of María Trastos, Nacho, Negra Vero, and the families of the Felipe Cardoso shantytown who had all built homes on squatted wasteland and who, lacking legal tenancy rights, risked being evicted at any moment, or not at all. Or indeed of Juan, Morocho and others, who endured criticism of "having a tip in their house" by including *requeche* furnishings or using their yards to classify *material*.

A desire for *clasificadores* to “cling to their hovels” is a charge that could perhaps be levelled at the author, given that I do not fully and uncritically embrace the current politico-religious orthodoxy regarding the dignification of *clasificador* livelihoods. It is true that I find much in the current social life of Uruguayan waste worth salvaging. My interlocutors were, nevertheless, for the most part explicitly committed to ideas of progress; a progress that was sometimes broadly universal in its reach (e.g. state benefits programs) and sometimes more selective (e.g. the dental care made available to COVIFU residents through their connection to President Mujica’s Plan Juntos). Such ideas were often discordant, even within families, with Moncho associating progress with work at the Planta Aries and his brother Martín associating it with the kind of material goods that he could buy with the greater sums of money that he earned at the *cantera*.

As Robert Marzac (2015: 85) notes, it is probably not true that English commoners rejected improvement either, and there is evidence that the pre-enclosure Saxon landholding system did lead to ameliorations in soil quality and innovations in farming. So rather than inhabitancy defined as stagnation or “clinging” to the status quo, I prefer Marzac’s framing of it as “lingering”. Specifically, he explores the rights of inhabitancy that were denied to commoners following a landmark ruling of English Court of Common Pleas judges in a judicial litigation known as Gateward’s Case heard in 1608 (2015: 113). Before enclosure, Marzac writes, “the subject having access to the land was not an entrepreneur bent on accumulating capital: the subject was considered to be an ‘inhabitant’ of the land and accessed the land’s unrestricted openness from a standpoint of sustenance rather than an investment in property development” (2015: 85). The inhabitant who was to be denied a right to the commons in the Gateward’s case was, counterintuitively, she who sought to dwell in the common but lacked the legal rights of permanent residency. As Marzac writes, “the concept of dwelling in the phrase *ratione commorantiae* [used in the court case] arose out of the fundamental existential custom act of accessing one’s right to common of pasture” (2015: 114). Tracing the etymology and meaning of the word *commorantiae*, Marzac (2015) calls this “dwelling as lingering: the non-accumulative (non-profit driven) sustaining of life” and the “sustainability of having access to a liveable occupation” (2015: 116). Is this not precisely the struggle of many *clasificadores*: to linger a little longer on the landfill and to exercise an occupation that allows them to live?

Common (Sense)

As can be observed in this thesis, many of the ways that Montevidean *clasificadores* live and work with and in waste clash with hegemonic ideas of infrastructural modernity and even human dignity. As I write these lines, a new pilot scheme is being rolled out in Montevideo that would replace horse and cart collection with motorbikes, a plan being pitched in a language of dignification, social inclusion, and sustainability (La Republica 2017). Never mind that horses might well be more sustainable than carbon powered transport, that motorbikes have a prohibitively small carrying capacity, and that *clasificadores*’ relationship with horses goes beyond the utilitarian and into the realms of culture. But if

clasificador practices like consuming *requeche* and using horses and carts are to escape the straitjacket of tired binaries like modernity-tradition or pathologising concepts like the “culture of poverty” (Lewis 1959), how should they be explained and situated?

In chapter 4, I analysed the consumption of *requeche* by turning to Mol’s (2008) “eating subject”, suggesting that such practice constituted *clasificadores* as ethical subjects who demonstrate an openness and generosity to the human and non-human. But we might go down another theoretical path by suggesting that *requeche* consumption, as a type of popular knowledge, represents an example of Gramsci’s (2005) *senso comune*. The sensory processes involved in determining what is good to eat would run contrary to common sense’s Aristotelian origins, where this term named “a supposed extra sense...enabling us to organize the impressions received from the other five” (Crehan 2016:43). Instead, the common sense of eating that which is *sano* emerges from the use of the tongue, eyes, nose, and fingers to determine whether something is safe for human consumption. Like Gramsci’s *buen sentido*, a positive component embedded in *senso comune*, the knowledge involved in figuring this out, or indeed evaluating what metals can be extracted from an assemblage and how, are substantive forms of popular knowledge rather than the kind of cognitive structures to be found in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (c.f. Crehan 2016: 46). And per Gramsci’s conceptualisation of *buen sentido*, *clasificador* practices can, I would suggest, be seen as forms of “awareness born out of the concrete experience of subalternity...the seeds from which new political narratives emerge” (Crehan 2016: 48-49).

The increasing attention paid to wastes and waste management across the disciplines highlights that there is no single way of knowing or theorising waste. Yet such a conclusion can be depoliticising and disabling if it is not accompanied by an ethnographic exploration of the way that different actors know and represent waste within structures of power, and the political and economic consequences of such representations. This thesis has tried to get close to both the materiality of waste and the way that differently situated actors come to know it. A chain of associations that equates waste with risky matter, and discards with waste, leads to a paradoxical situation where the destruction of the use-value in things can be advocated and implemented as “common-sense” environmental policy. Like the boy in the Emperor’s New Clothes, *clasificador* recovery of *requeche* represents an empirical reality-check, reminding us that many wasted things are in fact *sano*: fit for consumption and re-use. Beyond this, their good sense represents a popular and sensory “way of knowing” that regrounds epistemological debates about (waste) matter in the politics of the everyday.

If it seems far-fetched to suggest that a new politics can be generated out of the practice of eating rubbish, let us remember that brought together in the category of municipal solid waste are very often commodities stripped of their aura, de-fetishized objects (Kantaris 2016: 54) that according to some have to be re-fetishized in order to prevent us from seeing them for what they are: freely accessible and often perfectly usable goods that have been temporarily placed outside of the realms of

commodity circulation (Barnard 2016). The liminal position of the ex-commodity or the not-quite commodity enables such instances of gift exchange, sharing, and ethical engagement as have been explored in this thesis, examples perhaps of the kind of relations that can be sustained if we are brave enough to tear down the fences of hygienic enclosure. The story is a hopeful one, because it suggests that rather than conceiving of the world as steadily and inexorably colonised by capital, we need but look around the back of the factory to discover a potential commons. *La plage* not so much *sous les pavés* as *dans les poubelles*.²¹ Instead of continually importing capital-intensive waste management solutions from the North, could the labour, practice, and ethics of *clasificadores* not be considered as a potential Uruguayan export?

And yet, as we have seen, ex-commodities can very soon become re-commodified, whether converted to *requeche* at local flea markets or sold as *material* internationally. In considering waste as a commons, I have rejected David Harvey (2012) and others' conceptualisation of these as consisting of "both collective and non-commodified" goods, in favour of the identification of a range of features drawn from the case of the English commons, including customary rights claimed by a vulnerable population, the refuge provided from wage labour, the importance of access/use over ownership/exchange, and the blurring of the lines between work and play. As E. P. Thompson (1991: 84) writes, English commoners were not "primitive communists", and neither are Uruguayan *clasificadores* pure post-capitalist subjects. Nor, on the other hand, are they super-individualists living a dog-eat-dog existence around a hellish landfill. In fact, even the dogs abandoned at the landfill do not eat each other, forming instead a *canis familiaris* that lives from the bounty and care of the *madre cantera*.

My treatment of the commons at once territorialises, temporalises, and materialises the concept, bringing it down from the heady heights of radical social theory to ground it in the muddy realities of landfill extraction. It territorialises, because it affirms, like Ostrum and her disciples and like the English roots from which commons theory grows, that commons can be identified in territories and not only in the activity of "commoning". A feature of contemporary radical commons scholarship is the focus on the commons not as a resource but as an activity, a verb not a noun. For example, Harvey (2012: 73) argues that "the common is not to be constructed...as a particular kind of thing, asset or even social process but as an unstable and malleable social relation". The relation between *clasificadores* and waste is clearly important, but I resist the idea that, through their activity alone, *clasificadores* produce the waste commons, since the emphasis on commoning sits uneasily with the mutual dependence between *clasificadores* and the capitalist market in recyclable materials.

²¹ "*Sous les pavés, la plage* [under the paving stones, the beach]" was a situationist slogan from May 68, which made reference to both the sand that protestors encountered when pulling out paving stones, and their utopian illusions.

My framing also situates the commons within temporal processes by affirming that inclusion in the waste commons is but a temporary stage in the social life of a thing. It is the transient property status of waste, after decommodification but before re-appropriation, which allows *clasificadores* to claim a privileged place in a local moral economy as they compare themselves to shantytown neighbours who help themselves to materials that do have an owner. My framing also materialises the concept, grounding it in a debate over “the material requirements for the construction of a commons-based economy” (Federici 2010: 4), and suggesting that commons can be embodied in the materials of the waste stream. To a certain extent, my theorisation also provincialises current Western thinking that assumes commons to be something lost that must be recovered, as opposed to something actually existing that must be defended (c.f. Berlant 2016).

The utility of this framing of the commons and my conceptualisation of the waste commons beyond the pierced perimeter of the *cantera* must be examined in other ethnographic contexts. My suspicion is that the concept of the commons put forward enables a flexibility that would allow for the identification of more commons, commoning, and commoners, whilst also preventing the moulding of such spaces and subjectivities so as to fit yearnings for purified post-capitalism over political and economic hybridity. Given my focus on the customary claims to the waste commons made by *clasificadores*, it would make little sense to think of waste as a commons more generally without the presence of a vulnerable group that struggles for access to the leftovers of productive processes. For Medina (2005), waste-pickers can be found in developing countries where there is “chronic poverty, high unemployment, industrial demand for recyclables, and...the lack of a safety net for the poor” (2005: 18). Yet not all of these necessarily claim a customary right or are able to access waste as a commons. In certain places, such as in Kenya (Tom Neumark, p.c.) and in some Asian cities (Furedy 1990), landfill waste-picking appears to be controlled by criminal gangs and describing waste as a commons in such circumstances probably would not make much sense. On the other hand, Furedy (1990: 5) notes that, “some waste recovery practices are, in a sense, survivals from a traditional social contract”. The examples she gives of customary waste rights – of Bandung doormen to household waste, Indian leather-caste workers to animal skins and Sri Lankan launderers to coconut shells – bring us much closer to the kind of common-law particulars explored in the work of social historians of the English commons. These are only some of the instances where customary claims to materials rest on their classification as waste; where such wastes can be considered as commons; and where recategorisation as resource puts access at risk.

It is not just in developing countries that scavengers can be found of course, as evidenced by the burgeoning public focus and scholarship on freeganism, dumpster diving, skipping, and other forms of urban resource recovery (Boarder-Gilles 2014, 2016; Barnard 2016). I have argued that the distinction between those who scavenge or waste-pick by necessity and those who do so by choice should not be exaggerated. *Clasificadores* in Montevideo often have employment alternatives – even if

these are more restricted than those available to dumpster divers in Western countries – and the same has been argued for waste-pickers elsewhere (e.g. Medina 2005, Millar 2015). Dumpster divers often face similar restrictions on accessing waste materials (O'Brien 2007) and they also frame their right to access in terms that would be familiar to my mates in the *cantera*: if someone has thrown something away and abandoned property rights over it, then why should I not be able to access and get some use or money out of it?

The possibility of claiming the kind of access to things that I have described in this thesis relies on the latter having been abandoned and wasted. No matter that such things are then “unwasted” to become gifts, *requeche*, *material* or commodities, the waste phase is a crucial one in their social life, because this is what enables those in a position of vulnerability to gain access without, in many cases, being obliged to give anything back in return. As such, this thesis puts forth a defence of waste as a category. It warns against the dangers of disappearing rubbish through its recategorisation as, or conversion into, energy or resource by way of policy initiatives like zero waste or the circular economy. The political economy of particular waste infrastructures must be studied in order to find out who might be dispossessed if countries were to adopt schemes such as one proposed by Uruguay’s Chamber of Commerce, which would link companies’ discards with other businesses who would purchase them as commodities, thus dispossessing *clasificadores*.

The work of Kathleen Millar at the Jardim Gramacho dump in Rio de Janeiro echoes the idea that, in spite of the risks, informal waste work is often considered a “stable refuge” by waste-pickers, “constant, one of the most stable sources of income in their lives” (2015:39). Gramacho’s recent closure has resulted in the loss of this stability, compensated for by a one-off “golden handshake” and jobs for a limited number of *catadores* in recycling plants (Passos Lima 2015). Whatever the benefits of the inclusion of waste-pickers into formal waste management systems in terms of health and safety, recognition, and even, sometimes, remuneration, the continuities with historic commons that I have highlighted here are often radically transformed or lost. Waste becomes a municipal property resource; *requeche* is replaced by wages; the vulnerability on which access to labour is based is formalised and codified; and refuges from wage labour are often enclosed.

Infrastructure

As I have set out in this thesis, Montevideo’s waste recovery infrastructure has until recently been almost completely “informal” and maintained by *clasificador* kinship, which at least in my fieldsite was centred around adult sibling clusters rather than exploitative nuclear families. Such kinship structures do not imply the cast-iron loyalties and responsibilities that anthropologists used to ascribe to kinship models like the clan or tribe. Instead, brought up in precarious circumstances with weak or transient father figures, *clasificadores* often relied on the care and security embodied in the sibling bond. One way of caring for siblings as they moved into adulthood is through the provision of waste and waste

labour. Positioned outside of wage labour, *clasificadores* are connected to wider society and international markets through a waste trade that they pass on to their brothers and sisters, as well as their children and indeed their uncles. Forms of popular knowledge, access to waste spaces, and waste itself thus circulate along familial lines.

Several iterations of infrastructure have been put forth in the different chapters of this thesis. We have noted municipal attempts to attain an “infrastructural modernity” whose ideas and technologies are imported from overseas and which is largely focused on the containment and elimination of waste, conceptualised as risky and unhygienic substance. The substantive and perhaps surprising continuity of such an articulation of infrastructural modernity can be seen in the fact that Uruguay was one of the first South American countries to import European (English) incinerators at the beginning of the 20th century and sought to be the first to import European (Italian) waste-to-energy technologies at the beginning of the 21st. Such technological developments put the work of *clasificadores* at dumps like Buceo and Felipe Cardoso at risk. These workers, I have suggested, constitute a “shadow infrastructure”: a living labour operating on the waste commons that sometimes complements, and more often competes with, the dead labour embodied in waste trucks and landfill *machinas*.

The infrastructure of which I have written is thus inherently social, involving people not as the exception but as the rule. Thinking of social relations as infrastructural can be enlightening in several ways. First, it highlights that in many developing countries waste and recycling infrastructure are composed not only of imported trucks and sanitary landfills but also, often overwhelmingly, of labouring bodies. This is true even in places that have exported a municipal recycling model, such as Curitiba, where Calafate-Faria (2013) argues that most recycling work is in fact carried out by an unrecognised population of informal sector waste-pickers. Beyond waste, by focusing on infrastructure as materials rather than people, do anthropologists not risk concealing subaltern labour? By recognising that infrastructure is not just “matter that enable the movement of other matter” (Larkin 2013: 329) but also invariably involves people who move matter, or design, build and operate the machines that do so, we bring back the centrality of labour into anthropological infrastructure studies. More broadly, I have argued that both non-human discards and humans form part of a socio-material infrastructure across which waste, commodities, affects and expectations flow, sustaining inter-class, and kinship relations.

If this ethnography is one of infrastructure with the people in it, it is also one that takes cognisance of the material agency of things and the dynamics of more-than-human waste classification, whilst remaining firmly focused on the lives of my interlocutors. Rather than track the social life of things, I have encountered them as my informants did, at the moment in their lives when they have been placed in the waste stream and might well find their way out of it, either as *material* or *requeche*. “Can the thinginess of waste, vibrant though it may be, do without Douglasian classifications?”, asks Josh

Reno (2014: 3). “Is not a landfill the product of millions of tiny acts of symbolic rejection, whereby a human agent decided what was relatively disposable?” (ibid). I have analysed moments not of wasting or symbolic rejection but of “unwasting” and recovery, capturing through the concept of “individuation” and a focus on *requeche* the way that things catch the eye, their materialities and affordances playing an active role in both their emplacement in the waste stream and their extraction from it. *Clasificadores* do not always know why they take one thing from the trash – often helping it to fulfil its designed purpose – but leave a million others to their fate. In other instances, however, the flow of discards clearly helps to sustain the ethical subjectivities of kin who care for brothers, uncles, children, animals, and homes.

New Enclosures

The division of the thesis according to different waste work locations allows us to take stock of the connectivity of diverse classificatory spaces. The thesis began with an encounter with *clasificadores* on horseback who proclaimed that rubbish “belongs to the poor”. I have used this claim as a foundation for the argument that Montevideo’s waste can be considered a commons, taking the reader on a journey around the Felipe Cardoso landfill and its environs that ends in one of the recycling plants that *carreros* argued were depriving them of materials and the right to practice their livelihood. What links such *carreros* with *gateadores* like Juan and Aries workers like Ana Clara? The answer is, rather a lot, for all directly or indirectly shape and have shaped Uruguay’s contemporary waste politics.

One cannot but conclude that the new *Ley de Envases* plants are designed to negatively impact on street and landfill waste-picking. The provision of employment for a small number of *clasificadores* has made it easier for the local government to undermine forms of waste labour that it considers illegitimate, undignified, or irksome. Recyclables deposited by the public in hermetic containers are now redirected to plants, away from kerbside waste-pickers who are also prohibited from circulating in certain areas of the city. In the words of a senior Intendencia figure whom I interviewed,

“The *clasificadores* who are in the street today... will they be able to continue classifying materials? No, not really. Those who sign up for recycling plants will, but those who don’t, will not. Alongside the intermediaries, the profession of informal *clasificación* will disappear.”

When I returned to my fieldsite in early 2017, the gulf between conditions in the plants and those on the streets had widened. Plant workers had managed to secure a significant increase in their wages, making them more than double what they received during my fieldwork period of 2014. *Carreros*, on the other hand, faced new restrictions on their right to circulate in the city, something that the rolling out of a pilot motorbike-recycling scheme would do little to compensate for. A new fence installed

around the perimeter of the landfill had been dotted with police cabins, and *gateadores* felt that they could be evicted any day now. Even the spaces of the Trastos were under serious threat, with Nacho and María, as well as Negra Vero, taken to court by the owner of the land that they had occupied for over thirty years. Customary right and access could still be trumped by property law, whose judges had little sympathy for the caring relations that such spaces entailed.

There is a burgeoning scholarship on the “new enclosures” of the 21st century, such as that of intellectual property (May 2000) and those associated with carbon trading (Bond 2012: 689). The kind of enclosures that this thesis has detailed can be considered both old and new. Many involve the traditional practice of throwing up a fence around a piece of land and proclaiming it private property, denying the poor in the process the right to linger, dwell, inhabit, and common. On the other hand, thinking of the waste container as a technology of enclosure, suggesting that the materials held inside might be worth enclosing, and proposing that excesses of production but also of behaviour are being enclosed in new recycling plants are more novel lines of enquiry. One continuity between old and new enclosures that has emerged through this thesis’s focus on waste is the control of diversity and hybridity. Lost with the enclosure of rural fields in England and Uruguay were diverse forms of land ownership and use, replaced by a standardised model of concentrated private ownership. At the same time, the diversity and uncontrolled hybridity of plant and animal species also diminished, replaced by the emergence of standardised agricultural commodities. The expectation of standardised, identical product lines is to a large degree the prime factor behind the creation of the colossal quantities of waste in modern capitalism (Reno 2015, Blanchette 2015). And the forms of enclosure described in Montevideo’s waste management sector also aim to produce a homogeneous, uniformed waged worker; material that is either dumped as waste or sold as commodity; a separation of polluting culture and pristine nature; and a standardised municipal model of waste collection and recycling. Enclosure thus moves not just against habitation, but also against hybrid forms of waste management and material encounter.

Montevidean *clasificadores* face several different kinds of enclosure, as well as limited opportunities to embrace a labour-based citizenship offered to vulnerable workers. In Gidwani’s (2011: 1631) reading of Locke, those who did not cultivate their land appropriately were treated as outside the sphere of modern political subjectivity, and had no grounds for complaint in the case of dispossession. In my case, we might say that those who classify, recover, and consume waste inappropriately also find themselves outside of the left-Catholic, rather than liberal, body politic. Many years ago, Eric Wolf argued that the capitalist system had first “ransacked the world in its search for capital”, then turned tribesmen and peasants into “scavengers and beachcombers on the slag heaps of civilization” (1971: 3). We should also be alert to the present danger that capital returns for another round of primitive accumulation, where rubbish has become resource and scavengers at the slag heap risk further dispossession. While *gateadores* have continually resisted hygienic enclosure and precarious inclusion

into the lowest-paid rungs of the formal economy, the threat to their livelihood represented by the fencing in of the landfill is now joined by other technologies of enclosure that prevent materials from reaching the waste commons by reclassifying them as resource.

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