

meaning of other people's intentions (see also Alan Rumsey and Joel Robbins' special issue on the opacity of other people's minds 2008). While not using these approaches, we share their assumption that uncertain conditions are common, not incidental, experiences (Berthomé, Bonhomme, and Delaplace 2012: 130). In the second group, engagements with doubt, such as Jennifer Hecht's (2003) panoramic discussion of the skeptical tradition, can be allied to uncertainty as broad questions of how we know and, more specifically, how to gauge and act on unknown futures (Pelkmans 2013a, 2013b; Carey and Pedersen 2017). These latter questions are at the heart of analyses of late capitalism since both its mechanisms and consequences are uncertainty.

Thus, in the third set of approaches are analyses of how actors in financial capitalism achieve profits by negotiating risk as a means of managing uncertainty (Appadurai 2011; Miyazaki 2013; Ortiz 2014; Riles 2013; Tuckett 2011; Zaloom 2004). One flip side of the profit to be gained from the calculability of risk, and the readiness to adapt a workforce to demand, is the erosion of labor security. This precarity is experienced in a variety of forms that rehearse Marx's insight stating capitalist profit requires a reserve army of insecurely or unemployed people. While precarity in itself is an uncertain and not an indeterminate condition, it can lead to a crumbling of previously clear identities in terms of class and gender. Further, where the worth of different kinds of work (e.g., manual labor or waste picking) is not formally recognized, this can engender a sense that distinct identities, status, and human value are being eroded. Limor Samimian-Darash and Paul Rabinow's edited book, *Modes of Uncertainty* (2015) centers on ethnographies of attempts to know the unknown and thus identify danger and mitigate risk. Their emphasis is not on uncertainty as something "out there" but on how it is deployed as a concept: a new form of governmentality via the management of risk.

The fourth topos of engagement with uncertainty is how people negotiate the political and epistemological insecurities accompanying collapses of ideology and empire. Many of these chronicle the dereliction of lives in former state socialist regimes (e.g., Alexander 2009; Rofel 1999; Verdery and Burawoy 1999; Yurchak 2005) as well as those who embrace new economic opportunities. The complex phenomenon of everyday nostalgias for socialism (e.g., Stenning 2005) finds unexpected echoes in some postsocialist state nationalist projects. As Esra Özyürek (2006) reminds us in her study of Turkey, nostalgia for the modern state in the wake of anxieties accompanying neoliberalism is not confined to the former Eastern Bloc. In part, these anxieties may be ascribed to a loss of a sense of clear direction and of one's place in the world as part of a larger whole, even if in retrospect the wholes turned out to be rather fragmented. As discussed in the third section below, the collapse of old regimes and the emergence of new ones can generate not only people who no longer fit, but also newly redundant material remains of earlier hopes and quite different regimes (Navaro-Yashin 2009; Yarrow 2017).

Uncertainty therefore chimes with our discussion of indeterminacy, but only insofar as it reflects conditions of dissolution or category loss produced by economic and political exclusion; the material infrastructure of previous times that has yet to find its place; and, finally, a sense that future pathways are rarely as determined as grand narratives suggest but emerge as a dialogue between people's attempts to plan and shape futures and contingent events beyond their control.

Ambiguity is frequently used as though it were just another term for indeterminacy. Thus ambiguity refers to the precise meaning of something being unclear or obscure; this might be seen as the recognition failure of indeterminate conditions. However, the potential confusions that arise from ambiguity are because there is a multiplicity of possible meanings at any one given time. These multiple readings may be contradictory (Widger and Russell 2018), creatively play off each other, or depend on context.³ In other words, ambiguity is about a superfluity of possibilities, each one a legitimate reading of a meaningful category. In contrast, the condition of indeterminacy suggests the lack of such categories. There are instances, however, when the terms merge. For example, Jacques Derrida was specifically concerned with indeterminacy-as-ambiguity, multiple meaning, as in the *pharmakon* that is both poison and medicine at the same time (Rinella 2010); that is, the *pharmakon* is not either/or but both and hence essentially indeterminate (Derrida 1981: 63–171). Precisely because it holds both these meanings at once, it also speaks to the idea of the “scapegoat” (ibid).⁴ These ideas remain salient in the chapters in this book that consider the expulsion or social rejection of people.

Finally, while *liminality* may seem to mean the same as indeterminacy at times, a clear distinction between the terms is useful. In the anthropological tradition, following Arnold van Gennep ([1909] 1960) and his “recuperation” by Victor Turner (1967), liminality is not only a condition between two fixed states but, crucially, also has the characteristics of transformation and transition. These are not qualities that fit our definition of indeterminacy as something that remains between or has an undetermined future. Recently, the term has been widely adopted elsewhere in the humanities and social sciences, particularly political science, to refer to a general condition of being betwixt and between, which can be the locus of emergent political orders (e.g., Horvath, Thomassen, and Wydra 2015; Thomassen 2014). From literary studies, Arpad Szakolczai (2016) adds the oxymoronic notion of “permanent liminality.” These more capacious understandings of the term partly chime with our discussions, but also attenuate the charge of the original narrower anthropological use.

These are our working definitions for the book, but are far from the last word on how these terms are understood either in everyday speech or in different disciplines. Carla Namwali Serpell, for instance, reminds us that in literary and scientific theory these terms have become heavy with particular meanings: the New Criticism has appropriated ambiguity, indeterminacy is the driving

force of Derridean deconstruction, while uncertainty reflects scientific theories roughly contemporaneous with James Joyce (Serpell 2014: 308n41).

There are three more parts to this introduction. The following section provides a grounding for our chapters via a brief genealogy of how indeterminacy has been theorized in philosophy and social theory vis-à-vis questions of order, recognition, and progress, which partly hinge on whether or not the infinite variety of the world can or should be caught in categories. From this, we move in the next section to the growth of invisible, unregistered, stateless people in the contemporary world alongside tightening systems of classification and control and the material byproducts of intensified political and economic production/wasting processes: uncontainable contamination. Here we also consider four areas where social scientists have engaged recently with indeterminacy: statelessness, economic precarity, ethics, and creativity.⁵ Theorizations of the former two areas typically decry indeterminacy while the latter celebrate it. In the final section, we identify our principal contributions to understanding the multiple registers of indeterminacy via our ethnographic chapters.

A Brief Genealogy of Order, Indeterminacy, and Waste in the Modern Age

Our main focus in this section is the interplay between ideas and practices of order and progress in the modern age on the one hand, and indeterminacy on the other. As we work through this genealogy, we highlight how ideas of indeterminacy, waste, excess, and ordering narratives have been woven together at different times in different ways, then how and where these ideas resonate with our volume. We begin with a sense of indeterminacy as something to move away from, toward enlightenment, order, and progress before turning to Walter Benjamin's engagements with modernity as waste, which illustrate how waste and indeterminacy have often been cast as modernity's other (Benjamin 2002; Lunn 1984). This section ends with Michel Foucault (1977, [1984] 1992) and Georges Bataille's (1985) celebratory take on indeterminacy as transgression, and Theodor Adorno, whose negative dialectics and denial of the possibility of apprehending reality have been inspirations in locating lives in all their diversity and meaning-making outside, in parallel, or in response to centrally-determined, teleological grand projects (1973).

We therefore start with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel for whom indeterminacy (*Unbestimmtheit*) and recognition (*Anerkennung*) are fundamental pre-conditions to the development of individuals' agency as social beings (Hegel 1977). Drawing on Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is important here for two reasons (Hegel 1977). First, it starts with the condition of indeterminacy as the unknown point from which logical thought moves toward determinacy. The successive moves are toward first a determinate but abstract being. Then an actualized self emerges because of the recognition by

another subject of our own subjecthood: full dynamic being, in other words, is essentially relational. In this frame, we need recognition, and the relation that it implies, in other words, to become agents.

Hegel initially emphasized intersubjective encounters within social groups as linking mutual dependence to questions of recognition, solidarity, and esteem (Pippin 2000: 156) allowing (to use a different lexicon) the prosecution of life projects by a social agent. Later, in the *Philosophy of Right*, this shifted to an emphasis on the objective spirit of world history, eliding intersubjectivity, and creating a new idea of the ethical life and community where adequate recognition is achieved within an institutional system of rights (Williams 1997: 59–69): the three spheres of family, civil society, and the state. For Hegel, indeterminacy, alongside emptiness (or “loneliness,” as Axel Honneth translates *Einsamkeit*), is a pathology experienced as an unhappy self-consciousness, and indeed, Honneth suggests, is characteristic of the age (2016). While our take on indeterminacy differs from the Hegelian pre-thought void, the question of who recognizes, or refuses recognition of whom and what, is a central theme of this book, allied to the moral project of classifying.

Second, *Phenomenology of Spirit* outlines the dialectical process by which history (knowledge) moves to the absolute via the two steps between abstraction and concrete appearance that gives rise to a renewed idea and so on toward an absolute totality where idea/category and reality are fused into one. Hegel’s teleological vision of history is shared by many modern political projects. Thus, capitalism, socialism, and colonialism are all teleologically determined, grounded in Enlightenment concerns with development and progress, via science and technology, toward a goal of better, happier lives (see Negri 2004; Guyer 2007 for a discussion of capitalism’s temporality).⁶ Thus, as Vincanne Adams, Michelle Murphy, and Adele E. Clarke observe, modernist temporalities are anticipatory ones “in which the future sets the conditions of possibility for action in the present” and is able to “arrive already formed in the present” (2009: 248–49).

Drawing on Hegel’s method, Karl Marx offers a dialectical framework to address questions of change and structure, also rooted in a modernist temporality of progress and finalization (Berman 2010; Huyssen 1984; Lunn 1984). At its most blunt, the final resolution of the dialectic is reified as an absolute whole, and Marxist dialectical method is reduced to a prescriptive and predictive typology (Althusser 1970; Cornforth 1961) as it most notoriously appeared in Marxist-Leninism.⁷ More subtle Marxist work emphasizes the contingency of historical process and class formation (Chandavarkar 1994; E. P. Thompson 1978, 1991).

There have been critiques aplenty of this narrative of progress. What interests us here is how the ideas of surplus, ruin, excess, and waste in many forms, but particularly the indeterminate and unrecognizable, are woven through these narratives and their critiques. Thus Marx’s materialist interpretation of Hegel’s dialectical method located historical movement in the material

conflicts inherent in each socioeconomic formation. The final stage, communism, theoretically contained no exploitative relations and was thus the end point of historical development; the social/material equivalent of Hegel's merging of idea and reality. The emergence of capitalism, as a mode of production, lay in the confluence of factors that enabled the production and appropriation of surplus for profit. Surplus labor can be interpreted in two ways, both essential for capitalism. The first is the labor that is surplus to the laborer's livelihood needs and that creates profit for the capitalist. The second is the reserve army of unemployed people hovering in the wings to meet market demand. Such people are surplus to immediate requirements, outside yet connected to formal systems of value production; simultaneously potentially valuable and wasted.

Surplus is therefore integral to the capitalist process, creating and maintaining profit, and wasting human lives. But excess, as something overflowing that cannot be accommodated, can be threatening (Alexander this volume) and must therefore be expended (wasted), to follow Bataille's reasoning (1991)⁸ if it is not to become harmful. Excess also appears as the detritus of the capitalist modern age. In this spirit, Benjamin excavated modernity through the trail of waste and ephemera it left behind, his own monumental *Arcades* project, unfinished, a half-built/ruin of fragments symbolizing as well as accounting for the failed promise of modernity (2002). And yet, modernity's underlying framework of progress still seems to have a tight grip on dominant imaginaries of capitalism and socialism.

In some post-Soviet contexts, for example, revolutionary logic seemed merely to transpose "communism" with "the market" as the goal, retaining faith in determinate historical rules (Alexander 2009). Elsewhere, in the 1990s, international lending agencies as well as local governments spoke of "transition," the implication being that they knew precisely where they were heading: free market capitalism (Gaidar 1999; Lipton et al. 1992: 213; J. Sachs 1994). In the academy, the emphasis on transition moved rapidly, following Stark (1991) to languages of transformation and "path dependency," where particular pasts, rather than futures, influenced continual change.

But the modernist project of development, underscored by the same belief in progress and framed by market integration since the United States' Marshall Plan in 1948, marches on for all the steady criticism it has received over the last few decades from Andre Gunder Frank's insight that "development" was having the reverse effect (1966), and Arturo Escobar's reiteration in 1995 that development was wasting the very places it was supposed to make anew. There have been calls for postdevelopment (Dasgupta 1985), alternatives to development (Friedmann 1992), and to move after postdevelopment (Nederveen Pieterse 2000). But still, as Katy Gardner and David Lewis (2015) describe, the appeal of progress continues with, ironically, a return to a belief in technological interventions. Indeed, Wolfgang Sachs (1992: 1) described development itself as an indeterminate ruin of modernity, still with us, but pointing to a discredited

⁸"Indeterminacy: Waste, Value, and the Imagination" Edited by Catherine Alexander and Andrew Sanchez. <http://berghahnbooks.com/title/AlexanderIndeterminacy>

future. To paraphrase Benjamin, modernity can be characterized by the wasted lands, excess materials, and people it expels to keep the project on the road. For the anthropological endeavor, to think critically about normative frameworks of progress entails a willingness to engage with ruination (Dawdy 2010), and the modern forms of life created by processes of systemic expulsion and desolation (Massey and Denton 1993; Wacquant 2010).

Waste, John Scanlan suggests, is modernity's other side (2005). We narrow this down here to indeterminate excess produced by the order of progress. Indeed, the shadows of formal rational progress appear via a scabrous version of indeterminacy as the menacing, wasted cast-offs of progress itself where the curiously contagious quality of waste leads waste workers to become as much symbolically as materially defiled by their contact with waste materials and places, the latter typically located on edges and borders just to add to their capacity for symbolic disruption. More famously, Marx's excoriation of the *lumpenproletariat* merges those who live on waste with redundancy (or "uselessness" in Scanlan's phrase 2005) in a revolutionary progressive order, and with the quality of waste itself: "the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers in old society" (Marx 1967: 92); the dangerous class "living off the garbage of society" (ibid.).

Such language not only reappears in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, but makes explicit the contempt and fear generated by those who are not readily classifiable: the rotting (between life and death), ruined, and indiscernible masses

the decayed roués ... the ruined ... offshoots of the bourgeoisie ... ragpickers ... in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French call *la bohème*... This Bonaparte, who constitutes himself *chief of the lumpenproletariat*, who here alone rediscovers in mass form the interests which he ... pursues, who recognizes in this scum, offal, refuse of all classes the only class upon which he can base himself unconditionally." (Marx 1975: 148; emphasis in original)

This, Slavoj Žižek observes, is the ultimate statement of the "logic of the Party of Order" (2012: 20), where "the excremental ... non-representable excess of society" (ibid.: 21) becomes the only medium of universal representation. Western modernity, if we follow Scanlan, tends to blank out "that which doesn't fit" (2005: 80); ambiguity and confusion, he suggests, prevent meaning and lend themselves to the language of garbage (ibid.: 56).

Adorno's devastating critiques of modernity give us a way out of this binary of rigidly ordered meaning or unmeaning via an explanation and a method. First, with Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* ([1947] 2002), he locates the primal human fear of the unknown as the driver for attempts to dominate the world through technologies of knowing (see Feyerabend 1975, 2001). In such a society, unfree through fear, the other is exploited or expelled. This other, in our lexicon, is thus unknowable, unrecognizable—and rendered indeterminate. The second element we adapt from Adorno is from his *Negative Dialectics* (1973). His interpretation drew on Hegel's method but was a

nondogmatic philosophical materialism, as opposed to Hegel's idealism (Jarvis 1998). Thus, for Adorno, unlike Hegel, the attempt to conjoin idea and object is negatively valued. Where unity seems to appear this is only by suppressing difference and diversity (Adorno 1973: 142–61). It is only by articulating such contradictions, and the misidentification of object and thought, that a “fragile transformative horizon” of hope appears where objects and people can flourish in their particularity.⁹ We too are attempting this dialectic between theory and ethnography, outlining in the final section of this introduction how we draw on negative dialectics to frame our approach to indeterminacy.

Other critiques of modernity emphasize the repressive domination of ordering practices by celebrating transgression.¹⁰ As William Viney suggests, accounts of people, places, and things that do not fit dominant orders are typically binary, casting matter out of place as negative (2014), the process of ejection, however, is positive (for those doing it): reaffirming system and structure (Douglas 1966). There is, however, another body of work that also counterposes waste-as-excess against rational order, but celebrates and glorifies disorder as a deconstruction of the humanist, unified modern subject. Such accounts typically draw on pre- or early modern and ethnographic accounts of alterity to challenge modernist accounts. Thus, Peter Stallybrass and Alison White's historical work (1986), Mikhail Bakhtin's on the excess of the grotesque body and carnival (2009), and Foucault's work on transgression, infinite variety, and Dionysian excess (e.g., 1977, [1984] 1992) serve to destabilize singular subjects, aligning with Bataille's invitation to consider open-ended forms of knowledge and economic exchange rooted in the productive consumption of excess (1985, 1988). This compounded excess in the modern world, its threat, and its potential is what interests us here.

The next section outlines instances of that modernist drive to domination, order, and expulsion that many of the theorists above describe—but we end by juxtaposing this with not only celebrations of open-endedness and excess, but reminders of more complex accounts of how promises of modernist order have been experienced and lamented.

Contemporary Excesses

Crisis hardens social categories, spewing people out who no longer fit. The implications of being outside the law are crucial to how political indeterminacy is experienced. The term *outlaw* is derived from Old Norse for wolf (Nyers 2006), implying a lack of distinction between human and nonhuman that can cruelly shape what it means to be outside the juridical community. Indeed, Hannah Arendt opens *The Origins of Totalitarianism* with “homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth” caused by the chaos of war and reinforced nation-state borders (1950: vii). In this section, we consider the growth of political and economic indeterminacy as the volume of

displaced people and precarious labor grows. Alongside such immediate violence (Sassen 2014), we consider the concomitant slow violence (Nixon 2011) of wasting materials and lands through ordering regimes, and how this has been theorized before turning to a different branch of engagement with indeterminacy: the realm of creative, hopeful imagination.

Thus, over the last few decades, wars, the redrawing of nation-state boundaries, and the restructuring of ethnic and citizenship categories have stranded people in temporary zones and camps that have calcified into permanence. The UNHCR estimates there are over 65.6 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, of whom approximately two-thirds are internally displaced and therefore unprotected by International Law (UNHCR 2016).¹¹ In the same year, UNHCR estimated there were 10 million stateless individuals (*ibid.*). A crisis of recognition draws attention once again to the challenge of alterity: how to unite without forcing assimilation (Povinelli 2002), how, to return to the previous section, to recognize difference and common humanity. In such contexts, indeterminacy has typically been theorized as an undesirable condition, imposed by state authority, where resistance is the positive counter move to regain or remake political subjectivities.

Michel Agier documents a further “disquieting ambiguity” of refugee camps: humanitarian interventions that appear to be linked disturbingly to penal technologies of containment, and are an exercise in “managing the undesirables” (2010). He suggests a growing and carefully maintained division between “a clean, healthy and visible world ... [and] the world’s residual ‘remnants,’ dark, diseased and invisible” (2010: 4). Following Giorgio Agamben (1998), Agier describes states of permanent precariousness where a rhetoric of constant emergency means that refugee camps “exclude past and future” in an exceptional but enduring present (2010: 79). Nicholas De Genova (2002) and Sarah Willen (2007) similarly focus on the production of migrants’ illegal statuses and spaces—and their attempts to resist ambiguity. Recently, a series of interventions have highlighted resistance, reclamation, and the forging of new political subjectivities in these atemporal, aspatial spaces (Gabiam 2016; Turner 2012) even when simple existence can be taken as resistance (Schicocchet 2010: 67). Julie Peteet notes that, for example, in Palestinian refugee camps, young men re-ascribe meaning to beatings as rites of passage that constitute forms of masculinity (2005).

Agamben shows that those who are excluded from society live exposed and threatened lives (1998: 29). Such impositions of structural indeterminacy go beyond ascriptions of criminality and move toward the negation of humanity—as in the evacuation of meaning (Thorleifsson and Eriksen this volume) of the common use of tropes for unwanted migrants as indiscernible, uncountable masses (Alexander this volume). The number of unregistered people who fall between the cracks is growing as states militarize borders, tighten population classifications, and control measures for “homeland security,” and restrict welfare to those with the right kind of identification documents. In 2014, the

World Health Organization estimated that, as a consequence of such measures, two-thirds of deaths and nearly half the number of births globally are unrecorded (WHO 2017).

Alongside the indeterminate status of the world's "outlaws" and refugees, late capitalism has intensified conditions of precarity in the working lives of people in ostensibly stable political environments. Marx highlighted the reserve army of unemployed that kept nineteenth-century capitalism ticking. But now, cheaper labor can easily be found elsewhere in the world. Mechanization often replaces the need for bodies at all. Weakening labor legislation, the growth of unpaid internships, "zero hour" contracts, and corrupt or emasculated trade unions all contribute to contemporary economic precarity. Even when work is available, it may be poorly paid, unreliable, part-time, and insufficient for a livelihood. Such flexible labor has been enabled by financial deregulation and the easy global movement of capital (Harvey 1987). The essential character of formal employment has been transformed, not only rendering previous working-class identities indeterminate but as Richard-Michael Diederich suggests for unemployed Welsh former miners, "steadily dissolving what the individual had believed to be the stable core of his ... identity" (2004: 117). The ethnographic emphasis here has been on how precariously employed persons experience their labor; studies show it is often felt as extreme vulnerability (Allison 2012; Genda 2005; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hann and Parry 2018; Millar 2014; Mole 2010; Munck 2013; Sanchez 2016; Standing 2011).

Indeterminacy has become the dominant condition of insecure work in many industries as "permanent impermanence" normalizes ostensibly temporary contracts within regular structures of production. Employment conditions and forms are thus seemingly predictable and fixed through time, yet are underpinned by profound insecurity, collapsing previously clear distinctions between regular and casual work (Sanchez 2018: 235).

In such a context of increasing political and economic indeterminacy, Hudson McFann suggests a chilling typology of how humans-as-waste (see Mbembe 2011; Yates 2011) have been produced, typically as a product of ordering regimes such as colonialism, modernity, and capitalism (McFann n.d.), which both depend on and produce surplus people, lands, and materials. Hudson McFann's typology describes the symbolic deployment of the concept of waste (following Douglas's 1966 structuralist account and Julia Kristeva's 1982 notion of the abject); the biopolitical (such as Foucault's accounts of state ordering) and the politico-economic, informed by a Marxist critique of capitalism that demands a surplus labor population and wastes human bodies (Gidwani 2013; Gidwani and Reddy 2011; Yates 2011). To this we add Zygmunt Bauman's construction of late modernity as a fluid or liquid condition that seems to counter the rigidity of an ordering regime and yet rehearses expelling unwanted bodies as just so many wasted lives (2013).

Precarity and ambiguity can also generate strategies for living beyond, or in spite of, the state, as Ida Harboe Knudsen and Martin Demant Frederiksen and

their contributors (2015) trace through their notion of the “grey zone,” where the informal, ephemeral, and ambiguous have become ordinary. Improvisation can intersect with forms of exclusion and regimes of governance based on legibility. The temporalities of indeterminate encounters with the state require attentiveness. It is not only in refugee camps, among asylum seekers, and on the margins of the state (Auyero 2012; Das and Poole 2004;) that suspension and waiting are ways of being and expressions of power hierarchies.¹² Akhil Gupta reminds us of the chronic suspension of many giant infrastructure projects (2015), Timothy Choy and Jerry Zee of the chemical and other pollution suspended in the atmosphere that allows/damages life (2015). Samuel Beckett, of course, identified waiting as the human condition (1956).

Just as ordering regimes waste and devalue people, so too are landscapes marked with such regimes’ failures, byproducts, and cast-offs that give the lie to any notion of future-oriented improvement. The often unfulfilled promise of modernity’s grand projects become inscribed upon the landscape as half-built infrastructure and ruins, which point to forgotten futures (Gordillo 2014; Gupta 2015; Hussain 2013; Ringel this volume; Stoler 2013) and shape lives transfixed in a present, waiting either for the past or the future to return, as Paul Wenzel Geissler (2010) so movingly shows through a discussion of the people who continue to live and work in an abandoned colonial field station in Kenya. Both this and Thomas Yarrow’s (2017) account of Ghana’s incomplete Volta Dam project, suggest a different relationship to modernity’s march than suggested by the preceding pages. The failed promises of modernity can be mourned by people who live among the ruins.

Policies devised by such modernist states are typically linked to a specific mode of acting on the world to produce outcomes that are aimed at closure and containment (Hinchcliffe 2001). In the essentially limitless context of the environment and climate such aims are inherently flawed, since certitude can be misplaced and potentially damaging (see Alexander forthcoming; Wynne 1992, 1997). “Dealing with” the wastes of military and industrial extraction, consumption, and production is often only hopeful postponement, appealing to an imagined future state, when science will have caught up with its earlier incarnation and be better able to resolve the endless stream of byproducts and hybrid entities that have qualified “nature.” Buried shrapnel or lurking landmines can also be a source of profound indeterminacy (Henig 2012; Kim 2014), unmapping previously known landscapes. Compared with the relative localization of such military waste, chemical (like nuclear) contamination is “amorphous and invisible” (Broto 2015: 94), exacerbated by the inability to determine the temporal and spatial reach of leaks (Topçu 2008). Pollution and contamination are thus characterized by formlessness, excessiveness, and wayward movement (Strathern 1991: 61; Tsing 2015: 28), which resist neat narratives of containment or restoration. Such accounts of remediation, however, are confronted head on by a queer ethics of hybridity, personified by the figure of Nuclia Waste, a drag queen who exuberantly foregrounds the excess and

permeability of the entire environment and herself to nuclear contamination (Krupar 2012). Guy Schaffer further reminds us that queer theory is concerned with “uneven remainders, things that don’t fit neatly into categories” (n.d.), that “trash” unites wastes and camp alike and that camp itself is “a mode of aestheticism devoted to excess, to failure, to ironic detachment” (ibid.), a refusal, we might say, to be integrated. Such practices align indeterminacy, unruly wastes, and queer theory, recasting indeterminacy as a mode of potentiality, resistance, escape, creativity, and improvisation (see Gonzalez-Polledo this volume; Morgensen 2016;).

In just such a light, recent scholarship in the social sciences, arts, and humanities has characterized indeterminacy as a necessary space for creativity and cultural improvisation (Hallam and Ingold 2007). Howard Becker describes artworks as fundamentally indeterminate, only existing within each moment of re-creation (2006: 23). Feminist and queer theories also invite us to consider mobility rather than stasis, processes of becoming rather than fixed categories, and the generative power of ambiguity. They also ask us to think how metaphors and performances of indeterminacy can be mobilized to resist social classification and control. Or indeed, how ritualized gender transgression, as in Gregory Bateson’s (1936) account of transvestism during Naven rituals among the Iatmul of Papua New Guinea, can establish/reaffirm hierarchical, gender binary relationships, thus highlighting again the complex relationship between indeterminacy and classificatory systems. Gilbert Herdt’s work on the imaginative possibilities of the “third gender” suggests another reading of Naven transvestism whereby such performances indicate the “abandonment of absolute contrast” (Herdt 1994: 41; see Halberstam 1999).

J. K. Gibson-Graham’s feminist approach to political economy echoes these moves in its criticism of what is called the overdetermination of spaces, a capitalocentric, analytical tunnel vision that fails to see spaces of opportunity and alternative imaginaries (2006). Debates on imagination’s preconditions again insist on the apparent freedom offered by indeterminacy (Rapport 2015; Sneath, Holbraad, and Pederson 2009). And just as imagination projects forward, so radical indeterminacy has also been described as a requirement for hope (Miyazaki 2005 following Bloch 1995) and the crucial *conditio sine qua non* for an ethical stance of openness. Roughly speaking then we are faced with analytical approaches to indeterminacy that counsel only either hope or despair.

We end this section with Felix Ringel (2014) and Stef Jansen (2016) who both highlight an emerging strand of ethnographic writing that privileges the social significance of indeterminacy. Critically engaging with Hirokazu Miyazaki and Ernst Bloch’s analyses of hope, Jansen notes that recent anthropological attention to indeterminacy has allowed ethnographers to embrace global capitalism’s apparent “loss of direction” and to create new methodologies that consider the significance of exclusion and the emic inability to predict change through time (Miyazaki 2010: 250; see Bloch [1959] 1986; Ringel 2012). However, both Ringel and Jansen observe that many anthropological

engagements with this topic deploy a Deleuzian analytic that overly fetishizes processes of “emergence and becoming” (e.g., Anderson 2007; Biehl and Locke 2010; Pedersen 2012). Such ethnography can too easily settle for “uncovering and valorising sparks of indeterminacy” instead of interrogating how they are formed and where they lead. Like Jansen and Ringel, what concerns us are the social effects produced by these sparks, which we trace by emphasizing ethnographic rather than analytical normativities. In the final section, we describe what our ethnographies of indeterminacy reveal.

Conclusion: Ethnographies of Indeterminacy, Waste and Value

We approach indeterminacy and its relationships with the material and metaphors of waste and value through two closely related steps, both of which draw on Hegel’s idea of recognition and Adorno’s negative dialectics.

Our first step is to explore indeterminacy largely as an issue of classification and mis- or failed recognition of that which cannot be easily incorporated into classificatory systems. We do this by interrogating how the mechanisms of power and resistance play out in classification and indeterminacy; how people negotiate mundane knowns and unknowns and confront foreshortened futures; and how the state reads its citizens and is in turn read—or dissolves into illegibility that is resistant to encounter. And while indeterminacy can foreclose engagement with a person or institution that cannot be discerned, or can create a space for personal rule and corruption (Reeves 2015), there are instances where people may embrace ambiguity via a multiplicity of meaning, refuse categories, and find other ways of counting outside dominant classificatory modes (Alexander and Kesküla this volume). One implication of rejecting an imposed category is that the system or imagined totality that gives that category meaning is also implicitly rejected. Thus, the unhappiness of both the expatriate Russians in Eeva Kesküla’s chapter and the repatriated Kazakhs in Catherine Alexander’s are caught up in their repudiation not only of how they are treated, but also of the system, or the new totality, in which they find themselves. They are denied full citizenship rights but some at least, in turn, deny the state (see Simpson 2014). While the power difference scarcely needs to be spelled out in such reciprocal refusal, there are suggestions that the state also needs, in part, these recalcitrant people. The integrity of the modern nation-state and the modern human subject is challenged by, and yet requires open-endedness and mobility.

This might suggest a structuralist approach to categorization and its antinomies, returning to Douglas’s classic definition of dirt as matter out of place (1966). The power of her observation is that a bewildering array of “wastes,” and the visceral revulsion that may accompany them, are culturally determined. However, thinking with the third term, *indeterminacy*, which may be negatively or positively valued, or neither (suspension), or both, complicates this approach

and reveals (as in Thorleifsson and Eriksen's contribution) that quite different instances are merged and lost in the category of "the anomaly." At the same time, emphasizing those or that which is expelled may reveal contestation over who and what represents order. Finally, instances where an element may fit with the dominant order, but excessively so, or simultaneously possess wanted and unwanted characteristics, can threaten to shatter categories from within (Alexander this volume).

Our second step is the familiar anthropological argument that indeterminacy, as a mode of apprehension and being, can complicate modernity's grand teleology. We focus on areas where movement, change, and transformation are not always predictable or follow more modest ambitions than state-driven narratives of an ultimate social or organizational whole to which progress is being made. But there are also instances where people neither resist nor counter teleological visions, even after the collapse of animating state regimes. Rather they may hope for the return of such projects, grieve their passing, act as though they still exist, or simply transpose the logic to a new context. Three related insights from negative dialectics follow.

The first is that state (or indeed international agency development) projects are typically based on a teleological vision of time; after all "to project" implies just such an engagement with the future. But change may be unpredictable, rarely proceeding according to a predetermined telos. This echoes interventions from Science and Technology Studies (e.g., Bijker 1995; Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch 2012; and Latour 1996) that trace the contingency of successful technological developments, inventions, and the happy (but not inevitable) coalescence of enabling factors in the successes or failures that later come to seem predestined (see Ringel this volume for a comparable account in the case of urban infrastructure). Some ideas succeed and others fail to be taken up.

By focusing on lives outside formal scaffolds of developmental progress, we describe instances where people have been expelled from or denied full participation in mainstream societies, have embraced formlessness and open-endedness, or settled for getting by, muddling through, and attending to the job at hand. We also include those who align themselves with previous grand narratives and lost visions. It is perhaps worth noting that contemporary institutions increasingly expect employees to have their own life/career projects carefully articulated with the greater whole; those who do not subscribe to, or find themselves tangential to the latest institutional or state developmental mission or vision, are increasingly ripe for being "managed out" or cast as wasted (see Bauman, 2003).

But ethnographic attention allows us to see that a Baumanesque classification of outcasts as wasted lives is to fail to see gradation and difference, where tactics of imagination and reclamation may come into play, where value may be recovered both from rejected materials and by people whose labor is excessive for a profitable enterprise. Simply to call these wasted lives is to recapitulate analytically the expulsion into indistinction that modernity has inflicted on

them. Rather, we suggest that, while regimes of modernity expel lives, materials, and places as excessive, the tension and often ambiguities of these indeterminate states can allow meaning and value to be remade, suspended, or lost. If capitalism itself is predicated on imagined futures, (Beckert 2016), then so, in theory, people can reimagine their own futures.

The next insight derived from negative dialectics is that progression to another state (whether a future condition, revaluation, or reincorporation) is not to be assumed. This is most easily seen in the complex relationships between waste and value that are imagined, practiced, experienced, and theorized. Thus waste can be matter out of place, its expulsion a restorative act of ordering. We know enough now to recognize that one person's or system's waste, might be valuable in another instance (Reno 2009). But one implication of the emphasis on structural/contextual understandings of waste (changing a waste object's context can mean it is suddenly valuable) is that it appears as though wastes invariably contain the seed of value if they can only be placed again or converted, and indeed that all valued objects and people in turn contain the potential to be wasted. The relationship between waste and value is more complex and varied than that implied by the "matter out of place" maxim. One is not necessarily the simple inversion of the other. This is where indeterminacy provides a useful third term. Wastes can be indeterminate (value never) in the sense of a forgotten or postponed limbo, unattached in terms of property rights. Or indeterminacy can simply be a state where either, neither, or both negative waste and positive value can be discerned or imagined.

Examples of such an imbrication of waste and value, or rather, the precondition of an act or representation of wasting to release value are found in Anna Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015) and Sara Peña Valderrama's work on carbon sink accounting (2016). In the former, intensive industrial logging renders the land unable to support life except for one kind of fungus that thrives in such territory—and turns out to be a prized delicacy. Hope appears among capitalism's ruins.

Peña Valderrama illustrates another kind of intertwining of waste and value via a carbon sink project in Madagascar, which gathered weight and funding thanks to fallow land being constructed by project officials as both unrecoverable and potentially recoverable waste. An imagined future scenario of degradation from slash-and-burn cultivation is pictured as being "avoided" or "offset" through the project's reforestation activities. This accounting legerdemain created the fallows as essentially indeterminate, creating one kind of value via carbon credits. But this is not a hopeful story: the farmers who were literally cast out from their lands are effectively wasted. The politics of such accounting techniques are that different parties enjoy the benefits and suffer the losses.

Wastes are not simply transformed into value in these acts. Rather, the condition of indeterminacy can be seen as a mode between, or as encompassing, waste and value. In some cases, it is a threatening, negative force, sometimes translated into wastelands and waste people, sometimes a necessary imaginary

to allow the economic, rehabilitative value of an alternative route to be realized, but also exists as a mode of limbo or suspension that may never be resolved, recombined, or incorporated. This in-betweenness operates temporally as well as spatially.

Engaging with emic ideas of worth uncovers contested ideas of what constitutes waste and value in a given ethnographic moment. Crucially, the moment of apparent transition from waste to value may remain unresolved or indeterminate. This is the moment that interests us. We include in this idea, as one example, lands that have been irrevocably polluted and stripped into sterility by industrial mining or the toxic chemical by-products of value production.¹³ Abandonment or containment are typical responses, the latter sometimes in the hope of a future technology appearing that is able to undo toxicity. Again, people may articulate a sense of being left behind by rapid and extreme social change, for whom there is less a sense of “progress toward,” than daily routines of getting by, a modest intentionality. Again, we sound a note of caution about taking such lives as intrinsically those of either resistance or oppression. Some ethnographic studies suggest marginalized people may disregard any time but the present, subverting the rather Protestant notion of the present as a site of suffering to be overcome through careful planning. In this model, marginalized people resist by performatively stating that the true domain of suffering is the future, mitigated by the impulsive act of living for the “now” (Day, Papataxiarchis, and Stewart 1999: 2). Fatalism does not always lead to present impetuosity, or a positive emic take on it.

The final inspiration we take from negative dialectics is that apparent “fragments” are not necessarily part of, nor destined to be incorporated into a whole. Many of our contributions explore tensions between imagined totalities (e.g., nation-states) and mundane experiences. Our chapters speak to an unpredictable world, partly apprehensible, where the multiple ordering regimes of modernity rely on the constant production and expulsion of putative excess. Many of the essays in this collection suggest a means of representing and of being in the world as fragments, non-unitary subjects, and things, with incomplete perspectives and understandings (Candea 2010; Strathern 1991). In what follows we outline our chapters’ main contributions to understanding indeterminacy ethnographically.

The first three chapters explore open-endedness in quite different contexts, each of which reveals tensions, or surprises, between ways of knowing and managing (landfill containment, defining people, urban planning) and material or human refusals to conform to such determinate visions. Thus suspended fragments in a North American landfill generate unpredictable contamination (Reno); British trans artists’ embrace of mutability in life and work inhibits access to rights through formal recognition (Gonzalez-Polledo); German postindustrial infrastructure is successively planned, redundant, and repurposed (Ringel). The following three chapters examine demographic politics from complementary angles, how internal and external others (Roma and

Travellers) are marked as indeterminate waste in Norway (Thorleifsson and Eriksen); how Russian miners who were “left behind” after the end of the Soviet Union in Estonia and Kazakhstan now find themselves unvalued (Kesküla); and how repatriated Kazakhs in Kazakhstan are simultaneously welcomed and rejected as excessive to the country’s enterprise (Alexander). As many of these chapters uncover, one form of indeterminacy, whether imposed or embraced, often creates others. Our final chapter explores this explicitly through people classed as surplus labor in the Philippines, who now work as waste pickers (Schober). Despite the range of contexts, certain common themes appear, as the following sketches out.

The will to control through fixity, numbering, containment, and classifications, is typically manifested through the modern state, which expels, forcibly assimilates, or “digests” in Cathrine Thorleifsson and Thomas Hylland Eriksen’s striking metaphor (see also O’Brien 2003), those who do not fit. But as Thorleifsson and Eriksen show for the Roma in Norway and Elisabeth Schober for waste pickers, one means of doing this is by imagining indeterminate wastes that migrate across domains linking wayward pollution, chaotic material wastes, and unclean people that together threaten the literal and metaphorical health of the body politic. Shifting perspective shows different responses.

Schober shows how waste pickers contest classifications of “surplus” or “wasted” labor by remaking their lives, redetermining the discards of others into a valuable resource, locating ever finer intervals in the value chain where most see only indecipherable waste. In this way, they demand formal recognition of their lives and labor. Moreover, she highlights the failure of terms such as *precarity* and *wagelessness* to capture the nuances of how people live through, off, and alongside processes of capitalism. The trans artists described by Elena Gonzalez-Polledo experience the politics of recognition and indeterminacy quite differently. Seeking in their lives and art to escape formal determinacy, they find access to rights and resources denied and may strategically move in and out of accepting “labels” and medico-legal models in order to subsist. Thus the politics of recognition and redistribution merge in the tension between wanting recognition but not codification. Ringel’s description of the unanticipated ruins of industrial infrastructure, which actively inhibits future municipal development, is neatly offset by a group of residents in a rundown region who value their houses’ dilapidation as a means of resisting gentrification. Ringel’s point, as urban infrastructure is rendered superfluous then repurposed, is that, with each new direction, indeterminacy only appears as a retrospective point of surprise.

Both Kesküla and Alexander’s ethnographies illustrate people mourning the classificatory frameworks offered by former modernist states for the social, moral, and monetary value they once conferred. In the former account, Russian miners find they are no longer a distinct category of prized worker but lumped together with other unvalued manual workers, even though the product of the miners’ labor, energy, is vital for the national enterprise. Their sense of

dislocation is partly expressed through constant comparison with other workers, ethnic groups, lands, and times. They fit with none of them.

Joshua O. Reno's focus on the fragment reminds us that most analytical approaches fail to account for the part that belongs to no whole nor has a trajectory other than material decay. Not all wastes are ripe for conversion to value. Such present-oriented moments reappear in Ringel's account. The landfill serves as both metaphor and case study of the indeterminacies that emerge from techniques of control. Attempts to manage unruly wastes through containment are always incomplete as leachate and gas escape. Essentially indeterminate, biogas can only be partly trapped and converted to value. For an emergent politics of indeterminate wastes, the question is not whether they can be known or not, but if they can be known enough to act upon: a matter of degree instead of binary determination.

Thus we explore what happens when binary categories or ideas as containers of meaning clash with complex lives and materials that overflow such attempts to hold them fast. Repatriated Kazakhs, for example, seem to show an excess of qualities that demarcate "Kazakhness," potentially diminishing other Kazakhs by comparison. Further, they seem to conflate distinct times, embodying the past in the present, and remind unwilling neighbors that population and labor force numbers also refer to human beings. Numbers and categories, Alexander suggests, are essentially indeterminate proxies for reality. As both Reno and Alexander show, excessive regulation can create gaps between laws that, like anomalies, are often profoundly ambiguous.

Individuals that fall between or outside categories, or find their specificity denied in generic classifications, may strive for formal recognition and attendant rights, or celebrate being outside formal schema, or move between these modes. Anomalous figures may be rejected by dominant societies (as with the Roma in Norway), or brutally made the same (as with Travellers in Norway), may lack the relations that make them a social person, but may also be symbolically potent (the miners) or, as an entrepreneur, may seize the value lurking in indeterminate spaces and times.

The figure of the entrepreneur, who appears in many of the following chapters, incarnates the need for attention to ethnographic normativities. Often an anomalous figure¹⁴ herself, the entrepreneur can be cast as the heroic agent of innovation and capitalist value creation precisely by exploiting indeterminacy qua ignorance.¹⁵ Alternatively, she can be morally derided for mere speculation, or reconfiguration, failing to produce any genuine added value, or indeed brokering across spheres that should legally and morally remain distinct, as in the case of rent seeking.

One last observation, before we move to our chapters. Arguably ethnography is fundamentally concerned with the mundane spaces where social rules are encountered, negotiated, modified, resisted, reincorporated, appropriated, and so on. Fenella Cannell's ethnography of power and negotiation in a Philippine community makes this explicit (1999), but this is also the

indeterminate space of ethnography itself more broadly. Further, “suspension,” Choy and Zee suggest, “tethers to the ethnographer” a method, or a procedure, that works to render staid common sense into an opening of possible worlds: ethnography constitutes a work of suspension, of assumptions and disbelief, one that not only describes worlds but holds them in such a way as to allow them to settle into different arrangements, possibilities.” (2015: 212). Indeterminacy is at the core of ethnographic engagement.

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Notes

1. Mary Douglas was, of course, discussing dirt not waste, and the two are not always synonymous: wastes can be amorphous, unrecognizable, and hence unclassifiable; or they can be the very stuff of classificatory order, as anyone who sorts recyclates for collection knows. However, there is by now considerable literature where the equation between waste and dirt is made in a way that stays true to her overall argument (as Joshua Reno helpfully pointed out, pers. comm.)

2. Michael Thompson (2017) presented an analogous critique of Douglas's thesis by challenging the waste/value binary with a third term *rubbish*, an indeterminate but still, in his framework, a socially-constructed category.
3. Ambiguity is of course a mainstay in literary studies from William Empson's classic study onward. Note, too, in part homage Namwali Serpell's *Seven Modes of Uncertainty* (2016), which suggests that uncertainty is an essentially ethical stance, allowing freedom.
4. Thus, for example, a society that rids itself of a perceived social poison—unwanted people—is, in that act, providing the antidote or medicine to that ill.
5. There are others, of course. For example, Sarah Green's (2005) account of the Balkans that describes external discourse that insists "the region is fluidity and indeterminacy personified, right on the surface, a completely explicit fog, as it were" (2005: 12). It challenges modernist accounts of statist drives to clarity, but are also partly reproduced locally, and, as Green suggests, partly constitute lived experience. Both Green's book and Matei Candea's (2010) on Corsican identity, which also works through external and internal insistence on indeterminacy and partiality, are themselves presented as provisional, open-ended, and fragmentary.
6. Thus despite the fact that capitalism and state socialism have been ideologically portrayed as opposites, Susan Buck-Morss emphasized how, in the twentieth century, these two forms of organization were profoundly entwined, sharing eighteenth-century philosophical roots and a passionate belief in the emancipatory potential of industrial production for creating mass utopia (2000). Earlier, Keith Hart flagged the ideological projection of difference between capitalism and socialism during the Cold War while they had never been closer in practice (1992).
7. Note also Andrew Sanchez and Christian Strümpell (2014) for a different setting of prescriptive Marxist thought.
8. Although Bataille uses both *surplus* and *excess* in *The Accursed Share* (1991), there is a sense that it is the latter, as superabundance, which forces expenditure, or wasting-as-luxury (or sacrifice and war). Excess is the accursed share.
9. See Charles Taylor's 1992 account of contemporary political demands for recognition on the grounds that recognition and identity are fundamentally linked.
10. Or highlight alternative classificatory systems and discursive formations historically (Foucault 1994) and through ethnographic comparison.
11. Article 1 of *The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* defines a refugee as someone who has fled his or her country "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" and sets out the legal obligations of governments toward such people.
12. Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous paradox for rule-following encapsulates some of the experiences explored in our chapters of attempts to engage with the state and its representatives: "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here" (2001 [1953]: 69). We are grateful to Diana Vonnak for this observation.
13. Thus one might see David Harvey's concept of capitalism's spatial fix (1981) as having a second movement. If the first is to acquire more space, more territory to fuel the constant expansion inherent to capitalism, then the irrecoverable wasting of land from unsustainable resource extraction also drives the "need" to acquire more resource-rich land (see also Gidwani 2013).
14. This is taken further in Tsing's analysis of the potent imaginary of "the entrepreneur" in supply chain capitalism where sweatshop workers may hopefully imagine themselves as potentially rich entrepreneurs (2013: 159) and, in recruiting family members, further blur the fuzzy line between self- and superexploitation (2013: 167n28).

15. This, of course, as Joshua Reno points out (pers. comm.), is the fetishized ideal type of neoliberal ideology whereas (see Birch 2015), arguably, the monopoly capitalist who undergirds global capitalism is concerned with determinacy, predictability, and limiting risk where possible.

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