

## NATUREWORK AND ITS USES: OF TRUCKS AND BUTTERFLIES

*Scene One: A truck zooms down the freeway, the window rolls down, an arm appears, and fingers reach out to toss a can from the moving vehicle. The can sails through the air and lands along the edge of the highway with a small crash. Maybe it's a beer bottle or a cigarette butt. Or an entire ashtray full of cigarette butts. Whatever it is, it lands on the side of the road as the truck quickly disappears over the horizon. The object becomes part of a jagged mosaic of broken glass shards, cigarettes, cans, miscellaneous objects considered trash, and—as I once learned doing a highway cleanup—wings from migrating butterflies that can't compete with the cars speeding down the highway. The delicately beautiful but damaged butterfly wings are a small, well-kept secret in a roadside no-man's land that stretches for miles.*

Capek SM. The Social Construction of Nature: Of Computers, Butterflies, Dogs, and Trucks. In: Gould KA, Lewis TL, editors. Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology. New York: Oxford University Press; 2009. p. 12

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use to understand the world...  
tionally and morally reassuring.

Let's go back to the truck, the highway, the arm, and the flying can. How might the concept of naturework help us to interpret this situation? In fact, many things have to be in place for the can to be tossed out the window. First, one has to feel separated from the place where the can will fall. If this piece of earth is considered just "dirt" or empty space at the edge of a highway, not an alive organic material that interacts with us at every moment, it is easy to see it as a kind of trash receptacle or sponge to absorb waste. This is also not likely to be a place where one's loved ones live. Second, one has to assume that he or she is not accountable for the act of "trashing." Speeding down the highway, it is easy to leave behind any thought of consequence or accountability and to assume that no one will care, or at least no one will know who threw the can (notice that this also implies that we are accountable at most to another human being—perhaps a police officer—rather than the ecosystem or the Earth's biosphere). Third, in not giving this action much thought, one has to assume it is fairly trivial (as the word "littering" suggests). No thought is given to cumulative impacts because "nature" will clean it up, there is plenty of space in the trash can, or there are better things to worry about on a given day. All of these assumptions add up to one conclusion: *It doesn't matter.*

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ibid, p. 14

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## 3 hypothetical causes for littering

- Feeling separated from the earth or from a specific spot
- Assuming one is not accountable
- Thinking it is a trivial action, not requiring much thought

➔ Definitely a job for ethicists!

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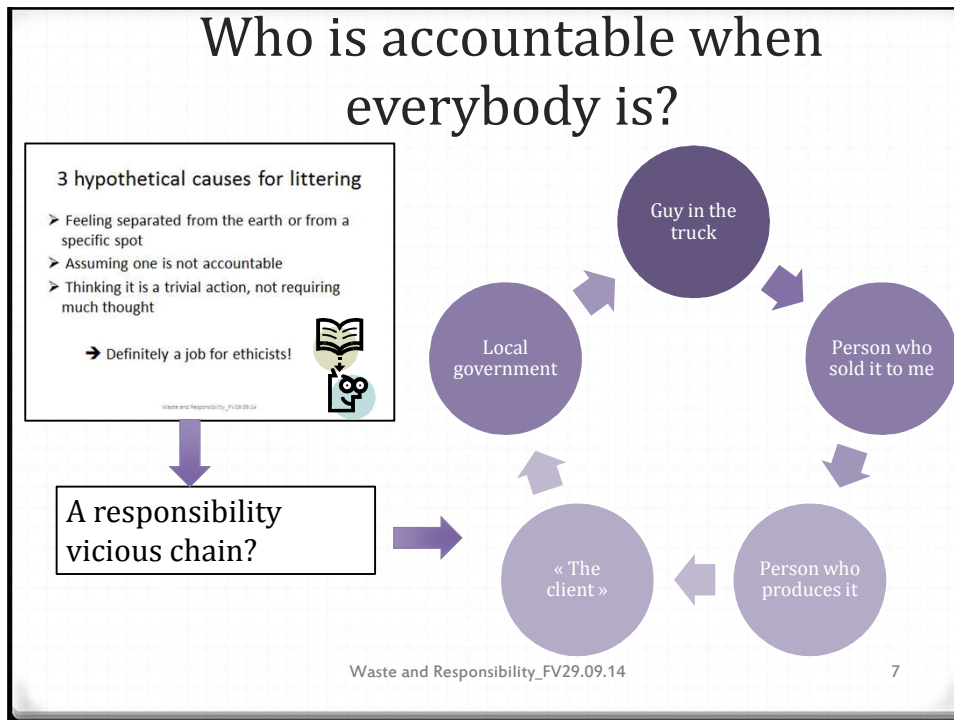
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## The « Ethics of Waste »: what's already out there?

- Hawkins G. *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; 2006.
- PHYSICALITY/FAILURE
  - Technology is supposed to protect us: experiencing trash's physicality is seen as a failure
  - "The destruction of paradise happened not when Adam took a bit of the apple but when he dropped the core on the ground."
- PLEASURE
  - Cleaning emphasizes identity: boundary me vs not me becomes clearer (cf. Mary Douglas)
  - Pleasure of recycling for the virtuous self: the pleasure of obedience to a moral rule

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## Investigating responsibility: the case of non-recyclers

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## Some background



- Institutional context: Partnership ECL (Ecole Centrale de Lyon) and Eco-Emballages
- Research group on « Le geste de tri » (*the sorting out gesture?*) as a « free gesture »
- Eco-Emballages: 13% of « non-recyclers ». Mostly demographic data about them.

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## Four kinds of « free gestures »

- Citizen gestures: being registered on elections lists, going to vote, volunteering, participating to demonstrations (very important in the French context ; ) ), etc.
- Donations: Giving money to organizations
- « Self gift »: blood/organ donor, etc.
- Eco-friendly practices: carpooling, compost, energy consumption, etc.

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## The « non-recyclers profile » project

- Objective: answer the question « do non-recyclers have a particular concept of responsibility that expresses itself in other daily life activities? »
- Does it seem like a sound survey to you for addressing that issue? What would you change/add?
- References, please!!!
  - On shared responsibility and accountability perception
  - On « free gestures »

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