

“One Man’s Garbage is Another Man Person’s Good Ungarbage”: *Trailer Park Boys*,  
Adorno, and Trash Aesthetics

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## Abstract

Using Theodor Adorno's aesthetic, economic, and cultural theories, this essay examines the Canadian television show *Trailer Park Boys* (2001-present) under the broad theme of "trash aesthetics." Set in the fictional Sunnyvale Trailer Park near Halifax, Nova Scotia, *TPB* mobilizes "trailer trash" stereotypes to tell the stories of a marginalized community of people rendered economically and cultural superfluous by the forces neoliberal globalization. The landscape of Sunnyvale is strewn with trash and soon-to-be trash, which often becomes appropriated by characters into useful commodities, causing garbage to have starkly different meanings within Sunnyvale. *TPB*'s portrayal of trash and its resulting "trash aesthetic" places garbage—what is normally hidden or "thrown away"—front and center, refusing to let "nature" or "the natural" be pristine or to let trash be forgotten. In this way, Sunnyvale becomes a place where the dialectic between nature and culture can become erased, presenting a potentially redemptive ethics and aesthetics to trash.

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In *Negative Dialectics*, Theodor Adorno makes the bold claim that “[a]ll post--Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage” (367). While writing off all culture as garbage is certainly hyperbolic, culture and garbage have one important theoretical commonality; both culture and garbage exist only by being labelled as such by humans, and consequently, both share the similarity of being dialectical opposites to “natural” phenomena. Although culture is typically a positive concept and garbage a conventionally negative concept, they are effectively two sides of the same coin, both the inevitable result of human creativity, and arguably, “progress.” In many ways, the Canadian television show *Trailer Park Boys* (2001-07) is both culture and garbage. Portraying the criminal escapades of poor, uneducated petty criminals, *Trailer Park Boys* mobilizes “trailer trash” stereotypes to tell the stories of a community of people who have been rendered a surplus population by the development of neoliberal capitalism, forcing them to find sustenance however they can, usually through petty crime. Their home, the fictional Sunnyvale Trailer Park located somewhere on the margins of Halifax, Nova Scotia, is a dilapidated and impoverished municipality covered in garbage but with a magnetic sense of community, refusing to allow its residents to ever leave their homes for good. As the unwanted “debris” of capitalism, the ethos and aesthetics of *Trailer Park Boys* embodies the ever growing piles of garbage mourned by Walter Benjamin’s Angel of History, borne away from Paradise on the unstoppable winds of so-called “progress.” *Trailer Park Boys* is a cultural product created directly from these garbage piles, portraying the consequences of the unstoppable winds blowing in the direction of “progress”: heaps upon heaps of garbage.

The spoiled landscapes and “trailer trash” stereotypes give *Trailer Park Boys* a unique “trash aesthetic,” starkly different from the pristine locations, landscapes, and bodies of a typical Hollywood film or a Parks Canada tourism advertisement. In Sunnyvale Trailer Park, garbage

has become part of the “natural” landscape and is simply a way of life, as many of its citizens earn money through various schemes involving garbage. However, by focusing on the ugly elements rather than the beautiful, *Trailer Park Boys*’s “trash aesthetic” of spoiled landscapes and “trashy” people has the effect of undermining the dialectic of nature and culture, refusing to allow the trash of capitalism to be located in a separate domain from nature. The effect of this “trash aesthetic” is a dramatic levelling of the dialectic of nature and culture; while the landscapes of *Trailer Park Boys* have been spoiled by ever growing piles of trash, these trash piles form the new “natural,” refusing to be swept under the rug so that carefully monitored enclaves of nature might remain pristine.

For Theodor Adorno and the other cultural critics of the Frankfurt School, the progress of industrial capitalism culminated in the development of culture industries, where cultural production no longer consisted of the creative production of unique and inspired cultural artefacts, but industrially produced copies designed to appeal to the lowest common denominator. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that “[a]ll mass culture under monopoly capitalism is identical” (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 95). Due to the sheer scale afforded to capitalists by developments in industrial production capacities as well the development of new technologies such as film and television after World War II, cultural products could be produced and reproduced on massive scales, rendering most culture a factory run of sameness. While traditional art and other cultural products such as sculptures and paintings could, in theory, always have been reproduced or copied, the ability of industrial technologies to create mass culture “present[ed] something new” for Walter Benjamin (218). For Benjamin, when an original work of art was “[c]onfronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority; not so vis a vis

mechanical reproduction” (220). The result of the mass mechanical reproduction of art and cultural products produced a fundamental change in “the reaction of the masses toward art... The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticised with aversion” (Benjamin 234). The ability for capitalists to produce culture on massive scales, in some sense, benefits both producers and consumers, as Wolfgang Fritz Haug explains:

[s]ince the vast majority of people can find no worthwhile goal within the capitalist system, the distraction industry appears to be a good investment for the system as a whole, as well as for competently run private capital. The need of those at the bottom to be distracted from this aimlessness meets the need of those at the top to distract attention from the dominance of the capitalist class interests (120).

This culture of sameness, distraction, and profit is where the Frankfurt School directed their broad and pessimistic critiques of mass culture under capitalism.

It is from this angle of contempt for the culture industries that Adorno makes the perhaps hyperbolic claim that “[a]ll post--Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage” (*Negative Dialectics* 367). While this claim presents a sweeping and perhaps exaggerated dismissal of modernity, the use of the term “garbage” gives a disposable and superfluous dynamic to culture. In this sense, Adorno sees post-Auschwitz culture as consisting of the production of products that are, in his estimation, artistically and intellectually empty and valueless. While these mass produced cultural products may have a function—distracting the masses and procuring profit—this very function is what should disqualify them from being considered culture. Adorno argues that the forms of post-Auschwitz culture that are circulated, such as film and television, tend to lack the sincere artistic qualities and intentions of traditional culture, and “the truth that

[the culture industries] are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce” (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 95). In this sense, Adorno views post-Auschwitz cultural production as involved in the production of meaningless kitsch and planned obsolescence, while the cultural criticism necessary to expose these problems is severely lacking. However, while Adorno has no qualms trashing modern mass culture, Adorno likewise sees classical culture<sup>1</sup> as bound for the landfill. For Adorno, “[s]ociety today has no use for art today and its responses to it are pathological. In this society, art survives as reified cultural heritage and as a source of pleasure for the box-office customer, but ceases to have relevance as an object” (*Aesthetic Theory* 22). In a process of mass forgetting, collective heritage has become “[n]eutralized and ready-made [and] traditional culture has become worthless today. Through an irrevocable process its heritage... has become expendable, to the highest degree, superfluous, trash” (“Cultural Criticism” 162). In place of traditional culture, late capitalist societies have substituted selfsame made-in-China junk for unique cultural artefacts, causing these traditional art objects to lose the relevance and meaning they once had. Taking both of these claims at face value, then, is to accept that under capitalism, culture on the whole has been tainted, its sacredness and meaning compromised by the profane interest of profit, rendering it essentially valueless, worthless, trash. The past has been discarded into the wastebin of history, and the culturally bankrupt and soon-to-be obsolescent cultural products that are being produced today are merely thinly veiled garbage passed off as culture, a cheap and disposable substitute that lacks the substance of its origins.

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<sup>1</sup> While I have deliberately selected passages from Adorno’s work that portray a convenient and totalizing split between “high” and “low” culture, Adorno elsewhere pushes back against such a convenient split between the popular and the intellectual. In a letter to Walter Benjamin, Adorno frames “high” and “low” culture as a dialectic, writing that the high and low are “torn halves of an integral freedom to which, however, they do not add up” as they both “bear the stigmata of capitalism” (129-30).

This comparison of culture with garbage has particular relevance when examined in light of Adorno's aesthetic writings. For Adorno, art is the subject of a dialectic of beauty and ugliness, and only a dialectic of the two within a certain piece of art can render it beautiful. Adorno's conceptions of ugliness and beauty bear many similarities to the nature/culture dialectic. For Adorno, ugliness emerges "from the principle of violent destruction that is at work when human purposes are posited in opposition to nature's purposes" (*Aesthetic Theory* 69). In this way, garbage, which poses existential threats to both nature and culture, becomes a "human purpose." However, contrary to a conservative conception of beauty as being constituted of elements that are entirely beautiful and free of garbage, Adorno argues that ugliness becomes vital to any representation of beauty, as the ugly "becomes in some higher sense beautiful because it has a function in an overall pictorial composition or because it helps produce a dynamic equilibrium" (*Aesthetic Theory* 68). Without some degree of ugliness, Adorno argues that art becomes relegated to the level of "sugary trash" or kitsch, which Adorno defines as "the beautiful minus its ugly counterpart." Without a certain levelness of ugliness, kitsch "becomes subject to an aesthetic taboo that in the name of beauty pronounces kitsch to be ugly" (*Aesthetic Theory* 71). In order for art to be beautiful, it must contain these very elements of the human—ugliness, destruction, garbage—to reflect the dialectic of beauty, lest it become kitch. It is here where the aesthetic groundwork for a "trash aesthetic" begins to emerge.

Just as Adorno views art as containing a dialectic of the ugly with the beautiful, Adorno likewise views art as reflecting a greater dialectic of nature and the domination of nature. For Adorno, art reflects a "dialectical tension between nature and domination of nature, a dialectic that seems to be of the same kind as the dialectic of society" (*Aesthetic Theory* 7). This dialectic of nature and domination over nature, aided by the technological developments of bourgeois

capitalism, necessarily leads to the domination of some human beings by others. As Lambert Zuidervaart explains,

[i]n the control of nature (*Naturbeherrschung*), [Adorno] says, control by nature over its human members gives way to control over nature by human beings, first through magic and myth, then through rational labour; the control of nature unfolds into the domination of some human beings over others, into suppression of nature within human beings, and into domination of all human beings by what they have made; and domination either will culminate in a catastrophe—the complete destruction of life—or will lead to a reconciliation that transcends control and domination via control and domination (Zuidervaart 84).

For Adorno, this dialectic of nature and domination of nature not only accounts for the current ecological crises caused by global capitalism, but also places a hard distinction between nature and culture under capitalism, inherently separating human societies from conceptions of the “natural.” Adorno argues that by condemning the ugly landscapes ruined by industry or garbage,

the bourgeois mind zeroes in on the appearance of the domination of nature at the precise juncture where nature shows man a facade of irrepressibility. That bourgeois condemnation therefore is part of the ideology of domination. This kind of ugliness will vanish only when the relation between man and nature throws off its repressive character, which is a continuation rather than an antecedent of the repression of man. Chances for such a change lie in the pacification of technology, not in the idea of setting up enclaves in a world ravished by technology (*Aesthetic Theory* 70).

For Adorno, the distinction between nature and culture, aided by the ideological commodification of nature through constructed nature enclaves such as national parks, perpetuates the dialectic of the domination of nature, which ultimately leads to humans dominating other humans.<sup>2</sup> In order to distance capitalist societies from the domination of nature, natural landscapes which have been upset by humans must be collectively reclaimed for their aesthetic value, and not merely cleaned up or beautified. Only by collectively viewing trashed landscapes as containing some type of redemptive beauty through their ugliness, then, can humankind move past this dialectic of domination and progressively combat the ecological crises it faces.

Garbage, one of the prime symptoms of every ecological crisis, is inseparable from humanity. However, while garbage is often implicated in the rhetoric of some type of short term crisis,<sup>3</sup> the reality is that garbage has been produced by all human societies throughout history; as John Knechtel notes, “[trash’s] production is rooted in survival, represented in every culture, and magnified by economic success. To purge the earth of garbage would be to destroy our own reflection” (9). Although few human societies have looked at garbage favourably, garbage has proved to be a permanent aspect of human life; despite our best attempts to eliminate waste from production and consumption, as Barry Allen rightly observes, “[t]hermodynamics may suggest otherwise” (207). With a complete elimination of garbage impossible, humans have always been

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<sup>2</sup> This ideological domination over nature leading to the domination of some people by others was epitomized by the Nazis, with their rhetoric of “natural” racial hierarchies and the resultant “trash disposal” that occurred in the form of ethnic cleansing.

<sup>3</sup> A prominent example of garbage constructed through rhetorical crisis is Vance Packard’s 1961 book *The Waste Makers*. Despite its proximity in time to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), *The Waste Makers* speaks little of ecological crisis, but rather of cultural crisis. Packard’s populist and alarmist critique glorifies the “good old days” when products were manufactured with durability and quality and bemoans the change in American manufacturing culture towards planned obsolescence. The waste problem for Packard lies more in the decline of manufacturing standards with planned obsolescence than with the ecological problems associated generation of vast amounts of garbage from disposable products.

forced to “deal” with the garbage we produce, managing it, administrating it, and hiding it from sight, which always incurs a cost. As Rathje and Murphy note, garbage has typically been dealt with in four different ways: “dumping it, burning it, turning it into something that can be useful (recycling), and minimizing the volume of material goods - future garbage - that comes into existence in the first place” (Rathje and Murphy 33). While dumping waste and garbage in the streets, rivers, and oceans<sup>4</sup> is still practiced in many places around the world, many cities have realized that bacteria and illness tend to follow garbage and have taken to disposing of garbage in landfills. In fact, the Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island, New York, was, at one point in time, the largest man made structure on earth (Rathje and Murphy 4). Despite its shortcomings, placing garbage in landfills has become the most popular method of garbage administration today. Burning garbage produces harmful pollutants, making it less than ideal, and while popular recycling movements have made progress, according to Judd Alexander, the type of trash that has experienced the greatest growth in the last 20 years is “miscellaneous non-durable goods;” single use disposable items designed with planned obsolescence in mind (Alexander 18). Despite attempts to limit the production of garbage, the amount of garbage produced by humans paradoxically grows, demanding more and more effort to be spent administering it.

Garbage has a unique and ironic way of revealing social class. On the one hand, the metrics which are typically used to identify high standards of living, such as GDP and HDI, are tied to greater production of garbage; countries with higher GDP’s tend to produce more waste

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<sup>4</sup> A much publicised story leading up to the 2016 Olympics in Rio was the poor quality of the water in the surrounding ocean due to the dumping of raw sewage into the ocean. The Associated Press reported that the amount of viruses found in the bodies of water to be used for the open water swimming, sailing, and rowing events to be 1.7 million times the level considered safe in the United States and Europe (Barchfield). However, in an ironic twist, rather than spending money cleaning up their waterways or installing sewage treatment plants, Brazil’s troubled government built walls along many highways near the Olympic venues to hide the sight of their urban poor from tourists, effectively sweeping their “human trash” under the rug.

per person than countries with lower GDP's (Brown 48). However, on the other hand, highly developed countries also have the luxury of being able to worry about waste reduction and efficiency, while structurally underdeveloped countries do not have the same privileges when developing their economies. As D. Paul Brown explains,

developed nations have learned to respond to the negative realities of excessive waste generation and have undertaken steps to mitigate and reduce waste...

Developing nations have tended to set their priorities on development and many have ignored the realities of the negative consequences of industrialization and increased growth which are associated with modernization (51)

Within developed countries, garbage likewise reveals a class division. Traditionally, the privilege to waste things belonged only to the rich, and as Greg Kennedy comments, “[f]or either leisure or consumption to persuasively demonstrate wealth, they must involve excess” (17). However, as Gillian Whiteley notes, a new type of targeted consumer class has recently emerged called “LOHAS” (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability). “Lohasians,” typically affluent individuals concerned with the environment, are marketed products such as “eco-tourism, organic/recycled products, environmentally-friendly appliances, houses built using renewable resources and energy, socially responsible investment, green transport,” usually carrying a premium price as a concession for some type of positive environmental impact (Whiteley 21). However, while the rich work to reduce their “ecological footprints,” the less affluent lack the privileged economic positions to worry about reducing consumption.<sup>5</sup> As Judd Alexander notes, “the largest

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<sup>5</sup> While recycling tends to be associated with new technologies and the spread of the the affluent LOHAS lifestyle, many of the urban poor worldwide engage in recycling as a means of survival, and Rathje and Murphy argue that these urban scavengers and ragpickers could be construed as recyclers. In Cairo, an urban community of trash pickers referred to as the *zabbaleen*, which literally means “garbage people” in Egyptian Arabic, survive by scavenging trash and processing it into usable materials. While the efficiency

producers of waste are not the most affluent citizens” (15). Lacking the economic security to worry about reducing their waste, the poor often end up paradoxically producing more garbage than the rich. For example, studying garbage in different neighbourhoods in Milwaukee and Tucson, Rathje and Murphy noted that in lower income areas, families consistently bought small sized packages of everything from cereal, to laundry detergent, to canned food, while more affluent families purchased “economy size” packages. The result of this is, as Rathje and Murphy note, a “terrible irony,” as “the poor end up throwing away more packaging per ounce of useful product than the affluent do” (66). This ironic tendency of the poor to produce more waste than the rich poses a fundamental challenge to global development, as developing countries in the process of capitalist development become held to a different standard than those already highly developed.

While trash is an inevitable aspect human existence, precisely what constitutes trash will always be open to contestation. Greg Kennedy argues that waste exists as a result of “the inevitable human habit of evaluation,” and as long as human societies collectively make distinctions “between positive and negative, we will always face waste” (2). The socially defined nature of garbage presents a transient quality to trash, as there quickly becomes no material that is intrinsically trash; as Walter Moser notes, “the same object may be considered garbage in one system and a useful, functional cultural artifact in another” (Moser). For Michael Thompson, garbage’s lack of essential character presents the ability for garbage to transition to non-garbage based on a relatively simple theory of social value, which Thompson calls “rubbish theory.” Thompson’s rubbish theory operates on the assumption that objects can be divided into two categories: “transient” objects, objects that decrease in value, and “durable” objects, objects that

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rate of their recycling systems rivals that of many developed countries, their recycling stems not from environmental concerns, but from the need to survive in the capitalist market (193).

increase in value. Thompson then proposes an intermediary category between transience and durability: rubbish. As a transient object becomes used, its exchange value eventually becomes zero, rendering it rubbish. However, at some point in time, the object can gain a sufficient level of rarity and demand that it can emerge from a “valueless limbo” and be transferred into durability (*Rubbish Theory* 9-10). However, while the precise coordinates of what constitutes waste are socially defined, the factor that distinguishes garbage from non-garbage is its objection to the smooth running of systems. Borrowing from Slavoj Žižek, Sarah A. Moore suggests thinking of waste as a “short circuit” or “parallax object,” which Žižek defines as “a faulty connection in the network—faulty, of course from the standpoint of the network’s smooth functioning” (*Parallax* ix). For Moore, it is not waste’s universal material qualities, but its ability to disrupt the smooth functioning of capitalist systems of progress that causes it to “disturb or disrupt sociospatial norms” (781).

While garbage is generally considered ugly, art made out of repurposed or reclaimed garbage actually has a vibrant history, from Marcel Duchamp’s objet trouvé movement of the 1910’s and 20’s (Whiteley 40) to the *Art of Assemblage* exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961 (Whiteley 42). Part of the allure of working with trash as a medium, Gillian Whiteley argues, is that garbage as art presents the perfect “postmodern and postcolonial metaphor” for artists, utilizing the filthy detritus of consumer culture to create unique artifacts that can seemingly only be appreciated by the truly “cultured” (7). Whiteley argues that art made of garbage is often viewed “as a disruptive, transgressive art form which engage[s] with narratives of social and political dissent, often in the face of modernist condemnation as worthless kitsch,” (8) allowing garbage art to act as “a signifier of urban alienation, disharmony with nature and social rupture” (40). In order to mobilize these resistant ethics and aesthetics of

trash, its substance must be reclaimed from the garbage can and its social value must be redefined from negative to positive; using Thompson's "rubbish theory" framework, what was once defined as disposable transience or worthless rubbish can become "durable," valuable, and unique simply by altering its social and symbolic context. What once disturbed the systems of production from smooth functioning can become reincorporated as an aesthetic commodity whose particularity and singular historical testimony renders it unique—while two candy bars may have originated from the same factory run, their wrappers will not have had identical lives, rendering each one unique. The uniqueness of appropriated trash gives it a sense of authenticity, allowing for a monetary monopoly on its uniquely crafted "trash aesthetic."

*Trailer Park Boys* utilizes the uniqueness of a "trash aesthetic" on a number of levels. Shot using handheld cameras at various Trailer Parks in and around Halifax, Nova Scotia, *TPB* offers a non-normative (but in some ways, more realistic) depiction of life on the margins of Canada during the neoliberal period. In contrast to the refined aesthetics of many contemporary North American television shows and films portraying lifestyles well beyond the means of the average North American film viewer, *Trailer Park Boys* portrays a diverse cast of characters whose lifestyles are below that of the average cinema goer, and in place of chiseled abs, beautiful landscapes, and penthouse suites, *Trailer Park Boys* offers up an impoverished community making their homes among trash.

*Trailer Park Boys* follows the misadventures of its three main characters, Ricky, Julian, and Bubbles, as they enlist the help of a motley crew of friends to concoct elaborate and often ridiculous illegal schemes of petty crime in order to get (relatively) rich. Pitted against "the boys" are alcoholic ex-cop Jim Lahey and his shirtless cheeseburger addicted assistant Randy, who represent the legitimate authority in their collective home of Sunnyvale Trailer Park. But

despite the quaint sounding nature of the name “Sunnyvale,” Patricia Hughes-Fuller argues that Sunnyvale is an “anti-pastoral” setting, in contrast to many other romanticised portrayals of Maritime life (105). Along with many trailers containing boarded up windows and derelict cars in the driveway, garbage is often seen blowing in the wind, and the park is patrolled by groups of “bottle kids”—young ruffians who throw glass bottles at everything and anything. Ricky lives in a beaten up old car dubbed “the shitmobile,” and Ray, Ricky’s father, literally lives at the municipal dump. *Trailer Park Boys* likewise portrays characters with non-desirable bodies. While Julian is often described as having big “sexy” muscles, many other characters have physical flaws that cause them to more so reflect the bodies of real people rather than the idealized bodies of Hollywood. Bubbles wears an enormous pair of coke bottle glasses in order to be able to see, and although Ricky’s pompadour is always (somehow) meticulously styled, the clothes he wears often have tears and stains. Moreover, Jacob and Trevor, who act as “jail cover” for the boys, are referred to as “twiggy aliens” for being tall and skinny, and Randy is perpetually shirtless and is often teased for having a “massive hairy gut.” A far cry from the penthouse apartments, corner offices, and white picket fenced houses in the suburbs presented in many television shows and films, *Trailer Park Boys* indeed crafts its aesthetic from the objects and people we normally avert our eyes from—trash.

The primary sense in which the characters of *Trailer Park Boys* embody cultural trash is through the mobilization of “white trash” and “trailer trash” stereotypes. Given the signifier “trash” being present directly in the name, the “trailer trash” stereotype has an ugliness and unseemliness as an essential component. The *OED* defines white trash as “[p]oor white people of low social status, especially when regarded as uneducated or uncultured” (OED Online).<sup>6</sup> Most

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<sup>6</sup> While “white trash” and “trailer trash” are sometimes used interchangeably, their historical meanings are distinct. While the *OED* traces “white trash” back to 1821, the earliest example of “trailer trash” is

scholars agree that the term “white trash” emerged from the Southern United states in the early 19th century, used by slaves and slaveholders alike as a derogatory descriptor to refer to poor whites who did not own slaves (Holtman 22). However, as Matt Wray notes,

[b]lacks may have invented and used the term *poor white trash* as an act of symbolic violence and micro political protest, but it was middle-class whites and elite whites who invested its meaning with social power, granting it the powers of social stigma and prejudice and enforcing its discriminatory effects with regard to labour (43).

By the 1920’s, the ethnic cleansing of “white trash” became the cause of eugenicists in the Southern United States, as would-be social engineers lobbied for laws that would force poor whites who were “morally unacceptable and socially and culturally inappropriate” to become forcibly sterilized in an attempt to weed out “unfit” or “feeble-minded” whites (Wray 68).

According to Janet Holtman, these attempts to cleanse the earth of “white trash” stemmed from the idea of “character.” Holtman argues that “white trash” has traditionally been viewed as a problem of “character” and “honour,” which was considered an essential and intrinsic quality (24). The notion of lacking “character” was not viewed as a redeemable problem that could be remedied, but as an essential cultural problem that could only be fixed through ethnic cleansing.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the cultural specificity of its origins, today “white trash” has lost its ties to the Southern United States and has become a racial slur used across North America to demarcate poor whites who not only lack wealth and intelligence, but more importantly, lack a perceived level of culture and whiteness. As Matt Wray summarizes, the stereotype of “white trash”

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1943, with the primary difference being the “white” signifier (can “trailer trash” be non-white?). In this essay, the two terms will be used interchangeably, but their historical differences could be the inquiry of future research.

<sup>7</sup> The term “ethnic cleansing” here carries much weight considering the fact that Adorno and the other writers of the Frankfurt School fled the Nazi ethnic cleansing.

“conjures images of poor, ignorant, racist whites: trailer parks and wife beaters, too many kids and not enough government cheese;” negative connotations indeed (1). For John Hartigan, the use of the term “white trash” insinuates a “contaminated identity” of whiteness, accusing its target of not having “the mainstream of proper class and racial identities among whites” (336) and suggesting that “the white racial order has been breached and compromised” (320). But while “white trash” conjures up a particular set of stereotypes, Hartigan argues that “there is no stable referent to the term,” and it is often deployed rhetorically to demarcate the social boundaries between the speaker and the lower class. Unlike other subaltern terms which people may proudly identify as, such as redneck, “white trash,” for Hartigan, is as much a rhetorical device as a cultural group, used by middle class or lower class whites to distinguish themselves from the very bottom of the social ladder (319). In demarcating others as “white trash,” Hartigan argues, middle class whites seek to perpetuate the view that “there are only a few extreme, dangerous whites who are really racist or violently misogynist, as opposed, for instance, to a notion that racism is an institutional problem pervading the nation and implicating all whites in its operation” (324). In demarcating the white other as “white trash,” poor whites are problematically marked as not living up the expectations of the white signifier, and by extension, not having culture.

Given the fact that the term “trailer trash” is often used as a synonym for sexism, racism, and intolerance, the ways in which racial and sexual tolerance function in Sunnyvale Trailer Park are quite remarkable. As Patricia Hughes--Fuller explains, the denizens of Sunnyvale have a high level of tolerance for both non--heteronormative sexual relationships and atypical (even problematic) racial identities. Despite the fact that J--Roc, the trailer park’s resident white rapper,

fashions his identity on the legitimate belief that he is black,<sup>8</sup> only park outsiders care to contest J--Roc's racial identity, and everybody from the within the park generally accepts his claim to blackness. Moreover, Randy and Jim Lahey's homosexual relationship is, on the whole, accepted by the citizens of Sunnyvale, despite Randy's previous relationships with women, their stark age difference, and their use of bizarre costumes often passed off as props for a play at the Blanford Recreation Center. Patricia Hughes--Fuller explains:

[w]hen, after being caught in flagrante delicto, Randy admits publicly that he and 'Mr. Lahey' have a gay relationship, none of their neighbours censure them. The latter is a striking example of how, in a context where a homophobic response from 'red-necked trailer trash' could be anticipated, not just gay sex, but outrageous and fetishistic gay sex (Randy is wearing a bumblebee costume and Lahey is dressed as—to quote Ricky —“Indianapolis Jones”) is accepted within the heteronormative community (103).

Rather than utilizing identity politics to divide the strange cast of characters, *TPB* unites its characters under a single thread: poverty. As Peter Thompson explains, the diverse sexual and racial identities of each character become subordinate to “the park's white trash culture, which the show presents as organic and genetically inherited” (198). However, despite the levels of tolerance exhibited by citizens of the park, Michele Byers notes that Sunnyvale is still dominated by white men, and while “[t]he trailer park may be a utopia where ‘race’ does not matter,... Julian is still the king, the paterfamilias of everyone in the park regardless of gender, race, and

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<sup>8</sup> J-Roc's appropriation of African-American rap culture gains another problematic layer when considering the bitter history of racial violence specific to Nova Scotia, such as the annexation of Africville in Halifax. J-Roc is the leader of a rap group called the “Roc Pile,” and often talks about how the “Roc Pile” acts as an ad-hoc family, despite the fact that he is the only member of the group that is white. While J-Roc attempts to present the “Roc Pile” as some type of post-racial utopia, it could likewise be read as the problematic colonization of black culture.

sexual orientation” (150). Moreover, despite the various non-normative family arrangements present in Sunnyvale (Sarah dates Cory and Trevor at the same time, Jim, Randy, and Barb, Jim’s ex-wife, all live together, etc.), Peter Thompson notes that Ricky has an “ultimately conservative understanding of the family” revolving around a monogamous and heterosexual patriarch (192). But, in response to stereotypes of racism, sexism, and intolerance associated with “trailer trash,” the characters of *Trailer Park Boys* demonstrate a level of tolerance that transcends their impoverished surroundings, almost as a form of solidarity against the economic forces that have placed them there.

While the “white trash” stereotype has a specific historical and cultural origin—the American South in the Antebellum period—today, discourses on “white trash” are typically dislodged from a specific geographic place onto an imagined space: the trailer park. Through their use in popular media, trailer parks have come to symbolize transience, mobility, marginality, and above all, crime; as Michele Byers notes, while trailer parks “have not always functioned as shorthand for poor white culture, this is likely the dominant interpretive space in which the trailer park is produced in mass culture today” (148). From *TPB*’s own Sunnyvale Trailer Park, to the trailer parks of Detroit in the Eminem’s *8 Mile* (2002), to the unmarked “Generic” of Camden County in *My Name is Earl* (2005-09), trailer parks have indeed become geographically dispersed throughout the collective imagination of North America, defined not by location, but by class. However, while trailer parks are often viewed as incubators of crime, this is not always the case; Barthe et al. analyzed crime rates and police call rates in low-income housing, subsidized public housing, and trailer parks, and concluded that trailer parks actually had a lower overall crime rate compared to low-income communities with traditional housing. While crime rates in trailer parks was comparable to the others, Barthe et al. noted that the

majority of reported crimes emerged from only a few particular trailer parks, and the majority of trailer parks have relatively small amounts of crime (15). However, it is not the benign view of trailer parks that shapes their representation in popular media. Along with crime, what unites the portrayal of trailer parks in popular media is their positions at both the economic and geographic margins of society, often being located in non-desirable locations far away from “prime real estate.” As Barthe et al. note, trailer parks are “usually located on the outskirts of a jurisdiction, and residents without the means to travel long distances will have limited opportunities to access... other parts of the jurisdiction.” As a result, they argue, trailer parks often “resemble small communities, and routine activities theory posits that most people remain proximal to their “living” areas, both out of convenience and the unease caused by visiting unfamiliar regions” (Barthe et al. 5). In this way, trailer parks are often portrayed as distinct communities that are separate from other parts of town due to both geographic and cultural distance, inhabiting the marginal spaces that are often less than ideal for living in.

While the trailer park carries with it assumptions of a culturally generic “white trash” aesthetic, *Trailer Park Boys* also contains distinct threads of cultural specificity rooted in its cultural background of Nova Scotia, creating a tension between the specific and the generic, the regional and the global. On the one hand, both Peter Thompson and Ryan Diduck see *Trailer Park Boys* as a structural descendant of both local Nova Scotian culture as well as the “hoser” archetype of “pan-Canadian pop culture” (Thompson 182). For Diduck, the hoser, a “culturally challenged and ambitionless archetype of the Canadian male protagonist,” can be traced from SCTV’s Bob and Doug McKenzie (1976-84), to *Goin’ Down The Road*’s Pete and Joey (1970), to *FUBAR*’s Dean and Terry (2002). Diduck argues that the bumbling and benign nature of the “hoser” can be read as “a typically Canadian reaction to American cultural hegemony” (Diduck).

However, as Thompson also notes, “[a]s much as *Trailer Park Boys* taps into the expression of this pan-Canadian ethos.., it is also rooted in the very specific geographical and cultural space of Halifax, Nova Scotia” (182). Many elements of the show, for Thompson, reflect the urban audience’s expectation of the “profane elements of Atlantic Canadian culture that were at the time (and perhaps remain now) shocking and counter to much of what the rest of the country thinks of the East Coast” (189). These subtle threads of Canadian and Nova Scotian culture give *TPB* a sense of cultural specificity, which contrasts the geographically generic setting of the trailer park.

While *Trailer Park Boys* can be read through these specific Canadian and Nova Scotian cultural lenses, a second and dialectically oppositional cultural trope runs through the show as well: the global. If the cultural threads of region and nation present a positive conception of culture (ie. having a culture), then the elements of the global present a negative conception of culture (not having a culture, having an “improper” or “generic” culture). Along with the “white trash” tropes, *Trailer Park Boys* presents a common cultural thread present in many places throughout the globe: the struggle to be economically viable from the margins of global capitalism. The impoverished situations of the denizens of Sunnyvale Trailer Park cause *TPB* to situate itself, for Patricia Hughes-Fuller, “in relation to *class* more than to either nation or region” (105). Confronted with the hegemonic cultural influences from outside the trailer park—what John McCullough calls the “McDonalds-ization” of culture—the regional cultural specificity of *TPB* is set against the vacuum of the global, aided in part by the influx of culture-less “white trash” stereotypes. The “white trash” aesthetic of the show, emerging from both cultural and economic forces originating from far outside of Nova Scotia, threatens the cultural specificity of Sunnyvale’s regional identity, seeking to replace it with the culture of

marginalized, precarious, and generic poor people. However, while simultaneously encroaching on the cultural specificity of *Trailer Park Boys*, the cultural hegemony of neoliberalism has, in some ways, facilitated the commercial viability of “regional culture.” John McCullough argues that as the world has become more connected through global markets and trade, the culture of the center and margins have become “dialectically related” to the extent that television has been able to commodify, produce, and sell region to the global market, and thus, “[tell] our own stories, from the margins” (158). McCullough calls this formulation “glocalism,” fusing the cultural specificity of the local with the vacuum of global capitalism (160). In many ways, the culture of Sunnyvale is neatly captured by the “glocal,” both having and lacking cultural specificity. While the cultural specificity of region is present in *Trailer Park Boys*, it is expressed within the vacuum of the homogenizing culturelessness of globalization.

A second sense in which the characters of *Trailer Park Boys* could be compared to garbage is economically. Borrowing from Moore’s formulation of garbage as a short circuit—that which prevents the smooth running of a system—the citizens of Sunnyvale could be considered, in some sense, garbage, as their lack of economic productivity and criminal behaviour creates a burden for the state and disturbs the smooth functioning of the capitalist order. In Chapter 25 of *Capital*, Marx argues for the “general law of capitalist accumulation,” which holds that as the capitalist economy grows, so to does the surplus population of unemployed workers, which Marx refers to as the “industrial reserve army” (qtd in McIntyre 1490). For many scholars, this type of economic superfluosity of the poor and marginalized is a defining characteristic of the neoliberal period.<sup>9</sup> For Michelle Yates, the inability of the poor to compete in a “knowledge” economy has rendered them a surplus population, and

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<sup>9</sup> Most scholars mark the neoliberal period as beginning with the presidency of Ronald Reagan in 1980; however, the term “neoliberal” has lost some of its precision over the years.

[w]ithout access to employment and wages, these surplus populations are left without the means to access subsistence, and many end up trying to survive through the black market or trash pick. The formation and growth of this kind of permanent surplus population can also be theorized as a kind of disposability and throwing away within capitalism. Once relegated as permanent surplus, meaning that capital no longer needs these populations as labor, these populations are little more than the human--as--waste, excreted from the capitalist system (1680).

David Nelson and Thomas Stubbs argue that neoliberal economics has facilitated the proliferation of the “informal sector” and the “informal proletariat,” who, faced with no other options, often find informal work “at the margins of society [which] stem[s] from the absence of state regulation and protection” (Neilson and Stubbs 442). Much of the surplus population turns to crime, feeding the phenomenon that Jan Rehmann calls “hypercarceration;” the tendency of states towards mass incarceration of their unemployed populations who have turned to crime as a means of survival rather than social support or welfare (310). These permanent surplus populations are not the result of inefficient development or temporary stagnation, but as Slavoj Žižek argues, are “the true “symptom” of slogans like “Development,” “Modernization,” and “World Market”: not an unfortunate accident, but a necessary product of the innermost logic of global capitalism” (*Parallax* 268). Unable to contribute to post-industrial economies, these surplus populations present not only a disruption to the straightforward functioning of the market, but represent wasted human potential, as the creative thought of these people become spent on simply surviving through any means necessary.

The denizens of Sunnyvale Trailer Park clearly fall into this category of surplus or waste population. For Ricky, Julian, and Bubbles, conventional employment is completely out of the

question. In “I Fuckin’ Miss Cory And Trevor,” (S7.E1) after Julian loses faith in the profitability of a meat stealing ring that the boys have been running and hints at searching for a job that is not against the law, Ricky boldly proclaims, “a job? Julian, we don't work. You know us.” While their criminal lifestyles make for good TV, the humour in this line underscores the very real reasons that Ricky is generally unwilling to search for work. Firstly, due to his lack of formal education, criminal record, and history of incarceration, Ricky lacks the cultural capital to be competitive in any job market. Ricky’s inherent mistrust of bureaucracy due to his experiences with the legal system, emblemized by his aversion towards “suit dummies” and “word papers,” prevents him from being able to trust a technocratic corporate power structure, and the types of things that would appear on his resume—marijuana distribution, pornographic film production, temporary relief assistant trailer park supervisor, proprietor of “semi--legit” businesses—would generally dissuade any employer from hiring him. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the forms of employment available to Ricky, aside from working for Sunnyvale Trailer Park in an official capacity, are menial, repetitive, and ultimately unfulfilling, and his time spent working often conflicts with his friendships. For example, in “What The Fuck Happened To Our Trailer Park?” (S2.E1), Ricky reluctantly takes a position as a security guard at the mall, proudly proclaiming that “it’s the first job that I’ve had that’s not against the law.” His reasoning for finding “a real family man kinda job” instead of growing marijuana with Julian is so that he can impress his on--again off--again girlfriend, Lucy. However, his brief employment is portrayed as stressful, demeaning, and tedious, and his work protecting the mall’s shopping carts from thieves comes into direct conflict with Bubbles’ shopping cart collecting business. However, Ricky’s employment as a mall security guard is brief, as soon after being hired, he gets fired for stealing car stereos and again soon partners with Julian for the lucrative

promise of an entrepreneurial scheme growing marijuana. The high--risk-high--reward nature of criminal enterprises provides Ricky with an avenue where he can not only work with his friends, but where his labour will not be exploited, despite the fact that his illegal business schemes almost always end with him ending up in jail.

While Ricky and Julian turn to illegal entrepreneurial schemes to find ways of earning money, the way in which Bubbles makes his living in absence of legal job opportunities emblemizes how capitalism turns individual lives into waste. Faced with no places where meaningful employment might be found, Bubbles is forced to likewise become a kind of “informal proletariat,” going into business for himself. Bubbles’ job involves collecting—and occasionally stealing—shopping carts from malls, fixing them up, and selling them back to the malls for a meager profit. Bubbles explains:

people don’t realize how much money there is in carts. I take these home and fix ‘em and sell ‘em back to a different mall for 18 bucks. I’ve got the two malls playin’ off each other. That’s how I make my livin’. It’s not even really stealin’ if you ask me because most of the money I make here I spend it back there anyway on cat food and stuff like that (S2.E1).

Faced with no other alternatives for meaningful employment, Bubbles finds the crudest market solution possible to make ends meet. However, Bubbles is thought of by the citizens of Sunnyvale as the most intelligent person in the park, and Bubbles comfortably references Plato, *Catcher in the Rye*, and Socrates. His lack of employment is not due to his lack of intelligence, but rather, the fact that global capitalism has placed him in such a precarious position where his labour is worthless and he has to pick at the scraps of capitalist culture, stolen and broken shopping carts used in malls, just to get by. When Bubbles ponders alternative means of

employment due to troubles with mall security, he laments about the precarity of his labour situation:

what does he think I'm supposed to do, go down to EI,<sup>10</sup> 'hi there, ya, I haul shopping carts out of ponds and sell them back to the store for a living. I've been doin' it for eighteen years, so give me a fuckin' cheque please.' That's not gonna fuckin' happen. Besides, I haven't been payin' into UI. EI, whatever the fuck they call it these days (S2.E1).

Without any opportunities for employment, Bubbles is forced to become a scrap picker, turning derelict shopping carts into somewhat useful commodities for profit, and as a result, his intelligence and creativity are essentially wasted on barely getting by.

Based on the fact that the characters of *Trailer Park Boys* embody many of the social problems of a surplus population, some critics have criticised *TPB* for simply encouraging its audience to laugh at poor people. As Dean DeFino notes “[c]omedy writers since Chaucer have known that poverty breeds its own particular varieties of humor,” and there is no denying that the humor from *Trailer Park Boys* often occurs at the expense of the intellectually and economically impoverished residents of Sunnyvale. Marketed to a middle-class urban audience, *TPB* effectively affords its viewers the luxury of joining in on the humour of the imagined margins without actually experiencing the corporeal reality of poverty, and in some sense, makes a mockery out of serious real world problems such as poverty, incarceration, and addiction. Tasha

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<sup>10</sup> This is another example of what Peter Thompson notes as a pattern of the “off-loading of the role of the state to private citizens” in the world of *Trailer Park Boys* (189). For example, despite the fact that they live in a system of universal health care, the Boys frequently have to seek medical help from unlicensed veterinarian Sam Losco, making monetary deals with him in exchange for fixing Ricky’s gunshot wounds and Bubbles’ infected tooth. Likewise, while the RCMP does maintain a presence in the show, the main security forces within the park are Mr. Lahey and Randy, whose authority comes from their employment as trailer park supervisors (Thompson 189).

Rennels calls this type of exploitation of the poor for entertainment “poverty porn,” and argues that giving middle class viewers a voyeuristic glimpse of the poor and their surrounding conditions works to reinforce “class stratification” (352). For Rennels, the white working class is “one of the few targets left in our cultural shooting gallery,” not yet protected by political correctness culture and still “open game for ridicule” (350). However, many of the show’s writers have gone on record defending the show against these accusations of “poverty porn,” primarily citing the show’s underlying message of social cohesion and friendship. For Mike Clattenburg, the *TPB*’s creator and lead writer, the goal of *TPB* “isn’t to make trailer parks look bad or have fun at their expense,” but rather to show “the people on the show playing the cards they’re dealt,” and although they have been dealt structurally poor hands, it is ultimately the ways in which they combine their chips against the odds which may bring *TPB* a potentially redemptive value (Qtd. in DeFino). For Dean DeFino, poverty in *Trailer Park Boys* “is not a crucible to try men’s souls, nor a social problem to be corrected by ambition and government funding... It is a state of being and belonging,” and residents of Sunnyvale look out for one another, whether it is Julian allowing Ricky to live in his car, or Randy constantly trying to help Jim Lahey with his alcoholism (DeFino). So while there is an undeniable element to *Trailer Park Boys* that involves voyeuristically laughing at the poor from the comfort of one’s living room, the underlying message of social cohesion presents a potentially redemptive angle to the impoverished situation that the residents of Sunnyvale Trailer Park find themselves in.

Within Sunnyvale Trailer Park, garbage has a wildly different use-value and exchange-value than it does outside of the park. For the residents of Sunnyvale, garbage—or at least what those outside of Sunnyvale would consider garbage—often becomes a valuable commodity for both personal use and market exchange. In Sunnyvale, discarded materials are appropriated in

clever and unique ways, redefining their use-value from nothing to something; old shopping carts become hoops for basketball, used mattresses become backyard wrestling rings, broken wine corkscrews become goalies for tabletop hockey games, and even old plastic bags from the liquor store become shower curtains. But along with finding new use--values for previously discarded materials, the citizens of Sunnyvale often find ways to turn these discarded materials into profit, substantially redefining the exchange--value of garbage from a burden on the state to a potential source of wealth. While Bubbles' shopping cart salvaging business discussed earlier is an example of Sunnyvale's salvage economy, the most prolific "remarketer" of trash is Ricky. In fact, many of Ricky's business schemes involve the sale of salvaged garbage in some form or another. The most explicit example of this appears in the sixth season, where Ricky opens a flea market style business called "Garbageland," which involves Ricky selling salvaged trash. After Ray, Ricky's father, is forced to live at the municipal dump after being evicted from Sunnyvale for not paying lot fees, Ricky begins to take note of the things that people throw away, and seeing a potential exchange-value contained within these barely useful pieces of trash, relocates them from the dump and sets up a flea market-style business on an empty lot in the trailer park. Taking up the discarded remnants of capitalism, Ricky effectively resurrects these pieces of trash from the grave, denying them their pre-ordained final resting places by squeezing the last few drops of value from them.

While garbage is often bought, sold, and traded as an outright commodity in Sunnyvale Trailer Park, its function as a commodity resists the commodity fetishism of the mass produced products from which garbage is created. In Sunnyvale, the packaging and materials of products often take on a variety of different uses in ways that draw attention away from the cultural meaning of brand name products and divert it to the actual physical constitution of packaging.

For Wolfgang Fritz Haug, the advertising practices of mass culture operate on the conceit that the cultural meaning of a product, communicated through brand names, advertising, and product placement, are actually more important for sales than the physical constitution of the product itself. This symbolic meaning of a product is conveyed, among other places, on the packaging of the product, which for Haug, is “not the simple wrapping for protection during transportation, but its real countenance, which the potential buyer is shown first instead of the body of the commodity and through which the commodity develops and changes its countenance” (50). For Haug, the value of a product stamped with a brand logo is contingent “only on its image, which in turn becomes the basis for a monopoly price” (26). However, in the world of the *Trailer Park Boys*, packaging becomes a useful commodities in and of itself, sometimes becoming even more useful than the product itself, thus resisting commodity fetishism. Empty two litre bottles of pop become useful drink containers; empty cigarette packages become paper for leaving notes on; old milk cartons become “piss jugs.” These items, which can be both trash and non-trash, are strewn across the park, frequently reminding viewers of the physical countenance of packaging itself, rather than the product it was designed to sell. So when Bubbles drinks from a 2 litre Coke bottle with the top cut off, the audience does not see “taste the feeling”—Coke’s current marketing slogan—but rather, the exposed skeleton of the bottle itself, the bottle’s past, present, and future, a reminder of the ultimate durability of a disposable container.

A prominent example of the appropriation of packaging occurs in the episode “If You Love Something, Set It Free” (S4.E6). After being attacked by a wild cougar while guarding Ricky and Julian’s marijuana field, Cory and Trevor are left with cuts and scrapes on their bodies. In place of real medical bandages, Bubbles creates improvised bandages by grabbing a bag of Lay’s potato chips from Ricky’s hands, ripping the bag in half, and affixing the pieces of

the bag to Cory and Trevor's wounds, converting the seemingly useless fragments of potato chip bag into a (somewhat) useful bandage. In the comical scene that follows, Cory and Trevor emerge from the trunk of Ricky's car with the pieces of the chip bag duct taped into place as bandages. The effect of scenes like these is a reminder of the physical primacy of the entirety of the commodity: both the chips and their packaging. In this particular moment, the chips, the product that contains a particular use--value conveyed to consumers using various modes of advertisements and packaging, is no longer the focal point of the commodity, and the packaging becomes the useful component of the commodity in place of the now useless chips. This reverses the standard conception of the product and its packaging, and in the process, undermines the carefully crafted perception of the use--value of Lay's brand potato chips. In neglecting the actual commodity for its packaging, this moment in *TPB* brings the physical constitution of the packaging front and center, reminding viewers of the ultimate durability and potential utility of the empty chip bags that they throw away.

The censorship of all recognizable brand names is another way in which *Trailer Park Boys* uses garbage to resist commodity fetishism. From liquor bottles, to storefront signs, to t-shirt logos, anything that bears the stamping of mass culture is blurred out in the post-production process, creating an aesthetic that signals a hyper awareness of capitalism within Sunnyvale Trailer Park. The indiscriminate censorship of all brand imagery helps to create a world where the symbols of capitalism—brand names—have no cultural meanings and are replaced by the mere material substances that make up a brand name product: trash, and the soon to be trash. Without being able to discern the familiar red label to signify the Coca Cola brand, what the viewer is left with is simply what Coke is without all of the marketing: a brown sugary liquid in a durable plastic bottle. Ryan Diduck and Dean Defino have both commented on the

nature of censorship in *TPB*. For Diduck, the willingness to blur out all recognizable brands signal the *TPB*'s "non--alignment with a policy of product placement exercised by many of its American contemporaries... *TPB* represents a departure from the culture of commodity fetish endorsed by mainstream television series, making it virtually the only counter--commodity on the dial" (Diduck np). Likewise, Dean DeFino argues that brand censorship in *TPB* situates its characters as "outlaws of capitalism, refusing to recognize the legitimacy of corporate culture" (np). For DeFino, censorship also actively resists commodity fetishism:

by denying the hegemony of the brand, the objects per se are restored to their original position of primacy. Almost invisibly, they are transformed from emblems of consumer culture into precisely what they always were: the detritus of modern life, the trash and the soon--to--be trash. In place of the rows of General Mills cereals on Jerry Seinfeld's kitchen shelf..., *Trailer Park Boys* gives us a shredded bag of salt and vinegar potato chips and a soda can stuffed with cigarette butts (DeFino np).

However, despite the fact that all brand logos receive the blur treatment, the logos are not blurred entirely beyond recognition, and the viewer is, more often than not, still able to recognize the brand; it is still quite clear to see that the ad-hoc chip bag bandages in "If You Love Something, Set It Free" (S4.E6) are Lay's potato chips, despite the fact that the logo is obscured. This blurring hides the brand in plain sight and masks its logo with the physical constitution of the product, reversing the normal masking of the material with a brand name. Along with the appropriation of garbage as useful materials, the censorship of brand names reminds viewers of every part of the commodities they consume, especially the packaging.

While it may be tempting to read the creative repurposing of garbage in *Trailer Park Boys* as a form of ecological stewardship, the frequent and irresponsible disposal of trash by Ricky more than outweighs the ecological benefits of his recycling of garbage. Ricky often simply throws his trash wherever is convenient for him: out the window of his car, into a lake, into the forest, or onto someone else's roof. Anywhere that gets the trash out of his way, Ricky will throw it, even carelessly tossing his garbage into a nature preserve with protected beavers in “We Can’t Call People Without Wings Angels So We Call Them Friends” (S7.E6). In one occasion during the episode “A Sh\*t Leopard Can’t Change Its Spots” (S3.E8), Ricky tosses an empty liquor bottle and a bag of chips into a lake in front of his daughter, Trinity. Channeling the collective outrage of viewers, Trinity accuses Ricky of littering, to which Ricky responds, “I’ve noticed that if you throw something into a water body like a lake or an ocean that the next day you come back and it’s gone, so somehow it takes it away and it filters it through and it just cleans it up like a garbage compactor or whatever.” These are clearly not the thoughts of an ecologically minded person, but rather someone who naively believes in nature’s infinite capacity to absorb our trash.

While Ricky’s careless littering might discount *Trailer Park Boys* from having any redeemable ecological content, what Ricky’s littering signifies about his conception of nature fundamentally unsettles Adorno’s dialectic of nature and the domination of nature. By throwing trash where it does not ostensibly belong, Ricky effectively undermines Adorno’s dialectic by simply no longer seeing nature as distinct from culture. As Barry Allen notes, the very idea of garbage is anthropocentric and relies on a distinction between nature and culture, as “there is no trash in nature” (Allen 203). Ricky’s careless production of trash, while irresponsible, can be read as a symptom of a world where the boundaries of nature and culture, the clean and the dirty,

the sacred and the profane, no longer hold any weight. When Ricky litters, the people around him—as well as the audience—often voice their objections; however, these objections to Ricky’s littering rest on the belief that trash does not belong “there”—in the streets of a city, in the ocean, in nature—but it belongs in a dumpster where it can soon be forgotten about at the municipal dump. But for somebody who makes their home at the dump, this “out of sight, out of mind” view of garbage is simply not possible. For Ricky, the distinction between garbage and non-garbage does not matter, since garbage is what constitutes the substance of normal life. Covered in trash and garbage, the “ecosystem” of Sunnyvale demonstrates that nothing is ever really “thrown away.” Even when garbage follows its ordained path to the landfill, it is never gone; it ends up in Ray’s home and is coopted into a commodity by Ricky, refusing to accept its label as “disposed.” In this way, trash is simply a “natural” part of Sunnyvale, just like trees and lakes. Rather than seeing a boundary between the sanctity of nature and the environmental degradation of the trailer park, Ricky sees a world where everything is simply covered in trash, allowing him to carelessly litter. What makes Ricky’s littering so unsettling for the audience, is not merely his unwillingness to “preserve” nature, but willingness to leave his garbage in plain sight, to force us to confront our collective shortcomings rather than allow us to bury them at the dump.

While littering contributes to the acceleration of ecological crises, the conception of the whole world as one big garbage dump may actually provide some redemptive ecological value. For Adorno, the dialectical distinction between nature and culture necessarily results in both the destruction of nature and the domination of some men by others; the only way around this dialectic and its concomitant ecological crises lies “in the pacification of technology, not in the idea of setting up enclaves in a world ravished by technology” (*Aesthetic Theory* 70). Similar to Adorno, for Felix Guattari the key to overcoming ecological crises lies not only in the

development of new technological or scientific solutions, but in a “reconstruction of social and individual practices” along “ethico-aesthetic,” lines which Guattari calls “ecosophy” (41). This reformulation of aesthetic practices, Guattari argues, must collapse the dialectic of nature and culture: “[n]ow more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture; in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems, the mechanosphere and the social and Universes of reference, we must learn to think ‘transversally’” (43). For both Adorno and Guattari, the path to overcome ecological crises rests on a reformulation of the ethics of technology based on the aesthetic view of nature and culture as a single domain. Traditional attempts to “conserve nature,” while perhaps well intentioned, result in a solidification of the distinction between nature and culture, which necessarily promotes a continuation of the destruction of things outside the domain of nature. In this way, “ecosophy” stops the practice of ecology as “being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or with qualified specialists,” and instead, “questions the whole of subjectivity and capitalistic power formations” by fundamentally undermining the dialectic of domination (Guattari 52). Only by reformulating the ethics and aesthetics of nature and culture into a single domain, then, do both Adorno and Guattari see the ultimate solution to the ecological crises facing humankind.

Can Ricky’s irresponsible littering actually demonstrate a radical (if perverse) form of environmental stewardship? In contrast to the trash-free landscapes and flawless bodies of Hollywood productions, *Trailer Park Boys* places the forgotten byproducts of capitalist production front and center, creating humour through the despair of garbage. The trashed landscapes of Sunnyvale Trailer Park can be read as the symptom of the dominant culture’s distinction between nature and garbage, with Sunnyvale being a convenient location for the disposal of garbage—both material and human—so that demarcated preserves of “nature” can

remain pristine. Resulting from the images of the tarnished landscape of Sunnyvale trailer park and its citizens who embody economic, social, and cultural trash, *Trailer Park Boys* refuses to let garbage be hidden or let nature be pristine, unsettling the role of the ugly through its “trash aesthetic.” It is the ethics behind this aesthetic view, that garbage not be hidden, that the “trash aesthetic” serves to undermine the aesthetics of domination of both man and nature. In keeping with Guattari and Adorno’s argument, Slavoj Žižek argues that “the properly aesthetic attitude of a radical ecologist is not that of admiring or longing for a pristine nature of virgin forests and clear sky, but rather that of accepting waste as such, of discovering the aesthetic potential of waste, of decay, of the inertia of rotten materials which serves no purpose” (*Living* 35). For, after all, love is not expecting the beloved to live up to an idealized and unrealistic image of beauty, but accepting all of the flaws of the beloved for what they are. Finding the aesthetic value in what is supposed to be ugly, hidden, and swept under the carpet is a stark departure from the ethics of beauty present in the mainstream of capitalist culture, yet for Adorno and others, represents the key to cultural and ecological redemption. By throwing his garbage wherever he likes, Ricky, in a way, refuses to accept the fact that nature and garbage appear on opposite sides of a dialectic, recognizing that garbage can never truly be “thrown away.” The resulting aesthetic that emerges from these practices, while “trashy” by the standards of contemporary Hollywood, demonstrates an uncomfortable truth about capitalism’s garbage, and only by fixating on the ugly can the true extent of garbage be fully realized.

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