

# *The Museum as a Landfill*

## *The Landfill as a Museum*

All objects are waste. Useful waste. Necessary waste. Lovely waste. But waste nonetheless.

Everything decays, but what is preserved—that's a function of human choice. The coffee cup is dumped into the landfill, while the porcelain teapot is displayed in the museum. As an institution of object-driven knowledge, the museum collects waste—curating and preserving it, hanging it on white walls and placing it on pedestals.

Filled to the brim with objects no longer in use, the museum is a landfill.

"But it's an important landfill!" the historian will say!

"It's a beautiful landfill!" sings the curator.

"It's a lucrative landfill!" goes the board of trustees.

These cries just exhibit the museum's power—to evaluate an object's importance, to preserve its beauty, to profit from it.

Calling its objects artifacts, the museum assumes that some waste has more potential to teach than others. This process inherently excludes both people and objects. It excludes those without the privilege to share their knowledge, and it excludes those objects overlooked by experts and thrown into the landfill.

All waste has been touched by people. All waste has stories. We can learn a lot about a person from their trash and a lot about a society from its landfill.

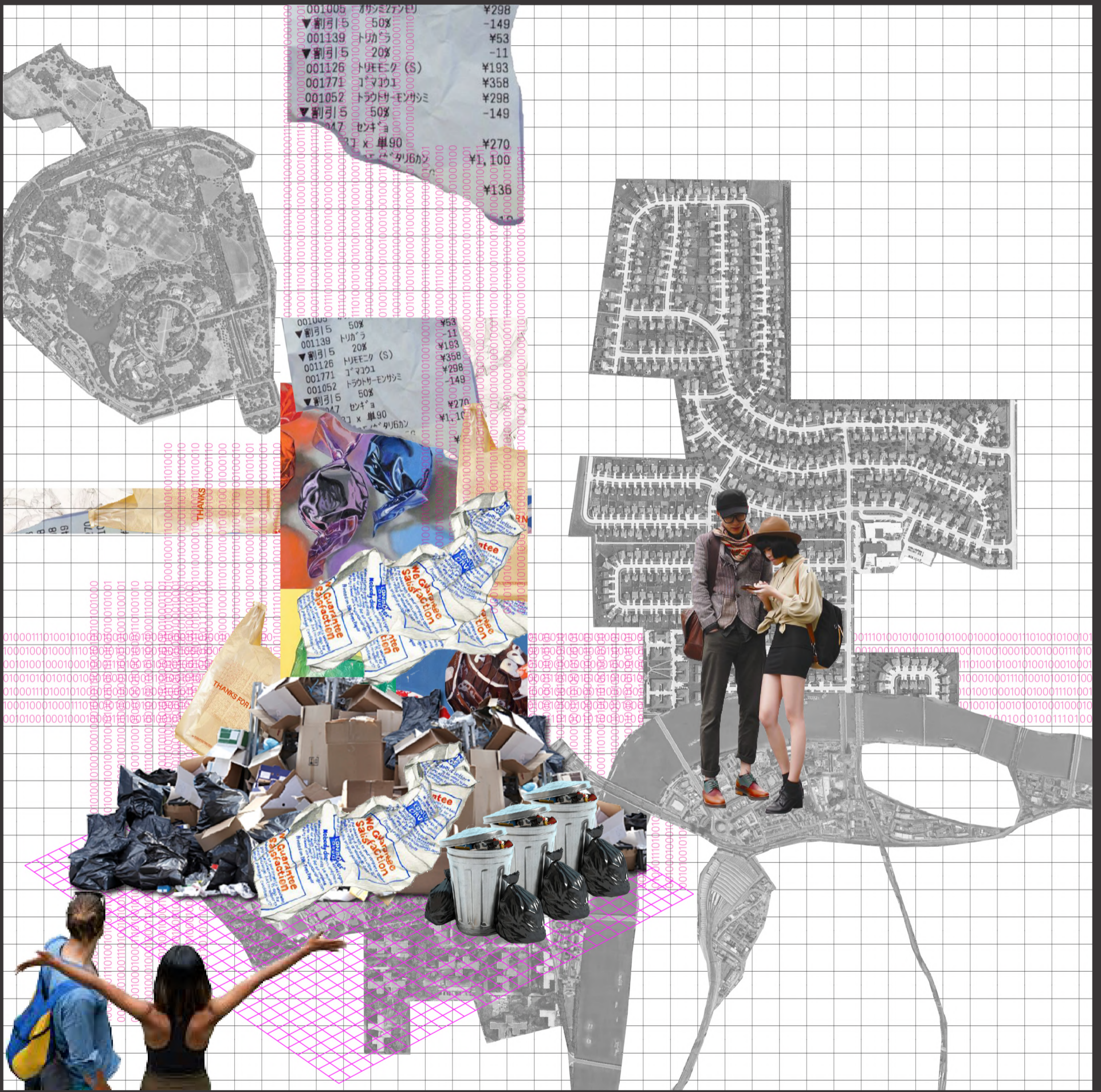
Thus the landfill is a museum—a collection of waste that can teach us. And unlike the traditional institution, the community curates the landfill. Everyone has the opportunity to contribute an object.

Our proposed landfill-museums can pop up as permanent exhibits or transient installations in any place around the world, from cosmopolitan cities to small rural towns. When contributing to their local landfill, the visitor-curator has the opportunity to submit information about their object to an online database. Before they submit, they encounter two types of guiding questions: 1) those that prompt them to share facts or personal stories about their object—anything the visitor deems important—and 2) specific questions encouraging reflection on the environmental impact of acquiring and later discarding that object.

As more and more visitors add their objects to the landfill, both the physical waste and digital knowledge pile up. Though the landfills themselves are localized, the online grid of information connects all of the installations, building a network of knowledge across space, time, culture, and language.

The landfill provokes thought about consumption, a major contributor to climate change. According to both the IPBES 2019 Global Assessment Report and Goal 12 of the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development, we must prioritize reducing our total consumption and waste. The landfill empowers visitors to reevaluate the objects they consume, identify sustainable alternatives, and challenge institutions to consume less.

So let's reimagine the museum as a landfill and the landfill as a museum. No pedestals. No white walls. No pretensions. Just a pile of community-collected objects. Each with its own history. Each with its own lesson. Teaching us about our society's past and helping us strive for a sustainable future.



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001139	トク	¥53
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001126	トク	¥193
001771	トク	¥358
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Opportunity for research. The potential for innovation is enormous – designers, scientists, and entrepreneurs can investigate systemic consumerism and waste production while sparking discussion of alternative solutions.

Along with the physical installation, the landfill will have a digital home as well. People can access the landfill's database from home or via QR codes placed on the objects in the exhibit itself.



Opportunity for education. School groups can gather discarded objects from their communities and center them in conversations about reducing waste and mitigating climate change.



Opportunity for relocation. This pop-up exhibition can be easily installed in a variety of locations, allowing us to compare local, national, and global patterns of consumption.



The landfill looms unnervingly high upon entering the exhibition hall. Visitors place their object on the pile, whose form changes daily due to accumulation and interaction.



# Biographies

**Artifact:** Rubber Band

**Submitted by** Danielle Lotridge

I keep a lot of rubber bands on my wrist, so I'm always sad when I have to throw one away. They're incredibly useful: from bundling a roll of graphic design sketches, shooting across the engineering lab at one of my classmates, or keeping me awake during a long day of project coordination. Unfortunately, the California sun makes short work of these elastic friends as they begin to disintegrate between my fingers. It broke! Maybe I can tie a knot? But alas the chemical bonds are no more. "Until next time."

**Artifact:** Architectural Model Scraps

**Submitted by** Alex Mingda Zhang

This is my seventh year studying architecture, and I have used a ton of paper/MDF/plaster/concrete/acrylic for making architectural models. When I look at a pile of leftover materials, such as fragmented, laser-cut MDF boards, I see both trash and new pieces of artwork, containing my ideas, labors, and passions.

**Artifact:** Clematis

**Submitted by** Grace Aaronson

I didn't want to throw the clematis away, but when its fragrance shifted from sweet to saccharine, and its white petals curled and browned, I knew it was time. The morning my parents left Trenton to drive up to New Haven and visit me, they picked a few strands of the flower off our driveway gate and laid them in a plastic bag alongside other essentials (a renewed driver's license, 12 bars of dark chocolate). Clematis blooms in early September, just after I leave for college. When I still lived at home year-round, it was clematis' delicate odor and cheery visage that ushered in the new school year and the crisp fall weather I love so much. Knowing I've been struggling with my History thesis, with readjusting to life away from home, my parents decided to bring a little piece of home to me.

**Artifact:** Disneyland Happy Birthday Button

**Submitted by** Alec Zbornak

Every time my mom and I go to Disneyland, we get a new button. But because we are proud annual pass holders and overall fanatics, our collection has grown a bit out of hand. We have dozens of buttons and just can't seem to throw them away. Out of necessity, I've taken a few back East with me to Yale, where I study humanities and Chinese language in pursuit of a career in theme park design. I hope that someday I can create some immersive experience that be put on a button. Until then, I can probably spare a few for the landfill.