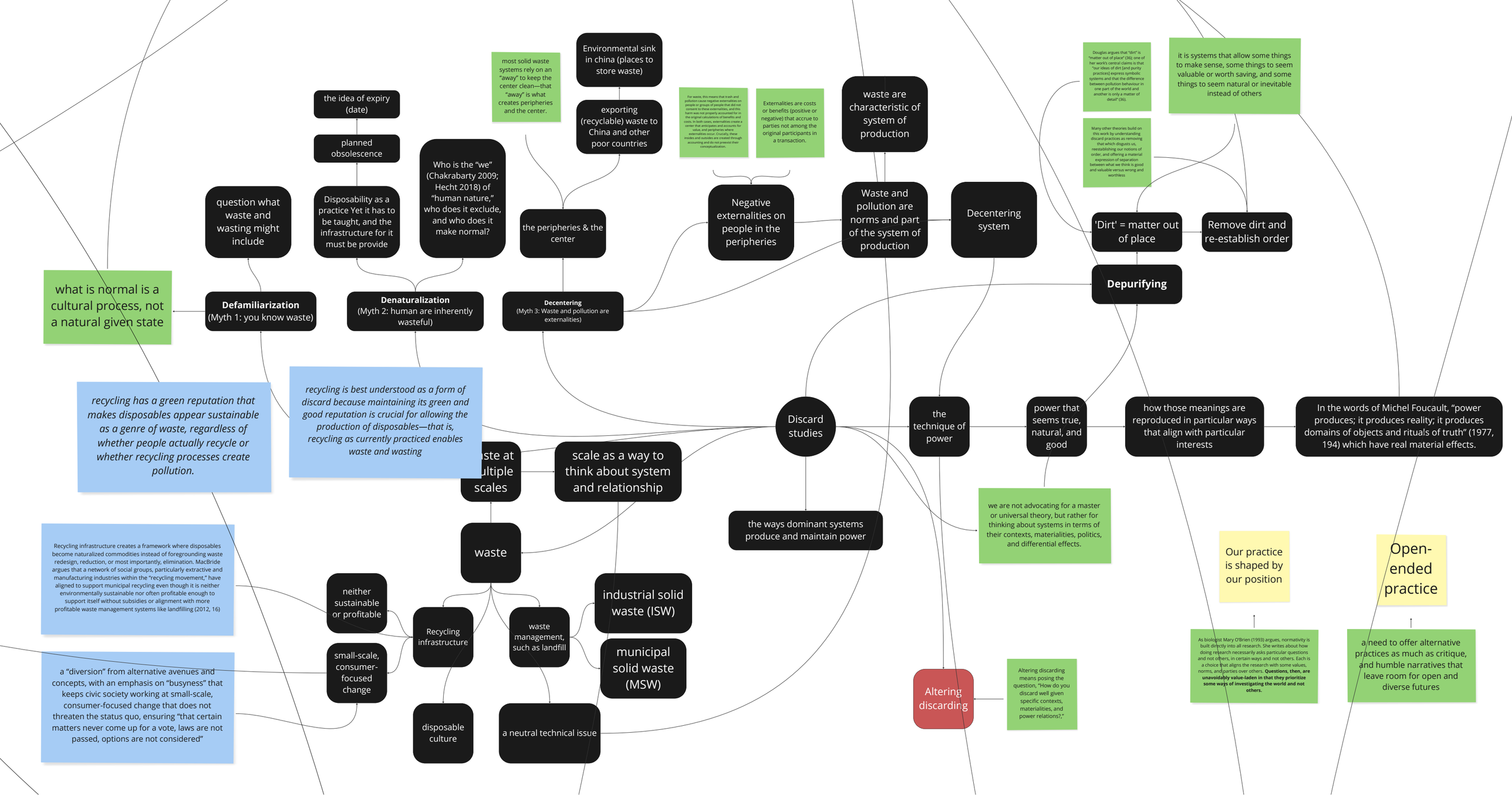
what is normal is a cultural process, not a natural given state
Defamiliarization (Myth 1: you know waste)
Denaturalization (Myth 2: human are inherently wasteful)
Decentering (Myth 3: Waste and pollution are externalities)
question what waste and wasting might include
the idea of expiry (date)
planned obsolescence
Disposability as a practice Yet it has to be taught, and the infrastructure for it must be provide
Who is the "we" (Chakrabarty 2009; Hecht 2018) of "human nature," who does it exclude, and who does it make normal?
most solid waste systems rely on an "away" to keep the center clean—that "away" is what creates peripheries and the center.
Environmental sink in china (places to store waste)
exporting (recyclable) waste to China and other poor countries
the peripheries & the center
For waste, this means that trash and pollution cause negative externalities on people or groups of people that did not consent to these externalities, and this harm was not properly accounted for in the original calculations of benefits and costs. In both cases, externalities create a center that anticipates and accounts for value, and peripheries where externalities occur. Crucially, these insides and outsides are created through accounting and do not preexist their conceptualization.
Externalities are costs or benefits (positive or negative) that accrue to parties not among the original participants in a transaction.
Negative externalities on people in the peripheries
waste are characteristic of system of production
Waste and pollution are norms and part of the system of production
Decentering system
Douglas argues that "dirt" is "matter out of place" (36); one of her work's central claims is that "our ideas of dirt (and purity practices) express symbolic systems and that the difference between pollution behaviour in one part of the world and another is only a matter of detail" (36).
it is systems that allow some things to make sense, some things to seem valuable or worth saving, and some things to seem natural or inevitable instead of others
Many other theories build on this work by understanding discard practices as removing that which disgusts us, reestablishing our notions of order, and offering a material expression of separation between what we think is good and valuable versus wrong and worthless
'Dirt' = matter out of place
Remove dirt and re-establish order
Depurifying
recycling has a green reputation that makes disposables appear sustainable as a genre of waste, regardless of whether people actually recycle or whether recycling processes create pollution.
recycling is best understood as a form of discard because maintaining its green and good reputation is crucial for allowing the production of disposables—that is, recycling as currently practiced enables waste and wasting
Discard studies
the technique of power
power that seems true, natural, and good
how those meanings are reproduced in particular ways that align with particular interests
In the words of Michel Foucault, "power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (1977, 194) which have real material effects.
ste at ultiple scales
scale as a way to think about system and relationship
waste
the ways dominant systems produce and maintain power
we are not advocating for a master or universal theory, but rather for thinking about systems in terms of their contexts, materialities, politics, and differential effects.
Recycling infrastructure creates a framework where disposables become naturalized commodities instead of foregrounding waste redesign, reduction, or most importantly, elimination. MacBride argues that a network of social groups, particularly extractive and manufacturing industries within the "recycling movement," have aligned to support municipal recycling even though it is neither environmentally sustainable nor often profitable enough to support itself without subsidies or alignment with more profitable waste management systems like landfilling (2012, 16)
neither sustainable or profitable
small-scale, consumer-focused change
Recycling infrastructure
waste management, such as landfill
industrial solid waste (ISW)
municipal solid waste (MSW)
disposable culture
a neutral technical issue
a "diversion" from alternative avenues and concepts, with an emphasis on "busyness" that keeps civic society working at small-scale, consumer-focused change that does not threaten the status quo, ensuring "that certain matters never come up for a vote, laws are not passed, options are not considered"
Altering discarding
Altering discarding means posing the question, "How do you discard well given specific contexts, materialities, and power relations?,"
Our practice is shaped by our position
As biologist Mary O'Brien (1993) argues, normativity is built directly into all research. She writes about how doing research necessarily asks particular questions and not others, in certain ways and not others. Each is a choice that aligns the research with some values, norms, and parties over others. **Questions, then, are unavoidably value-laden in that they prioritize some ways of investigating the world and not others.**
Open-ended practice
a need to offer alternative practices as much as critique, and humble narratives that leave room for open and diverse futures