

Waste Not Waste

Edited by Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis, published by the EcoDesign Foundation, softback, \$15 (members), \$18 (non-members).

Review by Caroline Pidcock

This book of essays about rubbish—the catalogue for a travelling exhibition arranged by Sydney's EcoDesign Foundation—should be compulsory reading. It brings to the subject of waste—in fact the whole ecological movement—a level of scholarship that is long overdue. It forms links to Derrida, Heidegger and other notable philosophers: there is also much reverential quoting from Fry's earlier text, *Remakings: Ecology, Design, Philosophy*.

After questioning what waste is ("a cultural category before all else," Fry writes), the essayists move on to extend the concept of what waste *might* be. Fry begins with the claim that "waste begs to be thought ... All that we are and can do, all of our achievements, stand on the effort we make to think outside the norm(al)." While I entirely agree with his defence of language as a vital tool for changing the way we think, it is contradictory to present such important issues via texts impenetrable to a broad readership.

Abby Mellick looks at how television both produces significant waste and presents waste in such a sanitised way that we can feel disassociated from its problems. Samantha Donnelly and Helen Pynor question why we have developed a mindset that regards human waste as something to be hidden, laughed at, got rid of. Cameron Tonkin's examines the idea of art as waste; waste that becomes useful in its reuse before becoming waste again. He also questions the sacred concept of recycling ... suggesting that it makes people feel good about 'doing something' for the environment without changing their destructive patterns of disposal. Anne-Marie Willis looks at "instrumentalised" and "moralised" waste that result from "the rise of industrial and consumer culture". Many industries, processes and lives are spent—wasted—on producing, marketing, selling and buying rubbish. Tony Fry concludes with a paradoxical postscript stating that the *Waste Not Waste* exhibit is not to be assumed as art— "nowhere evidences the transformatory power of institutions to transfer value from nothing to something, from waste to expensive commodity, than the institutions of art".

Waste Not Waste is an erudite, fecund text that may inspire more readable authors to take these ideas to a larger audience.

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