Unmaking Waste

Transforming Production and Consumption in Time and Place

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Foreword

Unmaking Waste 2015: Transforming Production and Consumption in Time and Place was held at the University of South Australia in May 2015. The initial idea for the conference came from many discussions at the Zero Waste SA Research Centre, where it became clear that most of us felt that waste – at the global and local scales – is essentially a consumption problem. For when we accelerate and expand consumption, we have to generate waste to ‘make room’ for the new. This led us to consider how we might ‘unmake waste’, both in material and social terms, and from what disciplinary, or cross-disciplinary perspectives, this ‘unmaking’ of waste might be approached.

So as it developed, the conference’s four main themes addressed our central concern through four complementary lenses: the first, ‘Engaging Values and Innovative Practices’, took up the theme of consumer wants, materialist values and the individualism underpinning consumerism. Papers responding to this theme reflected upon a growing body of research that emphasises the importance of a sense of ‘lack’, and the role of values and beliefs in shaping the enticements of consumerism. The second, ‘Engaging Communities through Social Innovation’, looked at ‘waste’ more broadly from a social perspective, and the possibility of engaging communities through various strategies of social innovations to reduce overconsumption and waste.

The third, ‘Engaging Strategies for Design for Reuse’, asked delegates to consider how designers might shift the attention of consumers away from the brand new, and how ‘waste’ materials could be transformed into valued resources for reuse, and beautiful objects or places that could be valued over the longer term. Finally, the fourth theme placed the problem of waste and overconsumption within an urban setting, asking how ‘Urban Systems’ might be redesigned for ‘Low Carbon Living’. This theme also underpinned our successful three hour China Australia Roundtable on the Circular Economy, which was attended by the keynotes and about 15 other invited speakers. We are grateful to all those who took part in this session, and especially to our joint chairs, David Ness and Ke Xing.

I am also very grateful to the keynotes, who each provided a unique interpretation and valuable addition to the conference. Professor Stuart Walker from Lancaster University gave a fascinating talk on transforming design practice towards sustainable outcomes, which linked to themes 1 and 3 (he also gave a valuable workshop to delegates on this theme); Professor Maria Cecilia Loschiavo dos Santos, from the University of São Paulo, responded to theme 2, and talked about the cooperative practices among the poor around recycling waste in Brazil; Professor Veena Sahajwalla, from the University of New South Wales, took up one of the main challenges of theme 3, and discussed how waste might be chemically transformed into more useful, and safer, materials for reuse; and Dr Shi Han, from the City University of Hong Kong, addressed the sustainable low-carbon urban transition in China, with a particular interest in how China’s new laws on encouraging a circular economy are working.

I would like again to take this opportunity to thank our keynotes and also our generous sponsors, including especially Vaughan Levitzke, CEO of Zero Waste SA (now Green Industries SA), whose ongoing commitment to the Centre and its work, made the conference, and this volume, possible. I would also like to thank the Tonsley Project's
developers, Renewal SA, and the Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of South Australia, for their generous sponsorship.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank our dedicated band of student volunteers and the outstanding staff in the School of Art, Architecture and Design – particularly Kate Thornton, Chris Thornton, Christina Penhall and Hazel Ryder – whose excellent work made this conference a reality that so many clearly enjoyed.

Robert Crocker, DPhil (oxon)
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Table of Contents

Foreword iii

Conference Keynotes 1

DESIGN SHIFT: a path to holistic design – Professor Stuart WALKER 2

Green manufacturing: Recycling end-of-life polymers in steel making - an example of successful translation of research into industry – Scientia Professor Veena SAHAJWALLA 12

Eco-industrial parks as a niche for sustainable low-carbon urban transition in China – Dr Shi HAN 17

Waste, city and resistance: The cooperative practices of catadores (wastepickers) in Brazil – Professor Maria Cecilia Loschiavo dos SANTOS 18

Unmaking Waste Dinner Speech – Vaughan LEVITZKE 19

Avoiding and reusing waste – Session 1 23

Garbage Banks as a platform for community-based waste management in urban coastal communities: A case study of Luar Batang, Jakarta, Indonesia – John DEVLIN 24

ReDress: Reducing Textile waste through Component Reuse – Kim FRASER 36

Spill-Over Effects for a Ship Shape Society: Earthship Ironbank as Cultural Catalyst? – Keri CHIVERALLS and Martin FRENEY 47

Buildings and construction in scholarship and practice – Session 2 56

A comparison of international and Australian research on the disclosure of building performance for energy efficiency – Bryn Jeffery ADAMS and Kathryn DAVIDSON 57

Barriers to Construction and Demolition Waste Management in Developing Countries: Case of Iran – Parviz GHODDOUSI, Bahareh NIKMEHR, M. Reza HOSSEINI, Nicholas CHILESHE and Raufdeen RAMEEZDEEN 81

Co-creating sustainable design – Session 3 90

Value Added: Education for Change – Lucy ADAM 91

Scales, spheres and relationships: an approach to educating future designers
– Tania IVANKA, Yoko AKAMA, Melisa DUQUE, Juan SANIN 100

Sustainable Design Thinking on Country: Values for a Critical Ecology of Waste – Ron NICHOLLS and Peter WALKER 112

Values in education and action – Session 4 119

Teaching Design in Unsustainable Conditions – Verena LIMA, Maria Cecilia Loschiavo dos SANTOS, Tatiana SAKURAI 120

The Medium is the Message: Reinvesting in Environments and Communities Changes Habits – Station North Arts and Entertainment District Case Study
– Inna ALESINA and Lori RUBELING 132

Sharing values: The relationship between values and meanings in collaborative consumption – Laura PISCICELLI, Tim COOPER, and Tom FISHER 143

Sustainable and sustaining objects – Session 5 152

Making custodians; furniture as intergenerational objects
– Penelope FORLANO 153

Crafting Waste: A Re-evaluation of a Furniture Practice
– Niklavs RUBENIS 166

Not Without My iPhone – Melinda GAUGHWIN 177

Systems and solutions for socio-spatial wastes – Session 6 184

Treated like an equal, treated with respect: a sustainable co-design and systems thinking approach to aged care reform that empowers older people as a valuable community resource – David KELLY, Chris SAMPSON and Veronika KELLY 185
Designing the Centre: re-making local government community facilities for a low carbon future in low density outer metropolitan suburbs – Flavia MARCELLO, Matthew PARNELL, Bridgette ENGLER-NEWBURY and Kirsten DAY

Mapping, building and inhabiting spaces – Session 7

Representation and recycling: disclosing the geography of waste in the European context – Cecilia FURLAN

Building a Common World? Understanding Architecture as World-making and Reconsidering Relationality through the Philosophy of Luce Irigaray – Andrea WHEELER

Public space for ambiguous times: where the market meets the street and something else may happen – Gini LEE

Systems for building and construction waste in virtual and material worlds – Session 8

JunkUp: supporting e-procurement of used materials in the construction industry using eBay and BIM – Tim MCGINLEY

Enabling the Reuse of Building Components: A Dialogue between the Virtual and Physical Worlds – John SWIFT, David NESS, Nicholas CHILESHE, Ke XING and John GELDER

Re-Valuing Construction Materials and Components through Design for Disassembly – Philip CROWTHER

Co-creating sustainable design – Session 9

Pollution in paradise: a student community engagement project involving design, construction and capacity building with the Port Resolution community, Vanuatu – David MORRIS

Renewing Materials: 3D Printing and Distributed Recycling Disrupting Samoa’s Plastic Waste Stream – Lionel TAITO-MATAMUA, Simon FRASER and Jeongbin OK

Gaining People’s Insights and Experiences: Developing Sustainable Design Considerations for Small Household Appliances – Dilruba ÖĞUR, Yekta BAKIRLIOĞLU, Çağla DOĞAN and Senem TURHAN
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable design thinking to unmake waste through values</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Session 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Just “Stuff”: Design, animism and materiality</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Christopher THORNTON</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An approach to letting go: Mindfulness towards designing futures</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Yoko AKAMA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyper-Consumption, Authenticity, Value and the Resurgence of Reuse</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Robert CROCKER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions for solid wastes – Session 11</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biosolids: Policies, Perception and Potential for Beneficial Use</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Norman (Chin How) GOH, Michael D. SHORT, Nanthi S. BOLAN and Christopher P. SAINT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The economic and bio-energy production potential of South Australian food waste using Anaerobic digestion</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Atiq ZAMAN and Christian REYNOLDS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current State of Scrap Utilization by Thai SMEs</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Singh INTRACHOOOTO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architectural Culture and Reuse – Session 12</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Aesthetics of Reuse: The Materiality and Vernacular Traditions of Wang Shu’s Architecture</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Hing-wah CHAU</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I hate cheap knock-offs!”: Morphogenetic transformations of the ‘culture of the copy’ and Chinese Identity</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Christopher BRISBIN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From roller skates to super heroes: The many lives of the Trocadero</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Catherine FORBES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmaking waste in Policy and Practice – Session 13</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmaking waste in the global commons: local legislation and regional governance as policy solutions for “garbage patches” in oceanic gyres</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Katharine THORNTON</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste vs zero waste: The contest for engaging and shaping our ambient ‘waste-making’ culture</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Jonathon HANNON</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring the Waste Management Hierarchy – Anne SHARP, Lara STOCCHI, Vaughan LEVITZKE and Marcia HEWITT</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The presence and future(s) of e-waste – Session 14 424

A Digital Ethnography of E-Waste: Engaging with Consumption, Recycling, and Reuse in Tippecanoe County, Indiana – Gideon SINGER 425

Transforming Electronic Waste into Social Capital – Edmond LASCARIS, Ben HARRIES, Simone CHETWYND-BROWN, Kylie CARLSON and Peter ALI 435

Future Scenarios of E-Waste in China – Gabriele FITZGERALD 443

Rethinking shopping, repairing waste – Session 15 457

The ByeBuy! Shop – how changing values can change the shopping scapes of the future – Kirsty MÁTÉ 458

Share + repair = care. Recoding reuse and establishing dematerialization practices by design – Eleni KALANTIDOU 472


Circular systems for unmaking waste – Session 16 488

Circular by Design: A model for engaging fashion / textile SME’s with strategies for designed reuse – Jen BALLIE and Mel WOODS 489

What role for the charity sector in the circular economy? – Ruth LANE, Wayne GUMLEY and Dan SANTOS 498

Resource Efficient Synergistic Urban Systems – David NESS and Ke XING 499

Values, practices and waste – Session 17 523

Pro-environmental ‘spill-overs’ in community settings three years on – Gabriele B FITZGERALD and Robert CROCKER 524

Exploring ‘pro-environmental’ actions through discarded materials in the home – Guy M ROBINSON, Mark RILEY, Alan METCALFE, Stewart W BARR and Terry L TUDOR 533

Individual, Social and Material Constraints on Sustainable Behaviour Change: Relevance to Food Consumption and Production in Australia – Gavin MELLES 542
### Unmakers of Waste – Session 18

*Objects of Desire as Agents of Change* – Denise DOMERGUE

*Mixed up: re-thinking the sensibility of reinforced concrete*
– Guy KEULEMANS

*Weaving, worldviews and waste: GhostNets art personalizing environmental ethics* – Sally BUTLER

### Sustainability as/in Culture and Design – Session 19

*Anti-consumerism. Contributions and paradoxes in the ‘sustainable turn’ in consumer culture* – Juan SANIN

*Greening ‘The Block’: Sustainability in mainstream lifestyle TV*
– Aggeliki AGGELEI and Gavin MELLES

*Dreaming sustainability, realising utopia: ‘convergence’ and ‘divergence’in art and design practice*
– Robert HARLAND, Maria Cecilia Loschiavos dos SANTOS and Gillian WHITELEY

### Refashioning textile waste – Session 20

*Space Between: A model of social innovation for fashion*
– Jennifer WHITTY

*Earthlink: Upcycling Corporate to Children’s apparel Engaging Strategies for Designed Reuse* – Deb CUMMING

*Sustainable fashion design: Minimization as a future design strategy for people, profit and planet* – Angela FINN

### Unmaking waste in our suburbs and days – Session 21

*Grave to Cradle Design: Creative Practices of revalorization in suburban opportunity shops* – Melisa DUQUE

*Alternative agreements through making: What is wasted now?*
– Tania SPŁAWA-NEYMAN

*‘Wombling along’: Unmaking waste in a pedestrian practice*
– Kate THORNTON
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable cities through collaborative and co-operative services – Session 22</td>
<td>668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability of the eco-city? – Thi Minh Phuong NGUYEN and Kathryn DAVIDSON</td>
<td>669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intangible waste: the untapped capacity of elderly people to contribute and participate – Daniel PERRONE</td>
<td>684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and Collaborative services; building capability, agency and trust – Angelique EDMONDS</td>
<td>692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards more adaptable housing design: Lessons from Victorian London – David KROLL</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>