

TRASH TALKS C

Our notorious habits of disposal appear to have put us well on the way to making the earth inhospitable to life. But our relation to rejectamenta includes much more than shedding and tossing. Trash Talks offers a portrait of the surprisingly intimate bonds we maintain with the dumped and discarded. Scavenging with abandon from sundry sources, Elizabeth V. Spelman explores the extent to which we rely on trash and waste to make sense of our lives and to shape connections among us. Examples are deliriously rich: We use people's rubbish to gain otherwise hard-to-get information about them. We trumpet wastefulness to proclaim our superior standing. We appear to think that there is a "right" relation to trash and that not having it betrays flaws in one's character or very being. We are intrigued by or in distress over the idea that evolution is a prodigiously wasteful process. In the ubiquitous heaps of our garbage and trash, some see consequences of the clamorous dissatisfaction so worrisome to our ancient sages, while others find confirmation of a flourishing consumer economy. We count on there being telling differences between those who know waste when they see it and those who don't. While we may want to shove debris and detritus out of sight, many of our most impassioned projects involve keeping them resolutely in mind.

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45,60 €

45,60 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

Lieferfrist: bis zu 10 Tage

Artikelnummer: 9780190239350

Medium: Buch

ISBN: 978-0-19-023935-0

Verlag: ACADEMIC

Erscheinungstermin: 15.06.2010

Sprache(n): Englisch

Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2010

Produktform: Gebunden

Gewicht: 453 g

Seiten: 256

Format (B x H): 145 x 222 mm
