

## High Trash (Siegen, 7-9 Jun 2013)

Siegen, Jun 7–09, 2013

Deadline: Jun 15, 2012

Joseph Imorde

### Call for Papers

High Trash.

A Conference on the Genealogy and Cultural Assimilation of Trash Aesthetics

Museum of Contemporary Art

(Museum für Gegenwartskunst), Siegen

June, 7–9, 2013

Organized by

Lehrstuhl für Kunstgeschichte, Universität Siegen and Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Siegen

Traditionally, trash has been seen as the unnecessary expression of mass society and mass consumption. However, from the 1950s and 1960s onward, an entire 'Trash aesthetic' has come into being, from classic 'kustom kar' pin-striping, and tattoo 'flash art' to musical exotica or Mexican wrestling, – a refuge for sensibilities tired of the banalities on offer both from the mainstream and academic markets.

Today, this aesthetic has taken on a different meaning. Proceeding from the assumption that Trash aesthetic has been integrated and normalized to a significant degree in contemporary politics, cultural life and global mainstream markets, this conference calls into question the relevance of the still much-discussed postmodern paradigm of high-low-exchange.

It is obvious that "turning high art into vaudeville" (Leslie Fiedler) and vice versa – at least in contemporary liberal consumer societies – is no longer "a threat to all hierarchies insofar as it is hostile to order and ordering in its own realm" (Fiedler) as it was assumed half a century ago. On the contrary: today, "vaudevillization" rather seems to be capable of strengthening hierarchies and order. As Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have argued, the global success of capitalism – and particularly late/post-industrial capitalism – is based precisely on its willingness and its capacity to incorporate contradictory and even hostile elements in a purposeful, productive manner.

Current examples of such a strategy can be found a.o. in Arnold Schwarzenegger's campaign for the governorship of California in 2003, in the collaboration between the infamous Trash-artist Jonathan Meese and the renowned management consultant Roland Berger, or in the fashion design of Marc Jacobs who created a "Trash Bag" for the manufacturer of luxury goods Louis Vuitton.

Accordingly, since aesthetics derived from diverse Trash genres no longer seem to "form a threat to all hierarchies", as also Christoph Schlingensief's apotheosis at the Bayreuth Festival and at the

Venice Biennale suggests, it is salient to discuss the theoretical and methodical implications of this shift with regard to visual studies, art history, cultural studies, literary studies, film studies and related fields. New methodological and terminological tools need to be developed in order to discuss Trash from a post-postmodern perspective.

At the same time, the conference will attempt to explore the more complex historical sources and genealogies of Trash, including not only its aesthetic, but also its socio-political dimensions – thus attempting to return to the phenomenon some of its initial critical potential.

Established as well as emerging international scholars, from the humanities and beyond, are invited to present their respective case studies and theses and to elaborate on problems such as:

What are the historic origins and mythological fundaments of Trash Aesthetic and how have they been modified in the course of the 20th century?

What political, cultural, social, or economic case studies are significant for the integration and normalization of Trash in contemporary consumer societies?

Which methodological and terminological approaches are required to assess "High Trash"?

What consequences for the historiography of postmodernism does the normalization and integration of Trash into established power structures imply? Does such normalization distract us from understanding Trash aesthetic as a pathological condition?

With regard to "High Trash", is it still possible to speak of "strong images" (e.g. visual art) and "weak images" (e.g. scientific visualizations or illustrations), as the philosopher and art historian Gottfried Boehm has suggested, when even the reality TV serial *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*, arguably one of the epitomes of Trash, is now regularly being dealt with in university courses and in the feuilletons of reputable newspapers?

Is it still possible at all to develop aesthetic/artistic strategies which cannot be assimilated by mainstream markets or politics in times of the management creed "commodify your dissent"? Is the emergence of new "borders" and new "gaps" only a question of time?

Please send an abstract of your talk (300–500 words) and a short cv before June 15th, 2012 to Joseph Imorde (imorde@kunstgeschichte.uni-siegen.de) and Jörg Scheller (scheller@kunstgeschichte.uni-siegen.de). Travel expenses and accommodation will be covered.

Reference:

CFP: High Trash (Siegen, 7-9 Jun 2013). In: ArtHist.net, May 10, 2012 (accessed Feb 15, 2026),  
<<https://arthist.net/archive/3255>>.