

Abstract

**Sonja Windmüller (Hamburg):
"Trash Museums" – Exhibiting in between**

Garbage –as a material and as a topic – entered museums of modern art long ago and in the meantime became subject of several cultural historical exhibitions. However, recently a so-called "trash museum" ("Müllmuseum"), built up in Bad Säckingen (a small town in Southern Germany), attracted nationwide attention. It was founded by a resident bulldozer operator working on a trash-dump nearby, who has been saving an ever increasing number of discarded things from decay, and – with the help of his family – cleaning and exhibiting them. In the following years, the "trash museum" of Bad Säckingen became part of the official regional sightseeing agenda and underwent stampedes of visitors.

From a broader perspective, this kind of "special museum" is no unique, nor even a solely contemporary phenomenon. Since its beginnings in the late 19th and early 20th century, technically supported waste disposal (incineration as well as recycling plants) have adjoined rooms for exposing "treasure troves" (pieces of jewellery, pottery, rare books, weapons, prepared animals etc.) extracted from garbage. Already in that age, these places were referred to as "trash museums" by the workers and local media.

My paper contributes to the semantics and aesthetics of garbage and its conception as a "border phenomenon" by exploring "trash museums" in their historical and present expressions. Obviously, despite physical cleaning and revaluation, there is still an atmosphere of suspicion around the exhibits. They actually not succeed in re-entering the "cultural sphere", but remain in a space between final exclusion and reintegration, in an intermediate state, that, besides, is objectified in the chosen mode of presentation: the "museum" strongly reminds of a room where court exhibits are kept.

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