



Trash
by Jon Davies,
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Jon Davies' book *Trash* demonstrates the very argument it constructs: that a deep love for a seemingly "trashy" object enacts a form of redemption, which serves the subject as much as it illuminates that object. As a result, the book

stands as much more than just a critical and historical study of Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey's 1970 film of the same name: it is a rigorously researched portrait of a cultural era that demonstrates the author's passionate engagement with his object of inquiry.

Davies sees *Trash* as illustrative of the contradictory categories through which bodies circulated in the queer, campy, post-'60s Factory-era scene: spectacular yet discardable, ordinary yet distinct, real yet artificial. The film stars former "nobodies" Joe Dallesandro (the hunky and quiet street criminal) and Holly Woodlawn (the outspoken and ostentatious drag queen). Joe's heroin addiction has left him impotent and apathetic, while Holly cobbles together a high-camp version of the American dream by salvaging objects from other people's garbage. Davies' book focuses as much on the film's fiction as on the reality that underpins it (though, in true Warholian style, the line between them is hopelessly indiscernible). In both cases, Davies suggests the central figures demonstrate a proudly defiant mythology of self-fashioning, which transforms them from "trash" into desirable commodities. Is it advisable, though, to become a glossy, briefly valued object in exchange for an escape from a forgotten pile of refuse? While Davies is careful not to immediately praise nor censure this move, he ultimately shows that the fleeting fame offered by Warhol's Factory was preferable to obscurity.

The first half of the book focuses largely on Morrissey's relation to the Warholian aesthetic: "real" people, meagre scripts, cheap production values and lax shooting schedules. Davies argues against the common perception that Morrissey's influence made Warhol's films more digestible by employing classical filmmaking techniques. In fact, Davies asserts that the relative success of *Trash* is due more to its narrative-based, character-driven structure and less to any kind of conventional visual style.

Davies goes on to interrogate Morrissey's condescending and derisive stance toward his performers and milieu (he hated artists, liberals, intellectuals and bohemians as much as "trash" like drug addicts and hustlers). Given the choice of aligning with Morrissey's disapproving stance, or empathizing with the film's characters, Davies picks the latter. While viewers might be tempted to say that the film's emotional climax re-establishes the humanity of the otherwise depraved characters, Davies, however, astutely warns that such a reading only mimics Morrissey's condescending attitude. Rather than a forced reversal where "trash" becomes valuably reaffirmed, what Davies champions is a more empathetic stance towards all the "trash" around us: the discarded objects and people that expose what our culture so discriminately and unforgivingly values.

In the last of three essay-length chapters, Davies explores what he calls the "existential artifice" of Pop art: the "effeminate" love of consumption, objects, mass culture, surfaces, spectacles and star bodies, not to mention infantile, non-discerning gluttony, passivity, "low" pleasures, transience and temporariness. All, not coincidentally, threaten the "masculine" conception of art as a beacon of semantic wealth from a wise, unique and autonomous authorial source. Davies concludes by valorizing the strangely "authentic" flavour of the Factory era's self-fashioned Superstars, arguing that nowadays such self-fashioning is *de rigueur*: pop art's "existential artifice" intended to subvert the normative order of depth and identity, whereas today's banal artifice has, for Davies, no such important or altruistic sentiments. This last point—contrasting the Warhol era's "authentic" artifice with today's artificial artifice—is perhaps a bit of an indulgent romanticization of a long-gone era, though it can be attributed to Davies' obviously personal engagement with the film, a sentiment with which, I think, any cultural critic or historian can sympathize.

At times, the book reads a bit like a compendium of observations and gossip about the film from various sources, but that is unavoidable when one is tackling a seminal cultural era about which so much has already been said and written. Still, Davies' writing is a fine balance of creative theorization, thought-provoking textual analysis and charming personal reflection—all of which prompt a rewarding re-viewing of *Trash* through his eyes.

—Jovana Jankovic