Foreword

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Taste as a socio-cultural, aesthetic, sociological, economic and anthropological concept implies distinguishing and evaluating, and necessarily establishes boundaries between styles. Judging what is good or bad taste is about drawing distinctions, and in the philosophical aesthetic tradition, it pertains to a universal attitude which is impossible to prove and which takes for granted the existence of a *sensus communis*, or common understanding. For Kant, the judgement of taste is not founded on concepts and is in no way a cognition, but only an aesthetic judgement (*Critique of Judgement*). On the contrary, Pierre Bourdieu highlights the sociological meaning of taste stating that the legitimate taste of society is the taste of the ruling class (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*). Thus, what does not live up to the norms of the elite and which fails to recognize their criteria of distinction can be qualified as bad taste.

If *bad* taste is generally seen as an error, deliberately employing it can also be seen as defying or questioning social, aesthetic or ethical norms. By putting itself on display it becomes a provocation or challenge to the dominant ideology and to the most consensual values. Ironically enough, ostentatious, exhilarating deviance would then be created by a new elite—for Baudelaire, "Ce qu'il y a d'enivrant dans le mauvais goût, c'est le plaisir aristocratique de déplaire" ["What is intoxicating in bad

taste is the aristocratic pleasure of giving offense"] (*Fusées*).

The goal of the conference was to examine the notion of bad taste from a multidisciplinary perspective—literature, film analysis, television studies, civilization, history and the history of ideas, sociology, economics, political science, communication and media studies. The papers published in these proceedings present concrete case studies and deal with fields which pertain to popular culture in the Anglophone world. Their aim is to question how knowledge and practices are learned in order to extend the definition of cultural studies beyond a strict disciplinary approach.

The authors of the following articles examine the aesthetic, ethical, political, economic and sociological standards which according to popular culture delineate the frontier between good and bad taste and which define the incongruous, the out-of-place, the illegitimate, the discordant and the inappropriate in relation to an imposed standard. They consider the deliberate use of bad taste to be the expression of a desire to shock and clash with decorum in all possible forms—indecency, vulgarity, violence, obscenity, camp, kitsch, trash culture and parody at its most outrageous. They also take into consideration the appropriation of bad taste and the emergence of a challenging discursive and aesthetic strategy within the context of Anglo-Saxon popular culture, and wonder whether the use of bad taste for purely transgressive purposes contributes to the creation of a counter-discourse and, after all, a counter-culture.