

# LONDON CONFERENCE IN CRITICAL THOUGHT 2025

Birkbeck, University of London

20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> June 2025

## Deadline for Proposals: Friday 4th April 2025

The Call for Presentations is now open for the 12<sup>th</sup> annual *London Conference in Critical Thought* (LCCT), which will be hosted and supported by Birkbeck, University of London on 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> June, 2025.

The LCCT is an annual interdisciplinary conference that provides a forum for emergent critical scholarship, broadly construed. The event is always free for all to attend and follows a non-hierarchical model that seeks to foster opportunities for intellectual critical exchanges where all are treated equally regardless of affiliation or seniority. There are no plenaries, and the conference is envisaged as a space for those who share intellectual approaches and interests but who may find themselves at the margins of their academic department or discipline.

There is no pre-determined theme for each iteration of the conference. Each year the conference's intellectual content and thematic foci are determined by the streams that are accepted for inclusion in response to the Call for Stream Proposals (now closed).

### The streams for LCCT 2025 are:

- The Art of the Gimmick
- The Crisis of Experience in the in the Age of Algorithmic Attention
- Critical Thought Maintenance: How to mediate intellectual and organisational form (and get away with it!)
- The Cruellest and Most Bloody Stream Imaginable: What's Left of Warhammer 40,000?
- Cruising as Critical Methodology: Practices and Imaginaries from the Shadows
- Diagramming Digital Image Ecologies: Material Articulations of Invisual Relations
- Ephemeral Resistance
- 'In Theory': Media, Systems and (Re)Conceiving Communication
- Interweaving Embodied Practice and Critical Theory in Transnational Feminisms
- Is Empathy Dead? Understanding and Questioning The Relevance and Significance of Empathy in the Digital Age
- Labour and Liveness in a New Age of Automation
- Margins & Ambiguities: Reflections Between Material and Epistemological Metaphors and Limits
- Masturbatory Reading
- Monstrous Becomings: The politics, aesthetics and contradictions of Monstrosity
- Radical Listening: Collective Practices, Histories and Possible Futures

If you would like to participate in one of them, please send an abstract for a proposed presentation with the relevant stream title indicated in the subject line to [hello@londoncritical.co.uk](mailto:hello@londoncritical.co.uk)\*. **Abstracts should be submitted as Word documents of no more than 250 words** and must be received by **Friday 4th April 2025**.

**Please note that LCCT is an in-person conference.**

\* please note the change of email address and URL from previous conferences, which are both no longer monitored.

# The Art of the Gimmick: aesthetic judgement as a window to capitalistic systems

Stream organisers: Oliver Cloke, Patrick Loan and Ziegi Boss

*Yet from the stainless steel banana slicer to the cryptocurrency derivative, our very concept of the gimmick implies awareness that, in capitalism, misprized things are bought and sold continuously. Its flagrantly unworthy form can be found virtually anywhere: manufacturing, law, banking, education, politics, healthcare, real estate, sports, art. – Sianne Ngai*

A shortcut, a cheap trick, a ploy to convince you that you need something that you really don't, the gimmick chronically promises more than it delivers. And yet, it is also an object of fascination and humour, and can even be a tool of social critique. The gimmick is an aesthetic category first presented by cultural theorist Sianne Ngai in *Theory of the Gimmick*, which reveals our everyday experience navigating capitalistic systems. Ngai describes it as an expression of dissatisfaction "linked to our perception of an object making untrustworthy claims about the saving of time, the reduction of labor, and the expansion of value." In this way, it is an aesthetic based in economic judgement, especially of unproductively spent money or wrongful praise by those duped by the gimmick.

While the gimmick can be found everywhere, the arts are especially prone to this determination. Ultimately, it is an expression of scepticism in the relationship between the labour and time that goes into something and its value. With this understanding of the gimmick, it is no wonder it plagues the arts: from Marcel Duchamp's Ready-made, to Banksy's half-shredded drawing, to Maurizio Cattelan's banana taped to a wall, many artists flaunt the tenuous relationship between the labour involved in production and its value as a capitalist commodity. It offers a glimpse of an alternative measurement of worth that is not determined by labour and time. The gimmick thus indirectly reflects the fundamental laws of capitalism that also make it prone to crisis: a system in which profit (and therefore value) is dependent on labour—all while unceasing technological innovation to stay competitive makes that very labour increasingly redundant.

We encourage submissions from artists and researchers to consider the gimmick, especially within the arts, as a lens to investigate the systems shaping our perception and measurement of economic value. We welcome a combination of (participatory) activities subverting typical conference formats, as well as theoretical presentations.

Topics could include:

- Can the gimmick serve as a tool of political resistance or social commentary (in protest art, satire, or activist movements)?
- Examples of art that people judge to be gimmicks, and/or scepticism of the art market, and what that reveals or implies about how we think about artistic production.
- The "gimmicky" use of technology - especially comically outdated or overly futuristic
- Our fascination with the gimmick and its connection to humour – as Ngai states, "...the exercising of suspicion can be creative, playful, and sometimes queer."
- The ways in which the arts/artists provide examples of alternative ways of measuring value, in contrast to the labour and time involved in production.
- From viral marketing campaigns to influencer culture, how do contemporary gimmicks reveal and manipulate society?

Reference: Ngai, Sianne. *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic judgment and Capitalist Form*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020.