

Kitsch as Experience of the World

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The term *kitsch*, widely laden with negative connotations, has often been used to designate worthless decorative objects or as a synonym for artistic failure. However, there is something in kitsch that, beyond its apparent low quality, distinguishes it from other matters as a novel and useful tool for expanding the horizon of meanings in the world. Kitsch generates an irresistible force of attraction towards its spectators, capturing their attention in a remarkable way. This allure belongs to a rarefied nature that highlights the pleasures and delights of an aesthetic appeal, opening up a space for social critique. Its apparent lack of value is thus mitigated by its ability to promote a radically relativistic attitude that establishes a conciliatory balance between what our reality is and what it could be. It is precisely here that all its power to shape our experience of the world resides. | *Keywords: Kitsch, Experience, Democratization, Effect, Pleasure*

1. Introduction. On the appeal of Kitsch

Kitsch is often associated with evoking a certain nostalgia that leads us, beyond the object itself, to experience kitsch as a statement about the structure of meanings in the world around us. For those who expect a challenge to established norms, this kitsch experience boldly implies a form of expression that, although eccentric and unusual, allows for the celebration of diversity and a break from conventional taste. In this sense, the appeal of kitsch may be confined to a specific, though broad, type of people distinguished by their bad taste (Kulka, 2011). But beyond that, its mode of presentation implies undeniable discursive power. The greatest virtue of kitsch could be what we consider its flaw; its aesthetics not only respond to the emergence of rapid industrialization and new cultural traditions but also serve as an eminently effective channel for them. Kitsch, though sometimes seen as something of extreme lowliness or bad reputation art, enormously amplifies the forms of current reality. In this aspect, kitsch is one of the most precise tools for representing the *iconic moment*¹ of the present and allowing its reconstruction and reformulation.

¹ We refer to this iconic moment as the event that presents reality as strictly present. In this sense, our experience of the world is mediated by the milestone of the current, which reconfigures every perspective that becomes subsumed within its temporal framework.

Although its popular appeal is intertwined with the unique emotional charge it evokes, kitsch redefines the beauty of the banal, highlighting the inherent tenderness in common objects. Through this operation, everyday life acquires an aura of goodness, of integral and incorruptible emotion that awakens sympathy. Around it, we feel safe and comfortable with the apparent innocence of new objects. The pleasurable supplants the threatening and brings the viewer closer to the object, held in a soft embrace. Thus, the success of kitsch essentially depends on this emotion. Its product comforts not only because it evokes a spontaneous reaction in us but also because we know we are reacting 'as we should', that is, we are moved appropriately (Kulka, 2011).

Kitsch reaffirms our most basic beliefs and feelings; it gives us the sense that we are not wrong. The evocation of common feelings aims for an effect that applies to society as a whole and generally produces the same results. Kitsch appeals to a precondition in individuals, a search for a certain tenderness, awakening that childlike need for closeness and maternal bond. Kitsch naturally comforts the whiny child we all carry inside; it speaks a common language that appeals to that inner desire for calm and tranquility. Far from esoteric language and intellectualism, its realism adheres to the most worn-out and repeated graphic conventions (Kulka, 2011), making us feel genuine comfort. Its adherence to the conventions of the moment allows it to easily connect the public with a work designed to be embraced in a kind of rediscovery of the object that kitsch transforms. It is precisely here that its great appeal lies.

2. Kitsch as the re-discovery of objects

Walter Benjamin (2008, p. 236) stated that "the side which things turn toward the dream is kitsch". It is precisely this side or more familiar contour of objects, wrapped like a dream over the object, that makes us pay attention to attractive things. Kitsch is a kind of repetition of the childhood experience; a re-dreaming of the discovery of objects. Benjamin (2008, p. 237) also said that "when we reach for the banal, we take hold of the good along with it—the good that is there (open your eyes) right before you". When there is no more space for the diffuse and we surrender to an intertwined intimacy, a conversation ornamented with objects, this experience produces empathy, a certain love. Kitsch is a dialogue in its essential truth with things. Thus, "the interlocutors are freed from the obligation to be polite" (*Ibid.*) and reserve the possibility of misunderstandings. In that precise moment, things become clear.

Kitsch plays with styles already digested by society. Its innovation precisely lies in not innovating, in giving another turn and squeezing what is already obsolete. Kitsch does without more embellishments than the object itself; it plays with that 'it is what it is'. And this is how kitsch becomes familiar, close. Precisely, the kitsch object is, in itself, what it is, what presents itself as itself. Thus, kitsch establishes a clear dependence on context. What differentiates it is that it speaks to us about what exists but has ceased to be; this occurs by highlighting and taking on a renewed form what had been blended with normality. Kitsch neither innovates, nor invents, nor expands the expressive

power of objects; it simply represents schematically and makes objects noticeable again. It enhances the inherent characteristics of the materiality of objects and presents them as they are, but emphasized in themselves. In this sense, kitsch not only represents, but re-presents. It emphasizes the reality or existence of an object. Consequently, the associations provoked by the kitsch image are the same as those provoked by the label: they basically produce the same effect. The label summarizes the image, and the image summarizes the label (Kulka, 2011).

For Susan Sontag (2018), kitsch represents an excess of emotion that is superficial or inauthentic. This excessively sentimental nature of kitsch distinguishes it from other matters like elevated art, which seeks depth and authenticity in its expressions. In this sense, kitsch, when inscribed within the sphere of art, is seen as a superficial, sentimentalist expression aimed at mass consumption. It is considered 'easy' art, appealing to immediate emotions and based on repetitive and predictable formulas. Approaches like Sontag's point out that the industrialization and massification of culture since the 19th century blurred the boundaries between elevated art and kitsch. While elevated art became more specialized and exclusive, kitsch emerged as an accessible medium for urban masses, generating a democratization of taste that challenged traditional cultural hierarchies, trivializing the artistic values that resembled a form of authority over the discipline. However, kitsch is not relegated to being just a mode of art but extends beyond it into the everyday. The poetics of art based on kitsch takes aesthetic, conceptual, or symbolic elements from kitsch but re-signifies, transforms, or re-contextualizes them within a deliberate artistic framework. This approach does not naively reproduce kitsch, but critically explores it as a creative tool. However, kitsch in its absolute dimension operates by directly influencing the way we look, know, and remember the world. From all of this arises the relevance of kitsch. It effectively fosters the memory industry. The object of memory refers us to the experience itself of the object, which, more than imitating or replicating, re-presents. The success of kitsch lies in the prior associations linked to the represented object, associations that it does not alter (Kulka, 2011). Therefore, kitsch does not create beauty, but parasitizes it and reveals it as a subtle trick that captures our attention. Kitsch is a kind of transparent glaze that reveals the attraction operation that objects exert over us. And this is how kitsch acquires a new dimension: its ability to reflect the contradictions of late capitalism and consumer culture. Its artifice and sentimentality allow for reflection on traditional aesthetic values, as well as on the role of art in contemporary society.

In kitsch, we glimpse the path that things follow. This is "the last mask of the banal, the one with which we adorn ourselves, in dream and conversation, so as to take in the energies of an outlived world of things" (Benjamin, 2008, p. 238). Through kitsch, genuine contact with the world, with things, becomes possible again. It completes the opportunity for man to approach reality. Man equips and reorders himself before a new sensation of the world that reconfigures nostalgia and allows for subjective emancipation.

3. The kitsch effect: nostalgia, escapism, and liberation

Closely related to this *new sensation of the world* made possible by the rediscovery of objects through kitsch, new perspectives arise that float and replace established conventions. A large part of the essence of kitsch, in its application to production, consists of replacing the ethical category with the aesthetic category; it imposes on the engineer and the artist the obligation to produce, not a 'good work', but a 'pleasant work': what matters most is the effect (Broch, 2011).² In this way, kitsch forces the illustration of the world as it is desired; it shows us the possibility of a pleasant world that is to be constructed, but at the same time, it uncovers the lie and illusion of the real world. Kitsch thrives on effects that, when applied to things, make them attractive to the analytical and attentive gaze. Thus, it suspends things and presents them for analysis in a way similar to what Sontag said about how Camp operates: Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a 'lamp'; not a woman, but a 'woman'. To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role (Sontag, 2018).

As we can see, kitsch operates as a sort of ontological reconstitution of the object. In this sense, there is a bit of kitsch in all the arts and creative activities. It is precisely experimentation that gives rise to the instruments that allow for these effects. Therefore, what already existed, what has already been tried and tested, is destined to inevitably reappear in kitsch (Broch, 2011). Kitsch submits to the dogmatism of the past, of what has already existed. It never takes its words from the reality of the ongoing world, but from what is pre-established and prefabricated. The *cliché*, that realm of reused presence, is the territory of divine recreation in kitsch. Thus, it does not seek depth or authenticity, but imitation.

In a certain way, kitsch tends toward a bias towards the past. As Broch (2011) stated, kitsch art tries to communicate to man the security of being to save him from the threat of darkness, as a system of imitation. Kitsch thus makes use of art to show the reality of the world through its infinite falsification. It uses it as a lure, as a deception, and distances us from future perspectives on the reality now presented as replaceable. It thus makes us feel an irrepressible need for satisfaction: personal satisfaction with affections constitutes the most abundant source of kitsch (Broch, 2011). Kitsch leans on personal nostalgia for a better, past world; any historically revived world emanates beauty. Kitsch soothes this nostalgia through established conventions, attempting to establish an immediate relationship with the past and presenting us with a multiplicity of possibilities of being. Consequently, it alleviates anxiety and suffering with an atmosphere necessary for human moderation.

² The effect might be where the greatest power of kitsch lies. This does not refer to any embellishment but rather to the ease with which kitsch endows objects with a kind of accessibility and versatility that makes us vulnerable to their collection and experience. In this sense, the apparent lack of uniqueness in the objects is compensated by a certain spectacularity that makes the objects present before us (Olalquiaga, 2007).

Kitsch establishes itself as a temporary escape toward the rational, toward the safety of things themselves. Through imitation, objects acquire the appearance of prescribed remedies against the irrational. The copying of specific characteristics of art then entails a creative act from which emerges a new work of art with simple forms and endowed with its own fanciful character, constantly resorting to the most primitive methods. In this way, a link is established between the fundamentals of reality and its compositional form. Here, there is no subjective or objective freedom, nor a possibility of accessing real words. However, this is what drives the system toward imitation. Appeals to sentiment serve a higher purpose within the value of the system, appealing to the darker and Dionysian aspects of existence, the impulse of blood and feeling (Broch, 2011). There is, therefore, a pseudo-conception of the world, a romantic novel that treats feelings symptomatically through prescribed formulas. In kitsch, all feelings are inevitably destined to transform into a kind of rational compendium of copies and imitations.

The efforts kitsch makes to dissociate itself from its own representative methods in order to present itself slightly as of a nature different from art also serve to highlight its limitations as a tool for emancipation. The banalization of reality with which kitsch operates generates the possibility of critique of the established structures. Thus, no longer being a captive structure, reality's falsity is unveiled, and with that, kitsch is no longer necessary. The satisfaction derived from the use of finite means thus gives kitsch a certain falseness under which the ethical wrong is intuited (Broch, 2011). However, this is collateral damage. The escape from the fatal, from death, that occurs in the kitsch experience, pretends to be an apparent overcoming of time: the transformation of time into a simultaneous system toward which every system of values tends is an objective that also drives every system of imitations, and hence kitsch (Broch, 2011). In this system, there is no novelty in the shaping or forming act. In its emancipatory exercise, kitsch ultimately tends toward the self-destruction of its structure, but continues to allow for the 'game'. The escape carried out by kitsch does not truly transcend time or death; instead, it avoids them in a sort of game or pastime from which a sense of liberation emerges, but it is nothing more than artificial and contrived. The production of kitsch is not inferior, but ethically abject and, therefore, leads to irony with any system of values that is not a system of imitation. Kitsch offers the appearance of a solution that produces an addictive tendency toward things that 'look good', satisfying primary affections that, seemingly without any previous reflection, lead to the critique of the real. Thus, kitsch first operates as a kind of somatization that represents an apparent 'ethical evil' due to its peculiar way of making us experience the world *differently* in a fictively satisfying manner, but then it is discovered as a tool of penetration into the structure of the world and its lie, unveiling its pseudo-absence. The structural model of the reality in question, as Umberto Eco (1986) would say, is thus revealed as an operating and self-stimulating system. That is precisely where the possibility of critique, escape, and the principle of liberation open up.

Kitsch presents itself as a new form of aesthetics reminiscent of the Rococo; this realm encompasses all artistic disciplines with a certain ease, which leads to a particular facility in finding a receptive audience to certain norms, open to the reception of kitsch. In this sense, “what constitutes the essence of kitsch is probably its open-ended indeterminacy, its vague ‘hallucinatory’ power, its spurious dreaminess, its promise of an easy ‘catharsis’” (Calinescu, 1987, p. 228). In fact, kitsch has adapted easily to modernization, with its development responding to economic and industrial progress, limited only by the market. Thus, kitsch can be seen as a pleasurable escape from the monotonous suffocation of daily modern life. It acts as a palliative for symptoms, an “aesthetic form of lying” (Calinescu, 1987, p. 229), making beauty something easy to fabricate and obtain. It is in its industrial possibility, in its application in manufacturing processes and through consumption logics, that kitsch finds a way to penetrate more deeply into society.

From this artistic perspective of kitsch, we can view it as a transcendence of the belief that confined it to the realm of cheap imitations. In this way, it manages to carve out a place in contemporary art as a varied artistic form or technique that knew how to benefit from avant-garde appearances. Kitsch has the peculiar ability to always be equipped with the latest conventionalisms. In this sense, it presents itself, outside of the inherent risk of avant-gardism, as ‘aesthetic advertising’. The poetics of kitsch is based on assuming a false identity that camouflages and masks itself as depth and poetic power, as Sontag (2018) suggests. This aesthetic falsification “consists of the use of avant-garde expressive means that have nothing to do with the tenor of the poem and that have the unique function of sticking the label ‘prodotto d’arte’ (‘artistic product’)” (Calinescu, 1987, p. 231–232). Considering this, it is not surprising to label kitsch as primarily false art; however, kitsch entails a certain aesthetic inadequacy. Generally, we think of kitsch in terms of aesthetic deception and self-deception. In this sense, we witness a transformation from authentic art to the significance in which that lies between art and what is not art.⁵

The bad taste frequently associated with kitsch is nothing more than an ideological manipulation of what we consider taste. In a world deeply entrenched in commercialism, we are compelled to conform in a simplistic manner to what is labeled the ‘official discourse’. Despite this, art always manages a degree of aesthetic autonomy that partly frees itself from the totalizing yoke of officialdom. On the other hand, “art that is produced for immediate consumption is clearly and completely *reducible* to extrinsic causes and motives” (Calinescu, 1987, p. 240). In this regard, the most significant aspect of the mass culture phenomenon in relation to kitsch lies not so much in the underlying discourse, but in the fact that this discourse is generalizable, as consumers are predisposed to accept what the market offers. The cultural industry, aware of the market's potential, provides pseudo-culture with

⁵ The complex positioning or interplay that kitsch allows between art and mundane objects connects kitsch with a kind of ‘common art’ produced as something that does not fully conform to any canon or category; precisely at this point, kitsch influences the relationship between art and the everyday. It serves as a ‘motif’ that challenges artistic tradition regarding the necessity of originality. The artistic discipline is deconstructed as an activity and emancipates itself from its various conventionalisms.

products that induce a certain relaxation and comfort, creating fertile ground for kitsch and the possibility of criticism it brings. Thus, consumers themselves, who become objects of the productive mechanism, serve as a tool to highlight their own condition. In this sense, “the power of the production process extends over the time intervals that on the surface appear to be ‘free’” (Calinescu, 1987, p. 242). The affluent classes of society and institutionalism, seeking the dominance of officialdom, find benefit in these production processes, as they express their way of life.

Kitsch, in this way, can be understood as more than just a reflection of a bourgeois dynamic or lifestyle that appeals to lower classes with the ideal of a better life to aspire to. Kitsch, by extension, represents a tool that challenges the established meaning regime and allows for a certain emancipation and democratization of the contours of reality. An action that Barthes (1977) would agree with in a certain sense regarding his ideas about the *death of the author*. In these effects, the mode of existence of kitsch aspires to a civilizational comfort that achieves functionality and pragmatism amid the unpredictability of social evolution. Kitsch lends itself to a definition in terms of a systematic attempt to escape daily reality and leverages the consumerist logic of modern society to launch a critique. As consumption is fully embraced, appearing as a duty or a way of understanding the world we live in, kitsch consistently and gradually accommodates itself to these value systems to offer *something reasonable* in the face of feelings of instability and discontinuity associated directly or indirectly with mass artistic culture. Thus, society finds in this mass culture the possibility of liberating itself from the influences of official and commercial culture (Eco, 1986). Kitsch possesses a certain uniformity that, along with its peculiarity, gives it anachronistic qualities that make it an efficient art form. Beyond being an indispensable cultural aspect for contemporary society, it signifies the emergence of a distinctive taste expression of the middle class, a form of ideology that seems somewhat spontaneous. However, this does not necessarily imply the paralysis of the aspirations of the less affluent classes under a dominant ideology through objects, but can also serve as an exciting and fruitful tool for them. Kitsch is “in fact the taste of the middle classes, which in the present day is the taste of the vast majority of our society” (Calinescu, 1987, p. 248). This corresponds to the view of kitsch as an easy way to escape the burden of time, a reaction to the terror of change and the insignificance of the flow of chronological time from one unreal reality to another.

4. Kitsch, the everyday, and the consumer society

Kitsch is closely tied to the specialized individualization of the social position of artists in an increasingly atomized mass society. This phenomenon is essentially an expression of the tension between the refined taste of specialists and the doubtful, unrefined taste of the mass society (Elias, 2011). Ultimately, kitsch is a reaction to a global productive dynamic oriented toward sales and consumption, hence the marketing logics inherent to kitsch.⁴

⁴ Kitsch seemed to have originated as a sort of amusement or a means of obtaining pleasure for the bourgeoisie. However, its development facilitated not only its adaptation to other

Above this constellation lies the great tragedy affecting all forms of production in our society: artists and engineers, for economic reasons, are forced to integrate into the production chain and, therefore, produce to sell. Gradually, a mutual dependence arises on a social rhythm that ended up granting expressive forms in the fragmented society a certain uniformity, a *style* that, while adapting to the structure of society, would be less rigid, more multifaceted, and less rich in contrasts than previous ones (Elias, 2011). In this way, kitsch embodies and encapsulates the pretensions of seeking emotional liberation and the satisfaction of frustrated desires. The need for kitsch lies in the expression of repressed feelings, yearning for leisure, and a faithful reflection of a spirit diminished by the drift of industrial society.

The kitsch product permeates new forms, floating above the memory of the past. There is no objective world, only a nature evoked by the emotional sentiment of the individual. This sentimental charge, evident in kitsch, is supported by an emotional need arising from the impossibility of finding, within the limited leisure time, the relationships excluded from working life (Elias, 2011). As a result, it is not surprising to say that kitsch involves a paradoxical and antinomic link between the great works of specialized artists and works intended to satisfy the taste of the masses (Elias, 2011).

Therefore, kitsch must be understood from the perspective of the viewer or consumer. Kitsch concretely transforms and characterizes its consumer, marking them with a hedonistic, timeless sense toward the artistic or the beautiful (Calinescu, 2011). Kitsch fills their leisure time and demands a series of basic norms related to *making beautiful things* instead of *making things well*, as Sontag (2018) suggests. Actions are thus distorted within an aesthetic framework that allows and validates this deception to facilitate the acceptance of things. In relation to this, kitsch is often read from an ironic interpretation, as is the case with *camp sensibility*, extensively explored by Sontag in her *Notes on Camp*. The kitsch product seductively exploits the illusions and weaknesses of its victims, their desire to be deceived, and makes them prone to believe in the 'aesthetic images' of kitsch. Therefore, it is referred to as an invitation to laziness and mere enjoyment (Calinescu, 2011). However, we see that this irony of false appearances and lies allows kitsch to formulate new spaces for worldviews precisely for its enjoyment and the emancipation from work as a necessary activity.

Thus, kitsch is a modern product linked to the birth of purely aesthetic consumption. Its essence lies in its absolute availability in quantities dictated by existing demand. Its appeal is that of an aesthetic simulation that extends, beyond bad taste, as a complex and deceptive current that questions the morality and structure of our time. However, unexpectedly, kitsch decides to make the deception beneficial to the viewer, who, in an eloquent twist, becomes a witness to their own self-deception.

aspects related to social critique but also allowed for the emergence of other resources such as irony, which became useful for artistic exploration beyond traditional heritage and artistic conservatism.

Regarding the everyday aspect of kitsch, we can say that, at times, its recognition is instinctive, derived from the indignant reaction to any manifest disproportion, to something considered out of place (Eco, 2001). Thus, kitsch seems to exclude itself from the good taste dictated, approved, and disseminated in society. From this perspective, kitsch serves to oppose these dictates and their perpetuation through an original replica. This kitsch replica can arise not only through mass consumption but also on an individual level. The richness of kitsch's contribution lies in that it allows for a new way of seeing the things that fill the reality presented to us; the boundaries between kitsch, the everyday, and art are so blurred that thin lines penetrate and interconnect between them, making the characteristics that could differentiate them less precise (Flores-Figueroa and Balderrama-Armendáriz, 2018). In this way, kitsch remains a kind of intermediary step that produces stability between art and the everyday. The everyday is thus intervened by kitsch to form objects with a pretension of more authentic expression. Kitsch is possible precisely because of this peculiar type of creation that exploits the contrast between reality itself and our interpretation of it.

Giesz's approach, which views the kitsch object as an epiphenomenon of art (failed art = kitsch) (1973), leads us to understand kitsch properly as a byproduct of artistic production. Thus, kitsch stands out as an intermediate product that, failing in its artistic aspirations, finds a new utility with the firm intention of becoming an object of pleasure, a political object of emotions. Although kitsch is categorized in this sense as a failed product, this does not mean it should be discarded. Even accepting this premise, there is a certain utility in kitsch that makes it valuable for the social whole. Kitsch maintains a confrontational attitude, an irreverent discourse that is essential to recognize. Its very nature allows for the provocation and originality characteristic of many forms of art. Thus, in the face of the fierce defense of artistic canons, a differential emerges that responds to the need for the emancipation of human expression and the continuous, innate search for new modes of expression. Specifically, we could say that art seems to repel kitsch, but in reality, it defines itself through it (Flores-Figueroa and Balderrama-Armendáriz, 2018).

Kitsch, one could say in relation to this, thrives on a certain mismatch between the object and its original function.⁵ Therefore, it always points slightly off-target, replacing purity with impurity, even when describing purity (Moles, 2011). The object, in this way, is simultaneously well and poorly executed. Thus, it is *well* in terms of careful and finished execution, *bad* in the sense that the conception is always widely distorted (Moles, 2011). On the other hand, there's a tendency for kitsch objects to 'give more of themselves'; a kind of clutter or overflow that leads kitsch to constantly surpass itself. Thus, it's about assaulting as many sensory channels as possible, simultaneously or juxtaposed.

⁵ Kitsch does not truly introduce a new perspective for us to shift our gaze over objects; rather, it reveals a perspective already present within the objects that has, until now, seemed hidden and not illuminated to our sight.

Precisely because of all this, kitsch remains halfway between novelty. Kitsch products are authentically false and facilitate consumers in absorbing their endearingly artificial essence. There is a concurrent effect on sincerity that leads to a sense of comfort and closeness; a demand halfway between the set of sensations at play and the fundamental acceptance of that very play. Therefore, kitsch primarily provides man with a function of pleasure, or rather, *spontaneity in pleasure*, foreign to the idea of transcendent beauty or ugliness, and also offers him a limited and indirect participation in *extravagance* (Moles, 2011).

For all these reasons, kitsch has a certain pedagogical character. Its appreciation as a game involves a gradual and successive process of refinement that leads to the identification of *good taste* as an interchangeable variable. It ascends a qualitative pyramid that gradually allows access to demands for greater refinement. The communicative possibilities of kitsch thus imply a precedent of an aesthetic model that adapts to the majority, introducing a function of testimony of the forces that reconstruct a purified image of the world, but it is linked to the ideas of middle ground and direct contact with reality. Kitsch ironically transforms everyday life and teaches us the semantic criteria of the objects and works present in our reality.⁶

The creation of kitsch entails the refinement of life and the sensitive reconquest of the world. If kitsch is not art, it is at least the *aesthetic mode of everyday life* (Moles, 2011). Thus, it is within reach of all consciousnesses and rejects excess, constituting a sort of domination.⁷ Its greatest power lies precisely in *stirring us while remaining on the margins*. Therefore, kitsch remains a fundamental tool for aesthetic democratization with broad possibilities of action in the world.

5. Kitsch and its possibilities in the world

Kitsch has made it possible to diagnose the crisis of autonomous art that followed the massification of culture in late capitalism. This has led to questions about how to assess the critical potential of the arts in mass societies, given the absence of a generally accepted standard of judgment. The difficulty lies in the ambiguous nature of contemporary artistic practices, which are often mixed and linked to irony or their own exploitation, allowing for multiple arguments to evaluate the critical role of the arts today. In fact, “the legacy of kitsch, one can argue, has been to promote a critical examination of the one self-evident Western discourse concerning the value of art” (McBride, 2005, p. 283). However, the question of what art is remains relevant.

What is at stake in the analysis of kitsch is that the other can reach the most intimate parts of a person, reaching, with its intimate value, the place where the exterior, the peripheral, reaches the core (Miller, 2010). This leads to

⁶ In this sense, it teaches us to judge and observe from different perspectives regarding the starting point of our expectation.

⁷ For this reason, we speak of the dictatorship of Kitsch imposed by the ruling class. There is an object for every problem, and thus, any conflict can be resolved with an object.

considering the paradigm of kitsch from the perspective of otherness. Kitsch allows us to overcome invisibility and the absence of connection through the activation of a relational dynamic with the other. This use of otherness can lead to overcoming everyday prejudices that reflect the dominant ideology. With Mandoki's assertion that in contemporary society, judgment based on sensitivity and intuition is more common than judgment based on coherent argumentation (1994), the possibility arises to question the widespread judgment based on officialdom and consider a reflection on 'the ordinary' that allows for the emergence of new forms.⁸

On the other hand, it is clear that kitsch is a product of the Industrial Revolution that urbanized the masses of the West. Thus, kitsch originally served to discover a new ability to overcome boredom. In this way, "to fill the demand of the new market, a new commodity was devised" (Greenberg, 1989, p. 10). Kitsch cultivated insensitivity and was used to serve the search for profit as a mechanical operator driven by the formulas of capital. Kitsch demanded nothing more than money from its buyers. However, its formulation allowed for unlocking new discoveries and conditions that art could use. The methods of industrialism could also be explored as methods and tools for artistic creation. Kitsch is deceptive; it has multiple levels, but it produces something worthy; it transforms the limiting and altering mechanics that diminish the essence of artistic creation into a productive possibility of resistance in a way that true culture could never be more than accidental. The temptation of kitsch triumphs as a cultural universal that, beyond ideology, allows for its exploration from different angles. The virtue of kitsch, by erasing the distinction between the everyday and art, produces almost a sense of attraction for the familiar, affecting viewers like a sudden discovery of the value of what surrounds them. In this sense, the discontinuity between art and life is effortlessly broken by the viewer. At the same time, kitsch offers a vicarious experience with great immediacy for the insensitive.

Kitsch appeals to everything included in the universe of emotion, as an idea inherited from Romanticism. However, in kitsch, this feeling is captured and identified with a basic mechanism: the effect. The recipient of the work is given what their feeling already demands. Kitsch accompanies a search for the compensatory, positioning itself as a substitute in a reconfiguration of taste that is no longer bad and can now be characterized with the adjective banal (Mecacci, 2018). In the nature of kitsch, there is a pretense of falsely beautiful things that banalize taste and turn it into something speculative, thus opening it to new reconsiderations. Therefore, what initially means one thing can end up meaning something completely different. Kitsch, in its effect of connecting the specialized aesthetics of artists with that of the masses, represents a problematic overlay between high and low culture that, however, cannot be ignored. In this sense, banalization in the context of kitsch constitutes a central axis that redefines our relationship with everyday aesthetics and the sense of the ordinary. By stripping objects and experiences of their elevated or

⁸ Here we see the emergence of an entirely new possibility for the democratisation of social space through the phenomenon of kitsch.

transcendental character, kitsch democratizes access to the aesthetic, but also runs the risk of reducing meaningful experiences to mere immediate effects. This banalization not only dilutes traditional parameters of artistic judgment but also introduces a new sensitivity based on direct emotion and immediacy, creating a bridge between the sublime and the trivial. However, in this process, kitsch challenges the hegemony of established categories, proposing an aesthetic that celebrates the common as a valid form of interaction with the world. In this sense, banalization, far from being a mere degradation, can be interpreted as a subversive gesture that invites us to reconsider value hierarchies and explore new forms of emotional and symbolic connection with our surroundings. Expanding this perspective involves recognizing how kitsch transcends its apparent superficiality to offer a critical tool that repositions the ordinary as a legitimate space for experience and aesthetic reflection.

Based on the above, kitsch allows the exploitation of fantasies by those who have never had one (Sachs, 1932). Embodying the devaluation of art, the goal of kitsch is not goodness, but the appearance of beauty. Like an obsession with unconditional applause and recognition, the hope of kitsch amounts to the glorification of beauty to 'please everyone'. Thus, kitsch remains a kind of art of happiness that deprives the subject of the experience of the genuine poverty of the world. Kitsch guides eyes away from reality itself, distorting and transforming it *somatically* to avoid suffering and alleviate the unmet aspirations and desires of viewers. In this way, kitsch constitutes a kind of palliative for the dysfunctional symptoms found among the constituent elements of post-industrial culture. The values of kitsch indicate the recognition of a new vision of art that definitively incorporates the attributes of the banal and bad taste (Mecacci, 2018) and democratizes taste to embrace the disordered perspectives of those whose dreams have been frustrated by the marketing logic of late capitalism. Kitsch, as a parody of taste, is the fertile ground for the emergence of new ideas in the present and the revision of the past. The feeling or need to be original is destroyed, or at least, at each stage, a transformation subtly alters the original (McHale, 1990) to admit new originals. In a particular deviation or distortion, kitsch not only affirms bad taste but also opens a path to channel the dissatisfaction generated by the movement in art. Kitsch breaks the parameters of good form, harmony, and good taste, turning 'what's interesting' into just another option. In this sense, it facilitates the context between an aesthetic form and an intentional external effect (Illing, 2006) in which the value of the popularization of art is reproduced. There is no overcoming of the inauthentic nor an approach to the peculiar essence of art, but a tremendous naivety that keeps kitsch usefully distant from nostalgia for the authentic (Lucero & Abadi, 2017). Kitsch belongs to daydreams, claims for itself the childish, but there can still be thought of a subversive dimension in it where eroticism transcends 'the other', not as a vengeful ghost, but as a vestige between the sublime, the beautiful, and the everyday, like an echo that truly represents the wound and the healing to come.

As long as the artificial quality of this experience remains, kitsch can rescue things from the pretended continuity outside the musty air of museums, becoming a stage that faces the organic fossil with all the strength of modern curiosity. As relics of an imaginary moment, kitsch allows us to dream beyond mere nostalgia, reifying the interpretation of reality and glorifying memory as a way to reinvent the future. Kitsch, instead of materializing the utopian desires of society, no longer satisfies the thirst for temporal transcendence, but revives it by proposing the recovery of leisure and life through constant reinvention. In this sense, kitsch allows us to momentarily find that lost time, but to do so, it must die and be reborn repeatedly, paying with its soul for each concession to a mythical desire (Olalquiaga, 2007). The pleasures of a lost experience become recoverable, like a buried secret treasure ready to be discovered. Our experience is then colored by a profound longing that leads to a vivid sense of the need to rediscover this primitive and archaic pleasure of total connection (Olalquiaga, 2007) with the world in an attempt to recover what industrialization took from us forever. Thus, kitsch is nothing more than a sensitivity born from loss; it is a longing once again for the capture of objects that themselves form the experience of the world. Life, in the face of kitsch, becomes something deeply linked to the search for rooting, meaning, and connection with nature.

6. Conclusion

In light of the points mentioned, kitsch, in its complex relationship with art, everyday life, and consumer society, reveals itself as a multifaceted and curiously paradoxical phenomenon. While its development exposes a capacity for the democratization of taste, allowing for a sensitive reconquest of the world's reality by viewers, it also positions itself as a *double-edged sword*. Its artificiality and genuine ability to connect with emotion through mechanisms of sensory seduction not only offer an opportunity to aesthetically reinterpret the world around us, but also alter our perception of reality. In doing so, kitsch challenges established norms and encourages a deeper exploration of the underlying structures of our perception of the environment (McHale, 1990). As such, kitsch's capacity to evoke both fascination and disdain speaks to its place as a socially charged aesthetic form, straddling the boundaries between high culture and popular sentiment.

In the intertwining of the everyday and the artistic, kitsch acts as a palliative for the dysfunctions of postindustrial culture. It creates a space for critical and subversive reflection, opening interpretative horizons that pluralize perspectives and meanings. Ultimately, it invites us to reconsider our relationship with aesthetics and human experience as a whole, revealing that, beyond any apparent superficiality, it is a powerful means to question, reinterpret, and reconnect with the essence of our cultural and emotional experience. As noted by Eco (2001), kitsch is not merely an aesthetic product but a cultural phenomenon that allows individuals to navigate the dissonance between personal emotions and the impersonal forces of modernity.

This capacity of kitsch to operate as a bold intruder that penetrates our perceptions is manifested in the miraculous regeneration or resurrection of the casual encounter with lost objects. These encounters move us, depositing grains of experience in our closed-off interiors. Within this framework, kitsch celebrates the fusion between what is fixed and what continues to transform in reality. On this border, the creations of our deepest nature arise, where the most exquisite pleasures and the sharpest pains intertwine with purpose: to help us understand the passage of time and its impact on our existence. As Elias (2011) argues, kitsch speaks to the longing for emotional liberation and satisfaction of repressed desires, becoming a vessel for the frustrated aspirations of a society marked by industrial and capitalist processes.

The precarious balance that kitsch maintains between constant change and its suspension allows us to glimpse the secret of the things that compose our world. In this space, intensity manifests as a resonant frequency that penetrates time beyond memory, measuring its margins and finding refuge in remote corners of our spirit. Where kitsch radiates its soft light, the circular perfection of the world seems delicate, and its experience opens us to a renewed vision that suspends us like dry sponges ready to absorb the new (Giesz, 1973). This transformative quality of kitsch underscores its power to evoke nostalgia and contemplation while simultaneously unsettling these very emotions, creating a tension that forces the viewer to confront their own engagement with art and culture (Greenberg, 1989).

In this sense, kitsch becomes a valuable and timely tool that helps us explore not only the distance between the past and the present but also the possibilities of an eternal future. It is this ability to unite the emotional, cultural, and aesthetic that allows kitsch to transcend its apparent banality to become an agent of transformation and rediscovery, both personal and collective (Moles, 2011). Kitsch's power lies in its ability to offer an accessible means of aesthetic pleasure, allowing it to function as a bridge between the ordinary and the extraordinary. This democratization of aesthetics reflects a broader cultural shift toward the rejection of traditional hierarchies in favor of an inclusive approach to artistic experience (Flores-Figueroa and Balderrama-Armendáriz, 2018).

Its subtle charm reminds us that aesthetics, even in its most controversial forms, can be a bridge to reconnect with the essence of human experience and the potential for cultural creation. Far from being merely superficial, kitsch possesses the potential to transform both individuals and society by breaking down barriers between art and the everyday, ultimately fostering a deeper connection to the world around us (Lucero and Abadi, 2017). In this way, kitsch continues to serve as both a reflection of cultural anxieties and a tool for personal and collective expression, reinforcing its significance as a vibrant and enduring force within the cultural landscape.

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.14762496