KITSCH: New Perspectives on a Controversial Aesthetic and Cultural Phenomenon

In his seminal essay, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” Clement Greenberg underscores how widespread kitsch has become since the Industrial Revolution. His assertion, made in 1939, remains as pertinent today as ever, with kitsch intertwining with artworks, design objects, and everyday items and practices. The ubiquity and diverse manifestations of kitsch in contemporary culture suggest that it embodies an aesthetic and cultural phenomenon emblematic of (post-/late-) modernity. For philosophers exploring aesthetic, cultural, and societal themes, delving into the realm of kitsch becomes a compelling pursuit.

In 1912, Pazaurek characterized kitsch as the antithesis of genuine and ingenious art—tasteless trash for the masses, ignorant of any ethical, logical, or aesthetic demands, indifferent to any transgressions against materials, techniques, or art forms, and masquerading as valuable while remaining cheap. This tone persisted in subsequent years, with critics highlighting kitsch’s profound aesthetic, epistemic, ethical, and/or political deficiencies. However, the 1960s witnessed a shift in attitudes toward kitsch. Disapproval waned. Furthermore, kitsch critics now faced accusations of cultural pessimism, conservatism, or sexism. Kitsch even infiltrated the art world, giving birth to kitsch art. In 2002, Liessmann finally concluded that bad taste is now good taste. Debates persist regarding whether kitsch art is truly kitsch or merely serves as ironic or quoted commentary on kitsch. And many philosophers, art critics, and the general public continue to disdain kitsch. Despite the enduring negative perception of kitsch, it is a remarkable fact that many people enjoy, like, and even love kitsch. Given kitsch’s mass appeal, are kitsch critics just anti-hedonic, or might their criticisms hold validity?

The special issue aims to gather diverse perspectives on kitsch as a controversial contemporary aesthetic and cultural phenomenon. While we primarily invite philosophical submissions, we also welcome interdisciplinary or artistic contributions. Submissions may explore questions such as:

- How can one define kitsch, and should one attempt to do so?
- What is the relationship between kitsch and art? How do different theories on (good) art change the outlook on kitsch?
- How does kitsch intersect with mass and popular art?
- Is kitsch truly a phenomenon of (post-/late-)modernity, and why?
- What historical perspectives provide fruitful insights into kitsch?
- What are post-colonial, feminist, and/or intersectional perspectives on kitsch?
KITSCH: New Perspectives on a Controversial Aesthetic and Cultural Phenomenon

In his seminal essay, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” Clement Greenberg underscores how widespread kitsch has become since the Industrial Revolution. His assertion, made in 1939, remains as pertinent today as ever, with kitsch intertwining with artworks, design objects, and everyday items and practices. The ubiquity and diverse manifestations of kitsch in contemporary culture suggest that it embodies an aesthetic and cultural phenomenon emblematic of (post-/late-) modernity. For philosophers exploring aesthetic, cultural, and societal themes, delving into the realm of kitsch becomes a compelling pursuit.

In 1912, Pazaurek characterized kitsch as the antithesis of genuine and ingenious art—tasteless trash for the masses, ignorant of any ethical, logical, or aesthetic demands, indifferent to any transgressions against materials, techniques, or art forms, and masquerading as valuable while remaining cheap. This tone persisted in subsequent years, with critics highlighting kitsch's profound aesthetic, epistemic, ethical, and/or political deficiencies. However, the 1960s witnessed a shift in attitudes toward kitsch. Disapproval waned. Furthermore, kitsch critics now faced accusations of cultural pessimism, conservatism, or sexism. Kitsch even infiltrated the art world, giving birth to kitsch art. In 2002, Liessmann finally concluded that bad taste is now good taste. Debates persist regarding whether kitsch art is truly kitsch or merely serves as ironic or quoted commentary on kitsch. And many philosophers, art critics, and the general public continue to disdain kitsch. Despite the enduring negative perception of kitsch, it is a remarkable fact that many people enjoy, like, and even love kitsch. Given kitsch's mass appeal, are kitsch critics just anti-hedonic, or might their criticisms hold validity?

The special issue aims to gather diverse perspectives on kitsch as a controversial contemporary aesthetic and cultural phenomenon. While we primarily invite philosophical submissions, we also welcome interdisciplinary or artistic contributions. Submissions may explore questions such as:

• Should (all) kitsch be criticized on aesthetic, epistemic, moral, and/or political grounds?
• What is the relationship between kitsch, propaganda, and totalitarianism?
• Should one feel guilty when indulging in kitsch pleasures? Is kitsch pleasure always a guilty pleasure?

**TYPES OF CONTRIBUTIONS**

**Research articles** are original contributions that initiate a debate, offer a point of view on current trends in aesthetics and the philosophy of art, or introduce a scholarly discussion. Contributions to the Research articles section should not exceed 7,500 words (including bibliography). Please add an abstract of no more than 150 words.

**Interviews** portray leading figures' lives and work in contemporary kitsch and art debates. Contributions to the interviews section should not exceed 3500 words. If one wants to conduct an interview, please discuss the proposal with the editors before submission.

**Translations** include seminal essays in different languages newly translated into English. The translated essays are selected based on their relevance for developing new perspectives on kitsch. Contributions to the Translations section should not usually exceed 7,500 words. Please contact the editors before working on a translation.

**STYLISTIC GUIDELINES**

Language of Contribution: English. The complete formatting instructions are available at: shorturl.at/ftESY. We will return submissions which do not comply with these instructions to the author(s). All submissions will undergo a double-blind review process.

**TIMELINE**

Submission deadline: June 30, 2024
Publication date: December 2024

Submission via espes.ff.unipo.sk.

If you have any questions, please contact the editors at: espes@ff.unipo.sk

Image source (detail):
Marek Cina
A Drawing Lesson, 2018
Multifigure installation, mixed media
Source: Author’s archive