

**A RESEARCH ON THE POSSIBILITY TO READ
KITSCH AS MEDIATED DESIRE**

**M.Sc. Thesis by
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A RESEARCH ON THE POSSIBILITY TO READ KITSCH AS MEDIATED DESIRE

SUMMARY

The aim of this study is to provide a possibility to read kitsch as mediated desire by using the Girardian concept of mediation used in literary criticism. The study, in general, provides an academic ground of discussion so as to define and understand the phenomenon of kitsch. After stating its being necessarily modern, kitsch is divided into two categories (aesthetical and sociological) and evaluated owing to these distinct aspects.

In particular, it suggests an alternative reading of its subject matter. Besides the object, the subject is also included to the inquiry, as kitsch object, in other words pseudo object, can not be considered without the person in the need of it. Considering democracy and the condition of equality as the *raison d'être*, the study aims to declare the existence of *the model*, in other words the mediator, who makes the subject's judgement paralyzed and produce the loss of reality. *Don Quixote*, Cervantes' masterpiece, will be given as an example and kitsch will be discussed on the ground of illusions which is both shared by him and the lover of kitsch. A great range of industrial products will be given as examples.

Key Words: Kitsch, Modernity, Democracy, Consumption, Illusion, Judgement, Objects.

KITSCH'İ DOLAYIMLANMIŞ ARZU KAVRAMINA GÖRE OKUMANIN OLANAKLILIĞI ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı kitsch'i Girard'ın edebiyat eleştirisinde kullandığı dolayım kavramını kullanarak okumaya çalışmaktır. Çalışma, genel olarak, kitsch olgusunu tanımlama ve kavramayı amaçlayan akademik bir tartışma zemini oluşturmayı amaçlar. Kitschin kesin modernliğini ortaya koyduktan sonra, olgu iki kategoriye ayrılır ve birbirlerinden farklı özelliklerine göre değerlendirilir.

Özelde, çalışmanın nesnesine dair alternatif bir okuma önerir. Kitsch nesne, diğer bir deyişle sözde nesne, ona ihtiyacı olan bir kişi olmadan düşünülemeyeceği için, nesnenin yanı sıra özne de araştırmaya dahil olur. Demokrasiyi, ve dolayısıyla eşit oluşu bir *raison d'être* olarak kabul edip, öznenin muhakemesini felce uğratarak, gerçeklik anlayışını yitirmesine sebep olan *modelin*, ya da dolayımlayıcının, varlığı açıklanacaktır. Cervantes'in başyapıtı *Don Quixote*, hem onun bizzat kendisi hem de kitsch düşkünü tarafından paylaşılan yanılsama temelinde tartışılacaktır. Pek çok endüstriyel ürün örnek olarak sunulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kitsch, Modernite, Demokrasi, Tüketim, Yanılsama, Muhakeme, Nesneler.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kundera (1999), in his renowned novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* claims that to reveal the true nature of kitsch we need to ask questions, because “a question is like a knife that slices through the stage backdrop and gives us a look at what lies hidden behind it.” (Kundera, 1999) Taking into account his recommendation, the writer of this study would dare to bend the exclamation mark following “kitsch!” which is used to humiliate things that are most likely not appreciated or approved, and make it a question mark like “kitsch?” in order to produce a possibility to understand what it actually is.

The very first statement that is needed to be acknowledged before venturing into the jungle of our notorious subject matter would be that, unlike most of the assumptions, kitsch is not a distinct or an independent category of object of consumption. It is a central part of this mass, yet “one of the most typical”¹ one. (Calinescu, 1987) What produces kitsch’s peculiarity, however, kitsch fails to keep on concealing the modern lie anymore: Objects are not consumed for their use values. Different from rather “modest” objects, kitsch-object can not easily disguise itself behind the label of function.

Due to its overstatement, kitsch performs like a caricature of the object of consumption. Like every caricature, kitsch exaggerates the features and makes us see what we would never have noticed in the original. What is failed to be seen, on the other hand, is that the value of the object does not originate object’s functional qualities but rather subject’s need for *social distinction*. Objects all around of modern subject are consumed as a mark of social distinction. “In this logic of distinction, kitsch is never innovative.” (Baudrillard, 1998) Kitsch object successfully portrays the current condition of modernity and post-modernity (within the limits of this

1 “But in fact it is not difficult to realize that kitsch, technologically as well as aesthetically, is one of the most typical products of modernity.”

study, no distinction between the two will be stated) as celebrating the disappearing contact with the real, since “there is no counterconcept to kitsch. Its antagonist is not an idea but reality.” (Rosenberg, 1959)

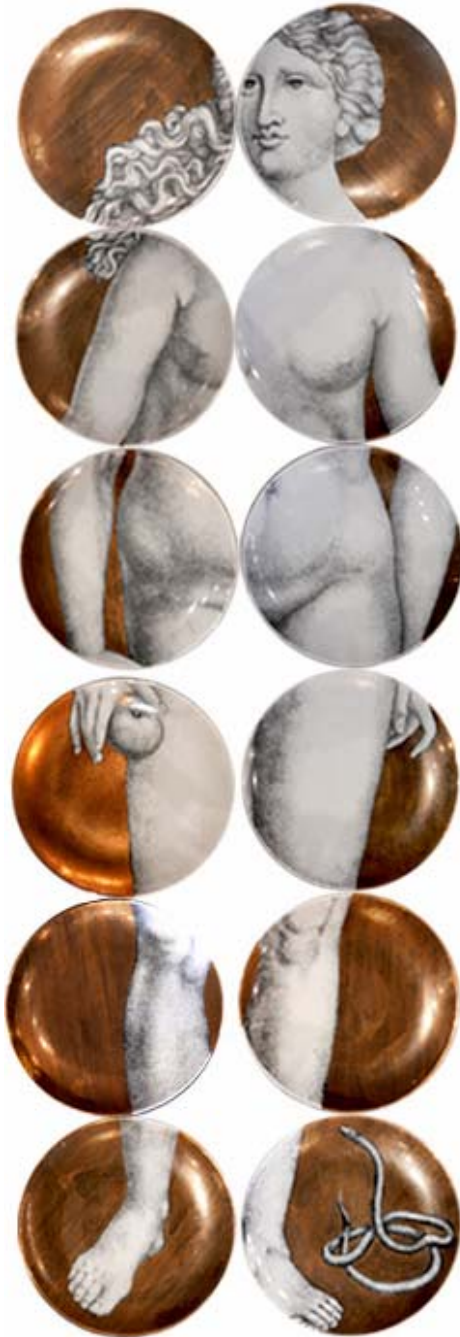


Figure 1.1: EVA Plate Set by P. Fornasetti

The significance of this study, therefore, stems from its method of approach to its subject matter. The study offers two distinct perspectives. In a broad sense, it takes the lover of kitsch into consideration. In a more specific sense, it takes kitsch as a constant follower of the logic of consumption. Therefore, the problem will be taken as an aspect of modern condition encircling us all. In order to achieve this, the samples will be illustrated quite arbitrarily. Not only cheap or so-cheap kitsch objects will be exemplified, but also the ones expensive, including Fornasetti’s Eva plates costing \$6,500. (Figure 1.1)

Nevertheless, it should be noted down as a deficiency that, this study aims not to stress on the discrimination of cheap and expensive kitsch-object or bad and good design. Moreover, it is not an overall survey on the design practice. However, it is a nice source for the young artist, designer, architect etc. in order for him to be aware of the stratagems of kitsch. Kitsch is certainly not the taste of bad or popular art. It is something more than being popular and different than being bad.

Unless its being pretentiousness and its inclination to fake are considered, kitsch can not be fully comprehended. “The whole concept of kitsch clearly centers around such questions as imitation, forgery, counterfeit, and what we may call the aesthetics of

deception and self-deception.” (Calinescu, 1987) Unless the phenomenon of deception is disclosed, kitsch remains as an enigma.

Kitsch mostly had hitherto been reckoned within the limits of objecthood. Since “kitsch could not, in fact, either emerge or prosper, without the existence of kitschman, the lover of kitsch,” (Broch, 1950) it is better to include the modern subject to the inquiry. Therefore, the second, and perhaps more important, significance of this study is that, it dares to make this embrace and focus on the ambiguous relationship between the object and the subject. In order to do that, mediated desire, a Girardian concept used for literary criticism, will be introduced.

Mediated desire, in other words, mimetic desire is based on the idea that the line joining the subject and the object is not straight but rather mediated, namely triangular. (Subject - Model - Object) Different from the claims of *the romantic lie*, the desire can not be fixed in an autonomous way, but by imitation of the desire of a model, in other words the mediator. It simply derives from the idea that we desire what others desire because we imitate their desires.



Figure1.2: *Mona Lisa* Zip Around Purse

However, we confuse the desire belonging to other people with ours. This confusion produces a fertile ground for illusions and this particular study intends to explore the relationship with these illusions and the concept of kitsch. “The mediator’s prestige is imparted to the object of desire and confers upon it an illusory value.” (Girard, 1976) Kitsch is strongly linked to this “illusory value.” Mona Lisa purse in Figure 1.2, for instance, beautifully exemplifies that the value of the kitsch object “is measured directly by the demand of spurious replicas or reproductions of objects whose original aesthetic meaning consistent, or should have consistent, in being unique and therefore inimitable.” (Calinescu, 1987) Kitsch declares to be valuable as

it borrows the genuine value of de Vinci's "unique and inimitable" masterpiece and confuses it with its own. This borrowed value is, however, only an illusion.

It is also consequential to designate that kitsch has a strong link with the gap in modern man's soul and it derives from the idea that this gap may be filled with objects. Kitsch is not only an object but also a certain kind of behavior of the subject who is ready to deceive himself. "Kitsch represents falsehood, ...this falsehood falls back on the person in the need of it, on the person who uses this considerate mirror so as to be able to recognize himself in the counterfeit image..." (Broch, 1950) Hence, mediation staying at the center of the deceit and illusions bestows us a possibility to figure out the phenomenon of kitsch. The reason to juxtapose kitsch with mediated desire is because the concept of mediation reveals the existence of illusions.

In conclusion, this study can be evaluated as a challenge to define kitsch as a fundamental part of the conditions of modernity. The aim of the study, in general, is to provide a scholarly discussion in order to become aware of the phenomenon of kitsch. Accordingly, in *Chapter 2*, kitsch's being an essentially modern notion will be announced. Excluding the conditions which modernity has brought into, kitsch has no chance to come into being. This discussion will continue as dividing kitsch into two categories.

In *Chapter 3*, kitsch will be considered as an aesthetical category so as to be able to first, distinguish what kitsch is, and what it is not. Kulka's (1996) three criteria will provide us the compulsory conditions for kitsch to exist. Furthermore, Broch's (1950) attention on Romanticism will assist us to generate both an understanding of the whys and wherefores giving birth to kitsch and a connection between aesthetical and socio-cultural aspects.

Chapter 4, after a general view on democracy is explained due to Tocqueville's (1999) analysis, kitsch as a sociological category will be discussed on account of the two functions of kitsch, the status seeking and display and the desire to escape from the boredom of modern day-to-day life. Tocqueville, Greenberg, Baudrillard, Calinescu and Adorno will be the senior guiding theorists of this part.

Unlike from the above chapters, *Chapter 5*, will focus on the collaboration of the kitsch object with kitsch man and will constitute my contribution to the overall scholar discussions on kitsch. It will be an attempt to explore how kitsch serves to construct fake identities and how kitsch-object produces a vague mirror so as to enable its owner to feel as if he is someone else. Therefore, the elusive modern state of “feeling like / being like someone else” will be raised as a question by means of highlighting the kitsch-object as a great source of deceit and illusions.

In *Chapter 6*, findings and the conclusions of the study will be presented, and suggestions for the future research will shortly be outlined.

Besides, in terms of methodology, it can be said that the question raised within the limits of this research is rather an ontological one. Inasmuch as, ontology is a study of conceptions of reality, a holistic research strategy is preferred within the limits of this study. The existential struggle of a new emerging class and his growing expectations can not basically be named by using qualitative methods and its positivist distant towards its object.

What exactly needs to be introduced is a method including its researcher in the research. Forasmuch as, the researcher is a part of the contemporary society and his life is interwoven with kitsch-acts and objects all around. The study shares the opinion of Flaubert who cries “Madame Bovary, c’est moi”² Therefore, an analysis of kitsch is an analysis of modern emotions and is an analysis of the self of the researcher.

The path will be followed in this research, will not be only a designer’s perspective, yet the researcher of this study is in the search of a common area between the study of design and the study of social sciences. Therefore, this study should be taken as one in between these disciplines. Lastly, due to the proliferation of kitsch objects (or paintings, buildings...), a great many of examples will be given in order to solidify abstract notions discussed within the framework of the study.

2 “I am Madame Bovary.”

2. KITSCH AS A PRODUCT OF MODERNITY

First of all, it is needed to be acknowledged that the term intended to be defined is a rather complex one. Besides being selected as one of the ten English words which are hardest to translate due to its abundance of meaning, it has been worn out a lot as being a nice tool for a delicate discrimination and disdain. However, as it will be explained later, kitsch is something related with falsehood rather than bad, as bad is not necessarily have to be a faker.

Kitsch is used to be characterized by certain adjectives like “phony, barbarous, morbid, unfamiliar, provoking, showy, paradoxical, flashy, superficial, unstable, melodramatic, pseudo-sensational, unbalanced, deformed, formless, disproportionate, cumulative, intricate, inconsequent, mimetic, odd, unabsorbed, cheap and thoughtless.” (Kambouridis, 1989) Most of the elements can be assessed as appropriate qualifications, although what is crucial here is to stay somewhat distant from popular labeling but achieve a scholarly discussion.

No matter how broader the issue is taken, it is inevitable that there will be more needed to be said. Kitsch is a real challenge for any kind of academic research in that the traces of it can be found anywhere you dare to look and no one seems to decide on what exactly this borderline issue is. Broch (1950) is right, there is a “cloud up there looks like a camel” or a sheep, or may be a horse, depends on in which point you look at it, what your profession is and perhaps even depends on who you are. Before venturing into deeper aspects, it is better to start with the possible origins of kitsch.

2.1 The Etymology of Kitsch

Even though the etymology of the term kitsch is quite vague, scholars mostly agree that it came into the German language in mid-nineteenth century. For some scholars, the word kitsch has several possible origins three of which are likely to be relevant.

First, kitsch is derived from the English word “sketch” when, in the second half of the nineteenth century the Anglo-American tourists wanted to buy cheap artistic stuff as souvenirs in Munich and asked for “sketch” and the Germans misunderstood what they asked for and called it as kitsch. (Calinescu, 1987) Second, according to Ludwig Giesz the term comes from “verkitschen”, meaning “to make it cheap”. Finally, it could be originated from another German verb “kitschen” meaning “to collect rubbish from the street” or “make new furniture from old”.

For Calinescu (1987), these three main etymological hypotheses have something to do with kitsch. In that,

“First, there is always something sketchy about Kitsch. Second, in order to be affordable, Kitsch must be relatively cheap. Last, aesthetically speaking, kitsch may be considered rubbish or junk.” (Calinescu, 1987)

At the end of 1920s, the term gained an international usage and in the mid-twentieth century it started to be a subject of scholarly dialogues as it helps giving an explanation of key words of modernity like industrialization, capitalism, the rise of nation state, urbanization, emergence of middle class, universal literacy, mass production, consumption etc. No matter from where it originates, or whatever it illuminates it has always connoted something negative yet humiliating as it can be seen in the above list.

2.2 The Emergence of Kitsch

One of the most crucial questions related with kitsch is that when it seems to come out. Almost everything related with kitsch, scholars again divides into two whether it is a modern phenomenon or whether some traces of kitsch may be found prior to the modern era. For most of them, who actually constitute the reference section of this research, believes that kitsch is rather a modern phenomenon arrived to Western society quite lately. On the other hand, there are others who believe that there are signs and attitudes proving the existence of kitsch before modern times.

The first group considers kitsch simultaneous with modernity. They develop two distinctive approaches in order to demonstrate kitsch’s being a recent issue. The ones concerning its sociological features “emphasize that the proper conditions for both

the consumption and the production of kitsch did not exist prior to the modern era.” (Kulka, 1996) The ones concerning its aesthetical aspects evaluate kitsch as a result of romanticism and claim that without the apposite conditions of Romantic Movement kitsch does not seem to come out.

Clement Greenberg (1967) in his famous article *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* says that "kitsch is a product of the industrial revolution which urbanized the masses of Western Europe and America and established what is called universal literacy." Here, what is important is a shift in a specific social class moving to cities and become "proletariats and petty bourgeois" who can be said to be the servants of the dominant bourgeois. Peasants as a class belong to pre-industrial society living in countryside and making their ways of living as they work on the ground. Therefore, unlike bourgeoisies who are city-dwellers, they are not used to live in cities. After the fall of feudalist system, they have moved from the countryside they used to inhabit and moved to cities. As being separated from their land and its culture (folk culture), they have faced with great adaptation problems. Kitsch, in this sense, has served as a reconciling tool and provided an intermediary region which is able to satisfy the demands of this emerging class who likes to engage themselves with the possibilities of city life, whereas fail to comprehend and fulfill what it really is. This emerging class is called masses today.

For Matei Calinescu (1987) in *5 Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, "... kitsch, technologically as well as aesthetically, is one of the most typical products of modernity." He considers kitsch as rather a recent phenomenon and links it with his interpretations on time and mass-production techniques.

"First the plutocrats and the nouveaux riches, then the petty bourgeois and certain segments of the populace were seen as trying to imitate the old aristocracy and its patterns of consumption, including the consumption of beauty. The art they liked, created and bought mainly as a sign of social status, no longer had to perform its difficult aesthetic function, and genuine artists were forced to turn their backs on an audience that applied exclusively pecuniary criteria in the matter of aesthetics." (Calinescu, 1987)

Gillo Dorfles (1968) in his *Kitsch: An Anthology of Bad Taste* discusses that kitsch can not be traced prior to modernity as there was no thing like bad taste before. For

him, it is not because our societies' requirements were different but the judgment which we use to apply to things was different than it was in the times, for example in Antiquity, was different. Therefore, the variety of problem in judging art makes it non-sense to link art before modernity with the concept of taste as "...it was connected with religious, ethical or political subject matter, which made it in a way 'absolute', unchanging, eternal..."

Broch (1950), on the other hand, links kitsch with romanticism and concentrates on its art-historical and aesthetic aspects. He searches kitsch within architecture and tries to define the characteristics of some distinguished periods and civilizations, for instance the Asian, Egypt or the Gothic, the Renaissance and the Baroque. He concludes that every civilization and period has certain architectural images which come to mind when we think of them. However, romanticism does not. He develops his argument on the dichotomy between the search for reality and the search for beauty and highlights the fact that it is from romanticism on art (architecture, design, literature, sculpture etc.) follows an investigation for not reality but beauty. As the Romantic Movement is originated in late 18th century, kitsch can not necessarily be traced before 1900s which quite fits the emergence of the term as explained in the etymology part.

However, there are some other scholars claiming some traces of kitsch may be observed before nineteenth century. For instance, Sontag considers chivalry romances of sixteenth century as kitsch. "*Don Quixote* is a book which is, first of all, an attack to certain kind of literary kitsch." (Sontag, 1990) To the fact that, even though these romances are kitschy in many respects, at the time when Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote* there was no such term like kitsch.

2.2.1 Modern Period

To discuss what modernity is beyond the limits of this thesis. However, before venturing into the categories of kitsch in the next chapter, it makes too much sense to take into consideration of some pivotal concepts and definitions. History, even though designated with certain departure from its predecessors, can not possibly be divided into some sharp periods. It gives us an important sight if it is taken as a matter of preconditions.

If the roots of modernity are taken as a departure from old institutions, it is the Renaissance more or less to which everything owes its modern quality. It upset the systems of biblically oriented values, monarchical government and feudal economy that lead us to today's democracy and liberal ideas. Societies existed before 15th century are pre-capitalist, namely traditional, ones due to the fact that bourgeoisie originated from Renaissance as it suffices the rise of a trading. Before the emergence of trading class, the production of goods depends on a local demand. Therefore, we are talking about close societies and indisputable relations. However, when we start to talk about trading and the trading class, the first thing entails to happen is the breaking of this close system. Trade, in every respect, is an act having an inherent dynamism. Therefore, even though modernity is considered in between the end of the 18th century and the mid of 19th century, there exists a period which constitutes the appropriate conditions for it. From the end of 15th century to the end of 18th century is called Early Modern Times which is significant for the appearance of the bourgeoisies as a noteworthy class and the period of Renaissance with its emphasis on embracing the new and the unknown.

As a result, as following the reference theorists of this research, it can be said that it is in vain to look for kitsch before 18th century and its dramatic consequences. The scope of the research is based on two major categories in which kitsch has its grounds to both emerge and prosper.

- French Revolution with its ultimate ideal of equality and a result of lowering of standards,
- Romanticism with its stress on sentimentality and sentimental effects.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, there exist two distinct approaches for the analysis of kitsch,

- A Sociological Approach → French Revolution



“Equal” rather than the “Best”

- An Aesthetical Approach → Romanticism



“A Search for Beauty” rather than “A Search for Truth”

Now, it can be seen that why kitsch’s being a modern phenomenon is discussed from the very beginning of the study. In the next two chapters, the two distinct approaches concluded above will be discussed in order to develop an understanding what kitsch is in general terms.

3. KITSCH AS AN AESTHETICAL CATEGORY

In order to be able to analyze what kitsch is, it is better to start with an attempt for identification. First of all, it should be noted down that, kitsch reveals itself due to its inadequate quality. Under some circumstances, it disguises itself behind some stylistic applications. The aim of this chapter is to give a ground to detect and define the phenomenon of kitsch within the framework of aesthetic criteria. In order to do this, Tomas Kulka's (1996) necessary conditions on kitsch will be judged. Three distinct examples of modern art will be given in order to explain the superiority of art among kitsch and to state the contrast in between the former and the latter. The relationship between kitsch and romanticism will be revealed in order to understand the origins of kitsch as following the criticism of Hermann Broch (1950). Various kitsch products will be given for exemplification.

3.1 Three Criteria for Kitsch

Kulka (1996) in his *Art and Kitsch* calls attention to a fact that, even though most of the aestheticians is agreed on kitsch is aesthetically bad and is an incarnation of bad taste, no one seems to be interested in whys and wherefores. He claims that aestheticians so much concerned with the question of "beauty," so that they ignore the one of "ugliness." He asks two questions in order to seize why the masses are very much attracted by kitsch and from where the appeal of kitsch comes:

"Question 1: What does the mass appeal of kitsch consists of?

Question 2: What does the aesthetic badness of kitsch consist of?

Question 3: Should the appeal of kitsch be properly regarded as aesthetic?" (Kulka, 1996)

In order to answer his own questions, he produces an imaginary situation: But if a competent artist somehow would like to produce "a commercially successful work of

kitsch,” what should he do? (Kulka, 1996) To be able to do that, the qualities producing a kitsch painting which satisfies all the requirements is needed to be known. In order to do that, he develops three conditions so as to be able to make a definition and recognition of kitsch in visual arts.

3.1.1 Condition 1

Is there a difference for our case of painting a successful kitsch if we make a picture of for example a little boy burst into tears or a chimney of a factory? Kulka (1996) claims that a crying little boy with big eye drops on his reddish cheeks work better than a dull industrial object or scenery.

“Among the themes that figure most prominently in kitsch pictures are puppies and kittens of various, children in tears, mothers with babies, long-legged woman with sensuous lips and alluring eyes, beaches with palms and colorful sunsets, pastoral Swiss villages framed in the mountain panorama, pasturing deer in a forest clearing, couples embracing against the full moon, wild horses galloping along the waves of a stormy sea, cheerful beggars, sad clowns, sad faithful old dogs gazing toward infinity...” (Kulka, 1996)

The commonality of all the above images is that they aim to provoke an emotional response. These awaken responses, however, should be a positive kind. Even though, the situations include crying, being sad or even dying as it is in the case of the crucified Jesus in Figure 3.1, they should look very sterile and the entire negative elements they may include should be disposed.



Figure 3.1: The Crucified Jesus above the Skies on a 5\$ Plate.

It is the cleansing of nasty and troubling. Kundera (1999) says “...kitsch is the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and fugitive senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence. ...The aesthetic ideal of the categorical agreement with being is a world in which shit is denied and everyone acts as though it did not exist. This aesthetic ideal is called *kitsch*.”

In this sense, we may claim that a photographer like Cindy Sherman is a photographer of “shit”. The depiction of femininity in Figure 3.2 is made up of the detritus and excretion of the body and never seems to be in “a categorical agreement with being a woman”. The distorted screaming woman face as a reflection on the sunglasses does not seem to be a one with “sensuous lips and alluring eyes” which calls the spectator for a tender dizziness. However, if our painter still likes to produce a successful kitsch painting, “he should avoid all unpleasant or disturbing features of reality ... and (has to) come to support our basic sentiments and beliefs, not to disturb and question them.” (Kulka, 1996) However, Sherman seems to disturb our expectations about the acquaintance beauty of a woman and makes us consider the annoying parts of human condition.



Figure 3.2: *Untitled #175* by Cindy Sherman

For the condition 1, it can be concluded that “kitsch depicts objects and themes that are highly charged with stock emotions” (Kulka, 1996) and these emotions should be a beautiful-sweet-acceptable kind. When a kitsch depiction is come up against, it has to trigger the sentiments associated with our humanity and result in an appreciation of the beauty and goodness of life. Therefore, it has to make us feel safe and satisfied with both ourselves and our surroundings.

3.1.2 Condition 2

It has been seen that the subject matter, in other words, what we paint is important in kitsch. However, how we paint is also important and an effective for the success of kitsch. That is to say, not every representation of a crying boy or woman can be kitsch. They have to be represented in universally accepted and affirmed ways. “Our artist would be more likely to succeed by painting in compliance with the stylistic conventions of nineteenth century Romanticism, or the socialist realism of the 1950s, than by adopting a cubist or futurist style.” (Kulka, 1996)

To paint a naked woman like the one de Kooning did in his *Woman I* does not work

for kitsch unless it has become worn out by time due to repeatedly use.



Figure 3.3: *Woman I* by Willem De Kooning

It has to resemble a woman more than the one in Figure 3.3 and has to match with the representations which are more faithful to the ones in the nature. “It has to speak the most common language understandable to all ... (as) it cannot afford to be, and hence never is, confusing.” (Kulka, 1996) This is another way of saying Kundera’s (1999) “The feeling induced by kitsch must be a kind multitudes can share. Kitsch may not, therefore, depend on an unusual situation; it must derive from the basic images of people have engraved in their memories.”

As a result, how we paint matters in the sense that it has to strengthen what we paint as giving a clear-sight. It can be said about condition 2 that, “the objects and themes depicted by kitsch are instantly and effortlessly identifiable.” (Kulka, 1996)

3.1.3 Condition 3

After having stated the requirements of being sentimental and identifiable, it is needed to be stated one more condition which can actually be explained in contrast to the concept of avant-garde. It is the answer of from where kitsch’s aesthetic badness

comes from. Greenberg (1967) in his famous article *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* announces that “when there is avant-garde, generally we also find a rear-garde.” Applied to art, avant-garde is what is innovatory, what introduces and explores new forms and in some cases new subject matter. Kitsch is, on the other hand, never seems to be interested in any kind of novelty. It profits from the revolutionary power of avant-garde where it creates art that elicits an emotional or cultural reaction as an effect, kitsch directly leaps to the end product and tells the addressee how his reaction should be.

Impressionism, for instance, was an avant-garde movement. It was a departure from the orthodox criteria, therefore, was a new way of perceiving the world. This time, let us share Kulka’s (1996) example, *The Bar at the Folies-Bergere* of Manet, as it is follows the same route of examples. It is again a depiction of a woman and in this case she is effortlessly identifiable.¹ The question here is that even though it fulfills our two necessary requirements, how it cannot be considered as kitsch?

“By breaking the objects into fragmented brushstrokes of discontinuous patches of pure prismatic colors, and by emphasizing the immediacy of the changing effects of light, the Impressionists not only enrich our associations, they actually helped us to look at our environment in a more perceptive manner.” (Kulka, 1996)

What Kulka (1996) talks about for the Figure 3.4 is that, unlike kitsch, real works of art makes us encounter realities that are not known or noticed by us before. Therefore, condition 3 may be concluded as “kitsch does not substantially enrich our associations relating to the depicted objects or themes.” It uses and re-uses tested and approved canons and formulations and it creates only stereotypes. Therefore, if we paint an impressionist painting today, it would be kitschy as impressionism has lost its revolutionary allegation and has become one of the common realities or recognized forms of art.

¹ However, please also be aware of the overall discussion of this painting. There exists an “ambiguity” whether it is the reflection of the woman that is seen or some another woman. Ambiguity in every sense makes a move away from kitsch.



Figure 3.4: *The Bar at the Folies-Bergere* by Edward Manet

In conclusion, “if we consider our three conditions jointly, they point to the *parasitic* nature of kitsch. They suggest that kitsch does not create beauty of its own, that its appeal is not generated by artistic merit of the work itself but by the emotional appeal of the depicted object.” (Kulka, 1996) After having a certain background information on kitsch, we can now check what we have said in some everyday objects and try to understand the insufficiency of kitsch owing to its parasitic nature.

3.2 The Parasitic Value

Kitsch and art, as it is stated above, has one of the strangest forms of biological realm: Parasitism. Parasites, unlike self-sufficient bodies, do not struggle to pursue their lives by themselves. In order to do that, they find other bodies that do it for them. Kitsch never saves artistic effort. It finds a way through an energetic body and satisfies its temporary needs. This is a “one-way affair” and it always works for the advantage of kitsch. For Crick (1983), “kitsch is the great hedonist vehicle of our time, a parasite now grown to leviathan maturity, while the host on which it feeds remains comparatively small.”

Broch (1950) also stresses on the parasitic quality of kitsch and metaphorically calls it as “the element of evil in the value system of art.” He does not take kitsch simply as bad art and he insistently claims that kitsch has “its own closed system.” He claims a similarity between “art and kitsch” and “good and evil.” This new closed system does not grow as a separated one, but rather grow “alongside” of the actual body.

“The enemy within (which is kitsch), however, is more dangerous than these from outside: every system is dialectically capable of developing its own anti-system and is indeed compelled to do so. The danger is all the greater when at first glance the system and the anti-system appear to be identical and it is hard to see that the former is open and the latter is closed.” (Broch, 1950)

An open system depends on an ethical basis and provides directions for one’s life. A closed system, on the other hand, depends on a set of rules needed to be followed. These rules consume the reality they imitate. Hence, they can not be called as ethical systems but only aesthetic ones. It reproduces the pre-existing works of art like in the case of tote in Figure 3.5 and depends on the idea of fabrication.



Figure 3.5: A Sunday on La Grande Jatte Tote - *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* by Georges Seurat

It is doubtless that the deprivation of art (following the transformation from an open system to a closed one) strongly follows the logic of commodification which is “the transformation of relationships, formerly untainted by commerce, into commercial relationships, relationships of exchange, of buying and selling.” (www.marxists.org, 2006) Therefore, kitsch seems to be a means of instrumentalizing art and a means of transforming this non-commodity into an object of commodity as assigning it a new and degenerated value.

“The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors”, and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”. It has drowned out the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egoistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless infeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.” (Marx, Engels, 2002)

The entire story seems to originate from a shift in the object of search. Broch (1950) gives the example of Rembrandt and claims that his experiments with light do not necessarily based on the “love of beauty” but “love of truth”. For him, art and science are in the search of truth as they aim at generating “the creation of new expressions of reality,” as, for instance “art is made up of intuitions about reality, and is superior to kitsch solely thanks to these intuitions.” (Broch, 1950) On the other hand, the search of kitsch is a bare search of beauty. Due to this fact, kitsch ignores the process and the context and settles for only the results. That is what produces kitsch’s aesthetic deficiency. This deficiency is the motive of kitsch’s distorted statement and the distortion derives from its inappropriate relationship with the cultural context it came into.

“An object in its material finality is a visual statement and therefore requires a certain reading both on the level of its functional properties and within its cultural context.” (Timur, 2001) As being pseudo-object, kitsch fails to fulfill the “rational separation of form and function.” Therefore, it may be claimed that “kitsch depends on the irrational (in the sense that there is not a direct, rational relation with the form but the meaning of a particular object)...” (Timur, 2001) This possibility leads us to

design a lighter in the form of a mobile phone or a clock in the form of a tire sizing 10 cm radius. (Figure 3.6 and Figure 3.7)



Figure 3.6: A Mobile Phone-Lighter



Figure 3.7: A Tire-Clock

In these cases, “the form appears to be a pretense; there arises an object whose real value is reduced but allegorical connotations and appeal are enormous.” (Aydinli, 1996) The visual statement is paralyzed and form has nothing to do with function. There are only resemblances of other objects and styles and these elements are gathered with an arbitrary manner.

“The producers of kitsch act generously in using and applying all the different codes on the top of each other on the same object without looking whether they are synthesized or integrated. So it is a free arena to play with meaning, connotation and surplus values. The manner of the production is done in such a short and clear-cut way that it goes beyond being sharp, it turns out to be a free medium of cut and paste. The kitsch object becomes a college of meaning and signification. In such a play with objectual symbolism, the issue can be interpreted as the cultural unconscious coming out to the surface through material production.” (Timur, 2001)

As a result, kitsch is an aesthetic category like beautiful or ugly and it is always a “deficiency” giving kitsch its identity. Due to this insufficiency, the statement that the object conveys, fails in its way to pass to the user or spectator. There occurs a misunderstanding producing the element of misjudging which stays at the heart of kitsch. Kitsch is produced and consumed for this misjudging. “It everywhere produces objects smaller and larger than life; it imitates materials (in plaster, plastic etc.); it apes forms and combines them discordantly; *it repeats fashion* without having been a part of the experience of fashion.” (Baudrillard, 1998)

Kitsch borrows certain elements, from every context that it would like to use. In Figure 3.8, it borrows the form of Greek Column as painting it into red and shiny yellow to function as a shoe-holder. It may be a relic of the past, a twinkle of an estimated future... It may derive either from Greek or African, from communist or capitalist... “Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same.” (Greenberg, 1967) The sameness does not stem from what it imitates, but rather stems from the basic fact that it imitates.



Figure 3.8: A Column-Shoe Holder



Figure 3.9: A Mosque-Clock

It collects certain elements from certain realities which are *sine qua non* (something

absolutely indispensable or essential) for real object, whereas, arbitrary for kitsch. (Figure 3.9) All the different elements collected from different contexts into one singular object produce superabundance. Due to this fact, they fail to compose a coherent visual statement which is the characteristics of a good-designed object. In the next part, we will try to decipher the connections of kitsch with romanticism in order to brighten its intrinsic emotional quality. Besides that, romanticism will constitute a nice introduction to the second category of kitsch.

3.3 Romanticism and Kitsch

In *Chapter 2*, it is clarified that kitsch is a modern phenomenon and emerged in the middle of 19th century. This was inevitable due to the fact that kitsch needs some specific conditions inherited from previous centuries. “Even if we can discover some formal relationship between kitsch and mannerist or baroque art kitsch seems to be historically as a result of romanticism.” (Calinescu, 1987) Also as for Broch (1950) “...We can say that however deep the mark left by kitsch on the nineteenth century, it is in fact derives predominantly from the spiritual attitude we define as Romanticism.” Therefore, one of these conditions giving birth to kitsch is the Romantic Movement and the overall spirit of it having spread out and marked our age.

Romanticism was born as a rebellion movement against the classical conventions of artistic and social forms. It was both an artistic and intellectual movement and is born in the 1770s Germany and Britain and leaped to first the rest of Europe and than the rest of the world. It should not be a coincidence that both romanticism and its faithful follower kitsch originated from the same source, Germany.

“Whereas during much of the 17th and 18th centuries learned allusions, complexity and grandiosity were prized, the new romantic taste favored simplicity and naturalness; and these were thought to flow most clearly and abundantly from the "spontaneous" outpourings of the untutored common people. In Germany in particular, the idea of a collective *Volk* (people) dominated a good deal of thinking about the arts. Rather than paying attention to the individual authors of popular works, these scholars celebrated the anonymous masses who invented and transmuted these works as if from their very souls. All of this fantasizing about the creative folk process reflected precious little knowledge about the actual processes

by which songs and stories are created and passed on and created as well an ideology of the essence of the German soul which was to be used to dire effect by the Nazis in the 20th century.” (Brians, 2006)

What the quotation primarily saying is that, it was emerged from the heart of anonymous masses and therefore, celebrated by them. So that, the romantic ideal was born as a movement emerging from the “below” and it achieved an enormous prevalence that no other movement was able to reach. It derived from “the belief that products of the uncultivated popular imagination could equal or even surpass those of the educated court poets and composers who had previously monopolized the attentions of scholars and connoisseurs.” (Brians, 2006)

The movement basically embraced, yet exalted the imagination and irrationality. The decline of balance and rationality headed a freely play with things. This possibility is one of the key features constituting the following ages rendezvous with kitsch. A departure from the search of well-stated, rational relations long-later has led artistic and intellectual productions towards an arena of “cut and paste.”

Romanticism stressed on sentimentality and dramatic effects besides imagination and irrationality. Sentimentality can be defined as “the effort used to induce an emotional response disproportionate to the situation, and thus to substitute heightened and generally unthinking feeling for normal ethical and intellectual judgment.” (Harmon, Holman, 1996) In art and literature, the overemphasized emotions started to be perceived as a source of aesthetic experience.

Kundera (1999) says that, “When the heart speaks, the mind finds it indecent to object. In the realm of kitsch, the dictatorship of the heart reigns supreme.” Besides, the heart has been ruled by longing. From the age of Renaissance (which is marked with a longing for Antiquity) until now, the object of longing has changed, whereas, the idea and, in a way, the fashion of longing remained the same. Every longing, however, is marked by a desire to escape from today. Another noteworthy aspect of romanticism, which is again related with longing, is the exotic.

“Just as Romantics responded to the longing of people for a distant past, so they provided images of distant places. The distances need not be terribly great: Spain was a favorite "exotic" setting for French Romantics, for instance. North Africa and the Middle East provided images of "Asia" to Europeans. Generally anywhere south

of the country where one was resided was considered more relaxed, more colorful, more sensual.” (Brians, 2006)

Such tendency has a power to portray the story of the emergence of kitsch. As indicated in *Chapter 2* while talking about “cheap artistic stuff as souvenirs.” These souvenirs are, perhaps, some sort of exotic “sketches” produced for tourists. Therefore, the path romanticism has opened is the path on which kitsch has started to walk and widen. As Broch (1950) says “Romanticism, without therefore being kitsch itself, is the mother of kitsch and that there are moments when the child becomes so like its mother that one cannot differentiate between them.”

As a conclusive remark, it can also be argued that Bourgeois Realism which appeared right behind romanticism should be taken into account as a movement takes place just in between the two. It is "one of the most gorgeous and self-righteous forms of kitsch" (Calinescu, 1987) and is in perfect harmony with what Greenberg (1967) calls as academism.

“The precondition for kitsch, a condition without which kitsch would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions, and perfected self-consciousness kitsch can take advantage of for its own ends. It borrows from its devices, tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, themes, converts them into a system, and discards the rest. It draws its life blood, so to speak, from this reservoir of accumulated experience. ...Self-evidently, all kitsch is academic; and conversely, all that's academic is kitsch. For what is called the academic as such no longer has an independent existence, but has become the stuffed-shirt "front" for kitsch.” (Greenberg, 1967)

Consequently, the objective of this chapter was to make an aesthetical analysis of kitsch. In order to do that, first of all the three necessary conditions for kitsch to exist is stated. Secondly, the parasitic aspect of kitsch is mentioned as it is explained by showing some examples from everyday life. Finally, the chapter ends with the exploration of the link between romanticism and kitsch as defining the preceding as the mother of the latter. These titles have given as an insight to be able to distinguish kitsch in both visual art and in object level.

4. KITSCH AS A SOCIOLOGICAL CATEGORY

Although the phenomenon of kitsch is discussed in relation to its aesthetical qualities, it is needed to be acknowledged that it does not help us to understand what it fully is. Kitsch is not doubt a sociological fact following the process of modernization. Therefore, the phenomenon of kitsch should also be discussed in relation within the framework of sociological and cultural features.

The underlying idea for such a study can be found in terms of modern democracy and the newly-established institution following its process. Kitsch has different sources in the historical arena. It can not exist without the conditions of democracy and therefore, the idea of equality and the rising individuality on the social scale. The major cultural, economic and social factors underlying the shift from the stable institutions of old regime to the mobility of democratic and capitalist societies will be discussed by using different disciplinary frameworks. In general, Alexis de Tocqueville's (2001) *Democracy in America* and Jean Baudrillard's (1998) *The Consumer Society* and in particular, Clement Greenberg's (1967) *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, Matei Calinescu's (1987) *5 Faces of Modernity* can be cited as the primary sources that are intended to be benefited from within the limits of this chapter. In order to achieve this, kitsch will be discussed depending on its two distinct functions. The first one constitutes itself around the concept of status-seeking and display and the other around a desire to get away from the burden of modern boredom.

4.1 The Two Functions of Kitsch

Greenberg (1967) seeks to define kitsch as the opposite of avant-garde claims that kitsch is a result of the industrial revolution and goes hand in hand with the process of urbanization. As soon as "universal literacy, the ability to read and write became almost a minor skill like driving a car, and it no longer served to distinguish an

individual's cultural inclinations, since it was no longer the exclusive concomitant of refined tastes," new urbanized masses started to hunt for other signs for recognizing the differences from folk culture.

"The peasants who settled in the cities as proletariat and petty bourgeois learned to read and write for the sake of efficiency, but they did not win the leisure and comfort necessary for the enjoyment of the city's traditional culture. Losing, nevertheless, their taste for the folk culture whose background was the countryside, and discovering a new capacity for boredom at the same time, the new urban masses set up a pressure on society to provide them with a kind of culture fit for their own consumption. To fill the demand of the new market, a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide." (Greenberg, 1967)

The quotations designate two crucial functions of kitsch. The first function announces the desire to be distinguished in the broad social denominator. Such sort of a desire is strongly associated with the idea of social status. The second, on the other hand, is linked with the idea of boredom. In that sense, kitsch is a means to cope with boredom which is a result of estrangement due to the process of modernization and capitalism.

4.1.1 Status-Seeking Theory

The indispensable condition for kitsch, without which kitsch would not exist, is the phenomenon of social mobility. It would be nonsense to try to make an enumeration of all the whys and wherefores of mobility. However, within the context of this study, it would be rather useful to mention about it a while so as to make a well-established socio-cultural analysis related with our subject matter. Social mobility indicates dynamism within the context of social structure in modern societies. For instance, an individual born into a working class family can be a high rank officer or become wealthy out of poverty due to the fact that, modern democracies accepts and encourages the shift in economic, social and ideological status of individuals. Quite the opposite, mobility was nonexistent in feudal societies and only with rare exceptions, could not be shaken. Social stratification was well-defined and every individual stays in his inherited social class, regardless of attained work and achievements.

“On entering the capitalist phase ...each social class remodels its value system according to its own interests; the overall ideology is split up into many ideologies, while commonly-accepted values are reduced to bare essentials. Industrial development accelerates these processes, and technology open up new possibilities in management and in the speed of production methods. The pattern of consumption changes accordingly. Dividing line among societies disappear, thus encouraging material – and ultimately, ideological – exchange. Social mobility becomes an unquestioned value, desirable for all.” (Kambouridis, 1989)

One of the necessities of kitsch’s being a modern phenomenon derives from the idea of social mobility. From the beginning of the capitalist phase until its contemporary forms, “broad swathes of the population are moving up the social ladder, reaching a higher status and, at the same time, acceding the cultural demand, which is simply the need to manifest that status in signs. At all levels of society, the generations of parvenus want their package ...There has to be a demand and that demand is a function of social mobility. There is no kitsch in a society without social mobility.” (Baudrillard, 1998) Consequently, it can be claimed that mobility is a compulsive element for the existence of kitsch and mobility is a result of democracy.

4.1.1.1 The Democracy Dimension

The effect of romanticism is not only limited with the aesthetical and stylistic aspects of kitsch. Romanticism, as it has been discussed in the previous chapter, was a movement which has aroused from the below and gained a wide acceptance. “More generally, romanticism is the first important *popular* literary and artistic movement, the main cultural product of modern democracy.” (Calinescu, 1987) Calinescu (1987) benefits from Tocqueville (2001), a pioneer on the issues of democracy, and his cult book *Democracy in America* which was written at around 1830s America.

“Tocqueville ...was perhaps the first intellectual historian and sociologist to analyze the effects on democracy on the arts and to explain why democracy necessarily leads to a lowering of standards in both creation and consumption. In a modern democracy “the number of consumers increases, but opulent and fastidious consumers become more scarce.” This general law explains why both the artisan and the artist are “induced to produce with great rapidity a [large] quantity of imperfect commodities” or art objects.” (Calinescu, 1987)

We had better go more deep into Tocqueville's analyses of democracy as it promises us certain realities for our analyses of kitsch. Above all, he stressed on the "the condition of equality." It is needed to be acknowledged that, it was the bourgeoisie who requested the condition of equality. "In the early Middle Ages, as cities were forming, growing, and emerging, artisans and tradesmen began to emerge as an economic force. They formed guilds, associations and companies to conduct business and promote their own interests. These people were the original bourgeoisie. In the late Middle Ages, they allied with the kings in uprooting the feudal system, gradually becoming the ruling class in industrialized nation-states. In the 17th and 18th century, they generally supported the American revolution and French revolution in overthrowing the laws and privileges of the absolutist feudal order, clearing the way for the rapid expansion of commerce." (www.answers.com, 2006) Middle class was the class of merchandising and trading. They were the one having an independent personal property other than having a land to govern¹. The personal property they had, gradually paved the way to power and resulted in new elements of equality among men. "The noble has gone down the social ladder, and the commoner has gone up; the one descends as the other rises. Every half-century brings them nearer to each other, and they will soon meet." (Tocqueville, 2001)

They took place in between the ruling nobility and the serf (proletarians) as being the middle class. With the fall of power and wealth of the nobility, step by step, the bourgeoisie came to scene as the new ruling class. "The middle class emerged in the nineteenth century as a class destined to win the power in the fairly near future. Driven by its urge for power, it had, on the other hand, to assimilate the traditional patrimony of the courtly-feudal class, changing it as it went along, and, on the other, to reaffirm its own original tradition, which was a revolutionary tempo." (Broch, 1950)

Tocqueville (2001) was a strong adherent, a supporter of democracy. He always kept on believing democracy is necessary and inevitable. However, after his trip to America, he came with a conclusion that democracy might bring certain types of

1 "In the eleventh century, nobility was beyond all price; in the thirteenth, it might be purchased. Nobility was first conferred by gift in 1270, and equality was thus introduced into the government by the aristocracy itself." (Tocqueville, 2001)

dangers to society. Relatively, he described the feudal system somehow a much calmer one:

“As the noble never suspected that anyone would attempt to deprive him of the privileges which he believed to be legitimate, and as the serf looked upon his own inferiority as a consequence of the immutable order of nature, it is easy to imagine that some mutual exchange of goodwill took place between two classes so differently endowed by fate. Inequality and wretchedness were then to be found in society, but the souls of neither rank of men were degraded.” Most importantly, before the new and unsettled democracy, “men are not corrupted by the exercise of power or debased by the habit of obedience, but by the exercise of a power which they believe to be illegitimate, and by obedience to a rule which they consider to be usurped and oppressive.” (Tocqueville, 2001)

Corruption and the risk of illegitimacy are the keywords of this quotation. The corruption grew in the souls of each man, was the result of the fall of “mutual exchange of goodwill.” From that on, any attempt to power requesting obedience will be an illegitimate kind as the world is so far away from the old agreement which comes as if “the immutable order of nature,” or in a way, the God will approved by both the few and the multitudes. In conclusion, mercantilism and the following capitalism upset stability both in social life and in economy and leaded a way to individuality in social scale.

4.1.1.2 The Individualism Dimension

All above story is the disposal of privileges and the settlement of “the condition of equality” at the heart of modern democracies. It only followed the destiny of bourgeoisie from the beginning until the end. It was not only the violence of French Revolution which turns things inside out, but also the idea of rationality. Dethroning the privileges of the King and “the happy few” is dethroning the God itself. It was not a coincidence that Nietzsche (2001) declared the death of God a few decades later.

“God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent? Is not the greatness of this

deed too great for us? Must we not ourselves become gods simply to be worthy of it? (Nietzsche, 2001)

Nietzsche (2001) believed in the power of individuality and the positive possibilities of individuality for humans. He believed that with God and with its orders and prohibitions, man can not be free. He can not fully feed and develop his abilities and satisfy his urge for creation. The declaration of the death of God is the declaration of freedom and the rise of individualism. Individualism is one of the most important features appeared along with romanticism. Today, it is one of the “sacred” values of our society, and it rarely links with anything negative. Before the eighteenth century, no one seems to call themselves as individuals. It was first linked with selfishness and used to describe what was believed to be the cause of the disintegration of society after French Revolution.

“Selfishness is a passionate and exaggerated love of self, which leads a man to connect everything with himself and to prefer himself to everything in the world. Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself. Selfishness originates in blind instinct; individualism proceeds from erroneous judgment more than from depraved feelings; it originates as much in deficiencies of mind as in perversity of heart. Selfishness blights the germ of all virtue; individualism, at first, only saps the virtues of public life; but in the long run it attacks and destroys all others and is at length absorbed in downright selfishness.” (Tocqueville, 2001)

Individualism applauded by romanticism. Everybody needed to carve their own bodies, in order to create their own self and their own truth. Without a shadow of doubt, the most influential example of individualism was Napoleon Bonaparte. He effected and became a model beyond the limits of his country and time. Nietzsche (2001) considered him as the one who was the closest to his concept of “overman” and as “the embodiment of the noble ideal.”

However Tanyeli (1999) asks a question about Figure 4.1, one of the paintings of Ingres, *Napoleon on his Imperial Throne*: What makes Napoleon kitsch in this painting and why a painting of Louise the XIV with a crown would not be considered as kitsch?



Figure 4.1: *Napoleon on his Imperial Throne* by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres

For Tanyeli (1990), a painting portrays a real-king with the sacred symbols and objects surrounding him can not be kitsch, due to the fact that these symbols never put together with an arbitrary manner. Quite the contrary, every one of them symbolize a historical fact related with the origins of the power. No matter how absurd they look like now, perhaps after the rationality of things, they meant something consistent in their ages. With the fall of the aristocratic system by the French Revolution, these symbols started to sense nothing. Therefore, a bourgeois like Napoleon wearing the symbols of old system can only be considered as kitsch. These symbols and objects in the painting are brought together rather arbitrarily. So that, any object can easily be added or subtracted to the crowd of objects around Napoleon.²

² Please see the original document as the translation is not enough to give the entire idea. Tanyeli U., 1990. Aslolan Kitsch'tir, Arredamento Dekorasyon, Aralık, pp. 103-108.

On the object level, let us give an example of this arbitrariness. Remember the Figure 3.6. It was a lighter in the form of a mobile phone. Therefore, if a lighter can be produced in the form of a mobile phone, than it can be produced in the form of a car (Figure 4.2) or of a gun (Figure 4.3) or following the same logic, if a gun can be a lighter than it can be a part of a table lamp. (Figure 4.4) A slight resemblance seems to be enough as it is in the examples of the gun, or no resemblance is required at all. No value is gained or lost whether to pick one form or another. What is significant at this point is that they can be cheap, regular objects or quite expensive and ‘designed’ ones like in the case of Starck’s.



Figure 4.2: A Car-Lighter



Figure 4.3: A Gun-Lighter



Figure 4.4: *Kalashnikov Gun Table Lamp* by Philippe Starck

What is important for us, however, is that how can it be possible for a bourgeois to wear a crown? Yet, how can it be possible to wear it by his naked hands as a crown, historically, should be worn by the hands of Pope or bishop? With the disappearance of the “natural order,” therefore the God and his grace, everybody, yet every object are free to imitate whatever they like. “If there is no God, everything is permitted,” as Dostoyevsky says. Therefore, the arbitrariness and the lack of order under the elusive name of freedom have some strange results.

4.1.1.3 The Salvation Dimension

Fraser (2002) in his *Redeeming Nietzsche* aims to develop a new understanding of kitsch. He says *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* starts with an attempt to understand one of Nietzsche’s puzzle-like concepts: Eternal recurrence. Kundera (1999) tries to understand the meaning of the concept as introducing the metaphors of “lightness and weight.”

“If every second of our lives recurs an infinite number of times, we are nailed to eternity as Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross. It is a terrifying prospect. In the world of eternal return the weight of unbearable responsibility lies heavy on every move we make. That is why Nietzsche called the idea of eternal return the heaviest of burdens (*das schwerste Gewicht*). If eternal return is the heaviest of burdens, then our lives can stand out against it in all their splendid lightness. But is heaviness truly deplorable and lightness splendid? The heaviest of burdens crushes us, we sink beneath it, it pins us to the ground. But in the love poetry of every age, the woman longs to be weighed down by the man’s body. The heaviest of burdens is therefore simultaneously an image of life’s most intense fulfillment. The heavier the burden, the closer our lives come to the earth, the more real and truthful they become. Conversely, the absolute absence of a burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into the heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant. What then shall we choose? Weight or lightness?” (Kundera, 1999)

Fraser (2002) claims that, Nietzsche, after the declaration of the death of God, faced with the problem of “lightness.” God was the “instrument of oppression, a great burden of human lives,” and if we murdered him and if he is dead now, then what should man do with all the freedom he gained? Is not it an unbearable lightness, and unbearable freedom? “...Before God’s death the weight of divine judgment bore down upon each and every human choice, the felt presence of heaven and hell

rendered human decision making of ultimate significance, freedom from divine judgment means that what human beings choose to do no longer carry the same significance. What is required by Nietzsche is some way of generating gravity, of introducing judgment, without returning to divine judgment and divine weight. This is the purpose of eternal recurrence.” (Fraser, 2002) Then lightness does not seem to be a rather easily tolerable one. Yet, we can not easily claim the negativity of weight and the positive aspect of lightness. The new gravity and the new burden is the modern salvation that Nietzsche suggests us. Humanity has to take responsibility for setting its own moral standards. For him, he was Napoleon who never cared for other people’s thought and went his own way to create his own moral values. Then what explains Napoleon’s kitschy situation with all the historical symbols all around him?

For Baudrillard, “By their number, redundancy, superfluity and formal extravagance, by the play of fashion and all that exceeds pure and simply function in them, objects merely simulate the social essence – status – the grace of predestination which is only ever bestowed by birth to a few and which the majority, having opposite destinies, can never attain.” (Baudrillard, 1998) The grace of predestination can only be given by the heavenly order, like the crown in the head of Napoleon. If you want to take it, it becomes the tragic-comic situation of Napoleon. Baudrillard continues “This hereditary legitimacy (whether of blood or of culture) is at the very heart of the concept of status, the key concept in the whole dynamics of social mobility. Underlying all aspirations, there is this ideal end of status by birth, a status of grace and excellence.” (Baudrillard, 1998)

Napoleon was an ordinary man who aimed to find a way to move all along the social ladder. His extraordinariness comes from his success which adds on anything new to the logic of moving up or falling down, therefore, the mobility of society. Similarly, kitsch never adds on anything new to the logic of distinction, it is just “defined by its derived and weak value.” (Baudrillard, 1998)

Consequently, “it is status which arouses this frenzy, this berserk world of knick-knacks, gadgets, fetishes, all of which seek to mark out a value for all eternity and prove *salvation by works, since salvation by grace is unattainable.*” (Baudrillard, 1998) Bourgeoisies who like to buy the noble titles are looking for this kind of a

salvation. Yet, as it can not be bought by money and it has been bought buy money, it was just a lie, a counterfeit yet kitsch.

4.1.1.4 Totalitarianism: A Detail

Long later Tocqueville (2001), Kundera (1999) exemplifies one of the illegitimate regimes as he experiences one in his country, Czechoslovakia, in 1950s. He considers kitsch as “the aesthetic ideal of all politicians, all political parties and movements,” and writes about the great danger inherited in such an idealization. Figure 4.5 reflects the aesthetic approach of socialism under the name of Socialist-Realism.

“Those of us who live in a society where various political tendencies exist side by side and competing influences cancel or limit one another can manage more or less to escape the kitsch inquisition: the individual can preserve his individuality; the artist can create unusual works. But whenever a single political movement corners power, we find ourselves in the realm of *totalitarian kitsch*.” (Kundera, 1999)



Figure 4.5: *Roses for Stalin* by Boris Vladimirskij

The protagonist of *Unbearable Lightness of Being* is a painter. While she was in the academy, she painted according to the rules of Socialist Realism, like which was the only officially approved type of art. Other modern types of painting like impressionism or cubism are strictly rejected as they have considered as the "decadent bourgeois art." "Under this regime that could be no question of radical experimentation or avant-garde movements in art and a dreary mediocrity prevailed." (Bottomore, 1992)

Sabonis-Chafee (1999) claims that in order to understand how the mechanism of kitsch worked through communist societies, it is needed to be understood the notion of "final vocabulary." For Rorty (1989), human beings have a final vocabulary which is:

"...A set of words which s/he has no definition because they are the internal text/test against which all experience is defined and evaluated: The vocabulary is "final in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far as he can go with language." Typically included in this vocabulary are such words as *good*, *right*, and *beautiful*, but also such words as *revolution*, and *progressive*. Unless the individual is willing to view her own final vocabulary with a bit of irony and appreciation for the final vocabularies of others, she will take for granted that her existed final vocabulary is universal: sufficient to order not only her life, but also to judge the actions and lives of others." (Sabonis-Chafee, 1999)

Therefore, the power of totalitarian regimes is their power to insist on a final vocabulary and their continually rejection of others. To always define a "true, good, right and beautiful" and dispose what is inevitably defined as "false, bad, wrong and ugly" is how kitsch works among minds. For Rorty (1989), this is the thin and flexible part of final vocabulary. "The larger part contains thicker, more rigid, and more parochial terms, for example 'Christ,' 'England,' 'professional standards,' 'decency,' 'kindness,' 'the Revolution,' 'the Church,' 'progressive,' 'rigorous,' 'creative.' The more parochial terms do most of the work." (Rorty, 1989) Similarly, Kundera (1999) asks and states that "...what is the basis of being? God? Mankind? Struggle? Love? Man? Woman? Since the opinions vary, there are various kitsches: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Communist, Fascist, democratic, feminist, European, American, national, international." The symmetrical nine candelabrams may make no sense to a Muslim. Likewise, the idea of the light

rotating may not for a Christian unless he knows circumambulating or a candle holder having Pope on it to a Jew. The “thicker” part of the final vocabulary produces certain segments of understanding. These segments are not universal and do not necessarily be shared by the different segments of humanity.



Figure 4.6: A Patriotic-Religious Candelabrum



Figure 4.7: The Pope-Candle Holders

Figure 4.6 is a Hanukkah menorah (Jewish candelabrum) which has turned into a patriotic symbol as joining USA and Israel. Figure 4.7 is a candle holder for

Catholics put in the tombs of relatives and friends have turned into ones with the new Pope onto it. Finally, Figure 4.8 is a picture of Kaaba whose around phosphorous lights are whirling like in the act of circumambulating.



Figure 4.8: Kaaba-Theque³

What Rorty (1989) and Kundera (1999) like-minded is that it is irony that opposes the default value or the essence of the world and ready to accept alternative vocabularies. “When I say ‘totalitarian’, what I mean is that everything that infringes on kitsch must be banished for life: every display of individualism (because a deviation from the collective is a spit in the eye of the smiling brotherhood); every doubt (because anyone who starts doubting details will end by doubting itself); all irony (because in the realm of kitsch everything must be taken quite seriously)...” (Kundera, 1999)

³ I have derived the name due to the fact that these frames resemble discotheques. It would also be nice to note down that Islamic kitsch objects have a peculiarity among the other religious kitsch objects: They use technological gadgetry very much.

4.1.2 The Escapism Theory

Although the theory of status seeking has a lot to say related with kitsch's sociological quality, it is also important to take into consideration the desire to escape from modern day-to-day life and its boredom fraught settings.

“Lovers of kitsch may look for prestige – or an enjoyable illusion of prestige – but their pleasure does not stop there. 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)

Kitsch offers “a pleasurable escape from the drabness of modern quotidian life.” (Calinescu, 1987) Actually, he relates the existence of kitsch with the conditions immanent to modernity in the sense that “the phenomenon of compulsive consumption, the fear of boredom, and the need for escape, combined with the widespread view of art as both play and display, and among the factors that in various degrees and fashions have contributed to the growth of what is called *kitsch*.” (Calinescu, 1987) No matter kitsch is some sort of a marginal product of modernity; it is still a product of modernity following the transformation of the things under the stimulus of commodification.

“People who advocate educational values tend to see in kitsch nothing but the dross of art, something that comes to pass because art compromised itself. Kitsch is more than that. It lies dormant in art itself, waiting for a chance to leap forward at any moment ...Kitsch is a parody of catharsis.” (Adorno, 1997)

The process of commodification raises a crisis related with the autonomy of art. Culture Industry, as Adorno and Horkheimer named it, asserts that art has become under the control of marketing rules which defines formulas to manipulate people. However, when the art started to be manipulated by the market-driven forces and become controlled, it loses its required quality of autonomy and being against the oppressiveness of power structures and becomes a bare, non-challenging tool. By means of such a reduction, art is transformed into an object of commodification and serves to give the people leisure and something to kill time. Such a shift is followed by a shift in the worlds of people. Culture Industry makes the people to turn into passive audiences ready to accept everything.

“...Adorno has described the *need* of the masses for distraction of ‘fun’ as both a result of existing (capitalist) mode of production and, as it were, one of the most characteristic products. ...Adorno’s insight into the need for ‘distraction’ is quite accurate if only we broaden the scope of its application and realize that the whole process of production and consumption of mass (pseudo) culture is facilitated by an all-too-human readiness for self-deception.” (Calinescu, 1987)

Art having lost its power to oppose and becoming a service of relaxation is the way running towards kitsch. For Calinescu (1987), it is not only art that swerves but beauty and the inclusive system of values. Kitsch “obviously has a lot to do with the modern illusion that beauty may be bought and sold. ...It appears at the moment in history when beauty in its various forms is socially distributed like any other commodity subject to essential market law of supply and demand.” The need to sell and the recognition of what sells the best is beauty on one hand, and the growing technological possibilities of fabricating things in great numbers and in a very short time on the other, have produced an appropriate condition for kitsch applications to sprout.

4.1.2.1 The Beauty Put On Sale

The commodification of beauty brings about certain inversions. Kulka (1996) quotes from the *Decay of Lying*, in which Oscar Wilde acclaims the explorations of Impressionist, to explain how the real artistic works of art enriches our associations. ““Where if not from the Impressionist, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blousing the gas-lamps and chancing the houses into monstrous shadows? To whom, if not to them ...do we owe the lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint forms of fainting grace curved bridge and swaying barge? The extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to this particular school of Art.”” (Kulka, 1996) It is not hard to guess that he is not only Wilde to be thankful to the school of Impressionism but also the producer of kitsch due to the fact that their technical developments and the production of a novel kind of “beauty” is absorbed by the system and marketed as artificial paradises. “What Art reveals to us is Nature’s lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out. When I look at a landscape, I cannot

help seeing all its defects.” (Wilde, 2004) Calinescu (1987) is right when he indicates “the ubiquity of spurious beauty in today’s world” owes too much to the past’s undiscovered beauties. Once there are labeled as beauties, they can easily be exploited and commercialized. Therefore, once it was art imitating the nature for its own sake, currently it is the nature to imitate art in respect of marketing laws. “Nowadays, nature has a little choice but to imitate mass-produced color reproductions, to be beautiful as a picture postcard.” (Calinescu, 1987) This is the transformation of beauty into the effect of beauty. By gaining this particular new function, beauty has taken a giant step forward to “the goddess of beauty,” (Broch, 1950) that is to say, the kitsch.

“Before Romanticism the aesthetic ideal has been considered as *transcendent* in regard to any possible work of art: Beauty appeared as an absolute, practically never attainable, model and criterion of value. But during the romantic era the aesthetic ideal lost all trace of its former transcendence and came to be perceived exclusively in terms of its immanence in particular, finite works of art.” (Calinescu, 1987)

Romanticism, along with a strong emphasis on the beautiful and the sentimental has brought about “various kinds of aesthetic escapism.” (Calinescu, 1987) One of the most vivid forms of escapism is nostalgia. A desire to escape from the present to the past, is one of the common qualities of romanticism and kitsch, actually, what kitsch inherited from the former one.

4.1.2.2 Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a term meaning longing for a past time or place.⁴ It always signifies unsuccessfulness or disharmony with the present, and simultaneously, calls forth a desire to escape from this hard-to-bare present to a past time. For Broch (1933), the conservative spirit of nostalgia “often happens in periods of revolution, it is used to escape from the irrational, and escape from the idyll of history where set conventions are still valid.” It is true that, nostalgia is a remembering of the past which is “closely associated with desires for belonging and for reinstating a lost, glorious part,” (Sabonis-Chafee, 1999) however, with an important nuance. The past

⁴ Nostos = returning to home and algos = longing.

that is remembered is inevitable an “idealized, a never-never past.” (Leppert, 2002) This is probably because; it does not stem from the qualities of the past but present as a failure. Therefore, the unbearable certainty of the failure is the producer of a need to escape another time/place, or actually existence, which counterfeits the self. That is to say, just like kitsch, it requires “a person in the need of it,” (Broch, 1950) a person who is ready to deceive himself. Leppert (2002) comments on Adorno’s understanding of kitsch in relation with nostalgia: “Kitsch invokes a past that is nostalgically misremembered; as such kitsch is a means to forget – but less to forget the past than to the present.” Therefore, it is the pain-killer soothing the anguish of being by means of distorts the harsh realities of the current time into illusionary ones. Figures below are the re-born styles which are produced with the guaranty of nostalgia sells.

Significantly, Figure 4.9 is a radio introduced to the market with the name of ‘The Nostalgic Radio.’ Figure 4.10 and Figure 4.11 is produced afterwards due to the fact that, it has sold a lot. However, they, in a way, “misremember” the original radios as are considerably smaller than the original ones.



Figure 4.9, The ‘Nostalgic Radio’ 01



Figure 4.10: The ‘Nostalgic Radio’ 02 **Figure 4.11:** The ‘Nostalgic Radio’ 03

“Kitsch is the simplest and most direct way of soothing nostalgia; the Romantic need was at one time satisfied by chivalrous novels or novels of adventure⁵ (in which the immediate terms of historical reality were replaced by fabricated clichés),” (Broch, 1933) now it is satisfied with other types of adventures, still with the same romantic need. Therefore, kitsch object serves a reservoir for various types of expressions of nostalgia. It may be a great empire, a particular hero, childhood etc.

“Replacing historical or contemporary reality by clichés, kitsch clearly thrives on some emotional needs that are generally associated with the romantic world view.” (Calinescu, 1987) In order to understand such longing and the need for illusions, one has to consider the romantic world view. Thence, the overall next chapter aims at developing a significant understanding of this particular view, as contrasting with what is *romanesque*⁶.

⁵ Please return to this full quotation, after reading Chapter 5, *A Case: Don Quixote*.

⁶ Means “novelistic”.

5. READING KITSCH AS MEDIATED DESIRE

It is needed to be acknowledged, first of all, that kitsch is an extremely fertile ground to give birth to various studies. The eye of the researcher can focus on either the aesthetical-stylistic qualities of kitsch or the socio-cultural ones. A great range of subject matter can be discussed such as political kitsch (totalitarian regimes like fascism, communism etc. and their productions of goods and discourses), religious kitsch (as both kitsch and religion discard to question and doubt) or certain sorts of nostalgic kitsch. Kitsch can be exemplified by picking the samples of industrial product design, architecture, or in any sort of arts like painting, music, photography etc. or, for example, advertisement.

Moreover, the researcher can discuss his subject matter related with a great many of reasons for the emergence of kitsch as Calinescu (1987) did or can concentrate on one particular reason like as Broch's (1950) romanticism. Similarly, in this study, it has been aimed to be mentioned all the whys and wherefore as dividing kitsch into two main categories and trying to discuss kitsch due to all its aesthetical and sociological aspects. On the other hand, in particular, the study has aimed to focus on the issue of democracy and most importantly, the condition of equality as following Tocqueville (2001) and the logic of consumption as following Baudrillard (1998).

Within the framework of this study, it is chiefly the democracy and the condition of equality claimed to be the aspect giving birth to kitsch. In terms of aesthetics, it necessarily lead to "a lowering of standards in both creation and consumption" (Calinescu, 1987) due to the fact that wealthy and selective demand decreased while the ordinary and easy-to-satisfy demand increased. In terms of sociology, however, democracy has created *a misunderstanding* among man. Yet, this misunderstanding is what is going to be concentrated on within the limits of this chapter.

After citing the issue of democracy once more as stressing on equality, the framework of the study, the mediated desire, will be defined in relation with the

ineluctable coming out of the model, in other words, the mediator. Owing to the fact that, it is believed the existence of the model, therefore, the idea of mediation has a lot to say about the nature of kitsch.

5.1 The Pseudo-Equality

In a modern democracy, man is born with the idea that “a man's own energies may place him at the top of any one of them, an easy and unbounded career seems open to his ambition, and he will readily persuade himself that he is born to no vulgar destinies.” (Tocqueville, 2001) However, as time passes by, what he is destined to learn is that only a few people accomplishes what is heralded due to the fact that there is a mass of people desiring the same thing. “They have swept away the privileges of some of their fellow-creatures which stood in their way, but they have opened the door to universal competition: the barrier has changed its shape rather than its position. When men are nearly alike, and all follow the same track, it is very difficult for any one individual to walk quick and cleave a way through the dense throng which surrounds and presses him. This constant strife between the propensities springing from the equality of conditions and the means it supplies to satisfy them, harasses and wearies the mind.” (Tocqueville, 2001)

Therefore, the misunderstanding is that the path leading a great many of people, namely the masses, to the above is not as easy as it is assumed to be. The fall of privileges, in other words, the stable and impervious class relations do not automatically brought about an ease to climb the upper parts of the social ladder. Now, each individual of this mass has to deal with a severe competition with all the other individuals of the same mass. Hence, the idea which arises on the presumed fact that “a man's own energies may place him at the top of any one of them” is yet needed to be acknowledged as an illusion. This basic reality what constitutes the grounds of this chapter is this illusion.

In modern democracies, there exists a mass aspiring to accomplish their desires yet have not attained. Their “desires grow much faster than their fortunes, and who gloat upon the gifts of wealth in anticipation, long before they have means to obtain them. Such men are eager to find some short cut to these gratifications, already almost

within their reach. From the combination of these two causes the result is that in democracies there is always a multitude of persons whose wants are above their means and who are very willing to take up with imperfect satisfaction rather than abandon the object of their desires altogether.” (Tocqueville, 2001) This request for short cuts, no doubt, indicates a growing desire for kitsch.

It should not surprise us to remark one of the first records of kitsch in Tocqueville’s (2001) observations. This very first detection of kitsch belongs to a time when the term kitsch was not even born. Thus, this is a memory of a man who faces with kitsch for the first time.

“When I arrived for the first time at New York, by that part of the Atlantic Ocean which is called the East River, I was surprised to perceive along the shore, at some distance from the city, a number of little palaces of white marble, several of which were of classic architecture. When I went the next day to inspect more closely one which had particularly attracted my notice, I found that its walls were of whitewashed brick, and its columns of painted wood. All the edifices that I had admired the night before were of the same kind.”¹ (Tocqueville, 2001)

It again should not surprise us to detect the same need for palaces like the above ones. The competence of technology has grown, yet the desire for “above means” and a search for “imperfect satisfaction” remained still. The below images belongs to today’s Mediterranean coasts of Turkey, Antalya. The opening image (Figure 5.1) is a hotel imitating the Topkapi Palace and similarly, the following one (Figure 5.2) is another hotel imitating The Grand Kremlin Palace.

¹ This paragraph is also quoted by Calinescu. See page 227.



Figure 5.1: *Topkapi Palace Hotel* by World of Wonder Hotels, 1999

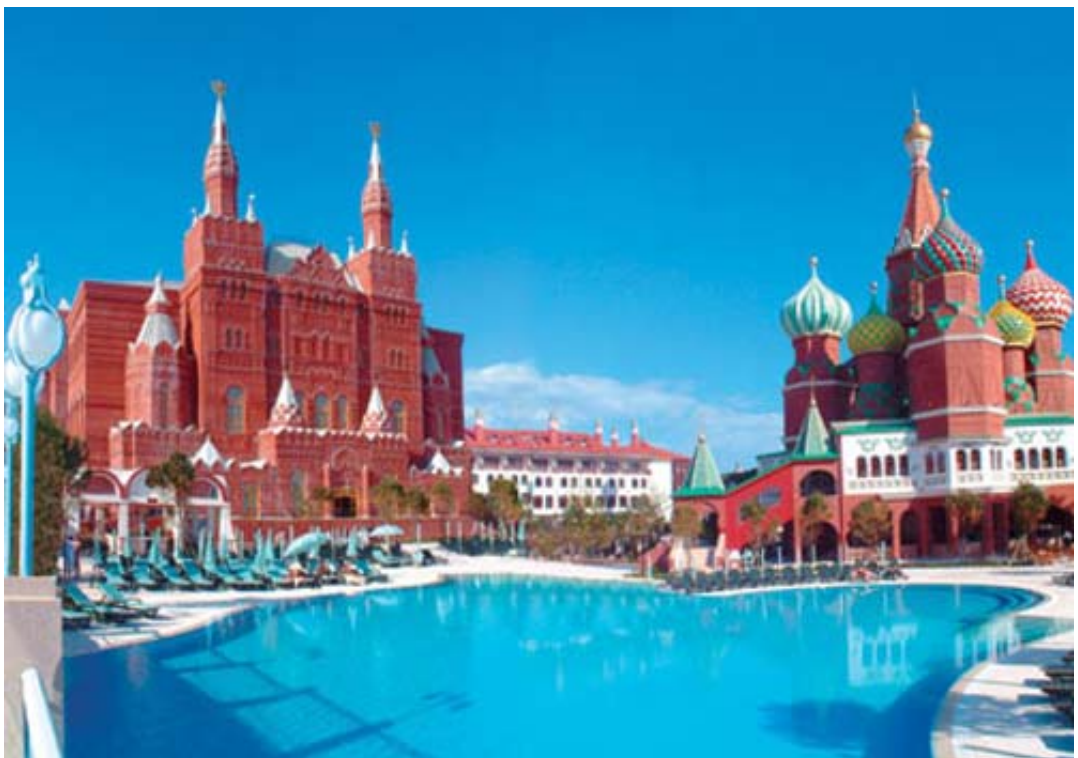


Figure 5.2: *Kremlin Palace Hotel* by World of Wonder Hotels, 2003

In conclusion, it can be claimed that democracy and the notion of equality results in, initially, a decrease in the standards and secondly an increase in sameness, competition and therefore, a need for distinction. The need for social distinction, on the other hand, results in a need to manifest status in signs. This manifestation can be either with non-kitsch objects such as a Mercedes Benz, an original Zippo lighter or an antique vase or with kitsch objects as fake signs depending on a counterfeit or an illusion and claiming an achievement which is actually a simulation of this achievement.

5.2 The Mediated Desire and the Mediation²

Adorno claims that “the positive element of kitsch lies in the fact that it sets free for a moment the glimmering realization that you have wasted your life.” (Leppert, 2002) A man who is born in a society having the idea that if one tries enough he can obtain his aspirations, moreover, a man who is always manipulated and induced to long for above his means, nevertheless, have not achieved yet, and gradually faces with the unbearable actuality that he may not achieve those at all, will probably be a man who will consider his life as wasted after a short while. This condition is what fabricates the masses’ need for sweet illusions. It was romanticism whispering nostalgic, heroic or saccharine-type dreams to masses to soothe their hysteria, now it is kitsch, the bulky child of romanticism, taking it over and pursuing the service successfully.

Girard (1976), in his fundamental work *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* opposes what he calls as *the romantic* and *the novelistic*. The romantic reflects a state of being unconscious of the existence of a model. It depends on a sweet lie and helps to keep on believing to this lie. The novelistic, conversely, is the state of being aware of the model. Yet, it reveals what is hidden by the romantic lie and faces with the fact that there is a model, namely a mediator, who gives directions to our desires, secretly manipulates our actions.

² Girard (1976) uses mediated desire also as triangular desire or metaphysical desire; the mediator as the model or the seductive.

What interests us related with kitsch is that, kitsch takes the absolute opposing attitude with what Girard (1976) calls as novelistic, whereas paradoxically, it brings about the same result. Kitsch never dares to reveal any truth. Let us remember some of the definitions of kitsch in the previous chapters: It is the “imitation, forgery, and what we may call the aesthetics of deception and self-deception,” (Calinescu, 1987) it is greatest liar and “the mask of beauty.” (Kundera, 1999)

Kitsch is certainly a child of romanticism, in fact, it is a quite exaggerated form of romanticism. Kitsch pushes romanticism to its limits, it, in a way, squares it. What is novelistic reveals certain facts concealed by romanticism by being honest to its subject matter. Kitsch, quite conversely, magnifies what is concealed and finally pushes the ordinary eye to be aware of what is tried to be conceal. They follow the exact opposite orientations, nevertheless, they brought into the same results in the sense that both the novelistic and kitsch makes the mediation clear.

5.2.1 The Concept of Mediation

Girard (1976) claims that desire as it is used to be assumed do not follow a linear path joining the object and the subject. Romanticism tells us that there is either a desiring subject or a seductive object. “When the ‘nature’ of the subject inspiring the passion is not enough, one must turn to the impassioned subject.” (Girard, 1976) However, for Girard (1976), there is a mediator choosing the objects of desire for the subject. “The mediator is there, above that line, radiating toward both the subject and the object. ...The object changes with each adventure but the triangle remains.” Therefore, the path in between those is not a straight line but rather a triangle. Girard (1976), however, warns us that “The triangle is no *Gestalt*. The real structures are intersubjective. They cannot be localized anywhere; the triangle has no reality whatever; it is a systematic metaphor, systematically pursued.”

Girard (1976) both gets the idea of mediation and the power of his criticism from the masterpieces of modern literature. The works of Cervantes, Flaubert, Stendhal, Proust and Dostoyevsky that are become classical today shapes the structure of his argument. Although, every one of the above writers has a lot to declare related with the mediated desire and existence of mediation, he is Cervantes who leads them all

and who actually is the master of the art of modern novel writing due to the fact that *Don Quixote* is considered as the first modern novel.

There is, actually, a trap in picking up *Don Quixote* as an example within the framework of this study in the sense that what is discussed here is the modern period which is literally between the 18th century and the present (if a distinction between modernity and post-modernity is required, modernity ends at the middle of the 19th century), whereas, *Don Quixote* is a novel written in the 17th century. It should not confuse us. First of all, it is needed to be acknowledged that, as it has already been stated in *Chapter 2*, modernity can not be divided into sharp stages. It requires what is termed as early-modernity constituting appropriate conditions for a couple of ages. Secondly, *Don Quixote* is admittedly a modern book dealing with modern questions. It is a book beyond the limits of its age and a great source of inspiration for any sort of discipline aiming to talk about modern conditions. It has been, for instance, taken into critical account in Foucault's thoughts on madness and civilization in his famous *The Order of the Things* and also Bakhtin's theory of the novel in his *Discourse in the Novel*. Thus, it is better to venture into the world of Don Quixote in order to understand the mechanism of mediation.

5.2.1.1 A Case: *Don Quixote*

Don Quixote is a story of a thin and a less than affluent man at around his 50s who is obsessed with chivalry books and makes a fool of himself by believing he is one of those chevaliers. One day, Alonso Quijano makes up his mind to leave his home and "become a knight-errant and travel about the world with his armour and his arms and his horse in search of adventures and to practice all the(se) activities that he knew from his books were practiced by knight-errants..." (Cervantes, 2003) Equipping himself with old, rusty armour and a cardboard helmet, he renames himself Don Quixote de La Mancha. As a final step in his transformation into a knight-errant, he picks a girl, whom he calls Dulcinea Del Toboso, as every knight-errant in the chivalry romances has a lady whom knight is in love. With the same reason, as every knight-errant in the romances has a squire, Don Quixote persuades Sancho Panza, a fatty local worker, to be his squire as promising him an island to govern at the end.

For Girard (1976), Don Quixote and also Sancho Panza are typical examples of mediated desire. *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* opens with a quotation from *Don Quixote* who speaks out his imitation.

“I want you to know, Sancho, that the famous Amadis of Gaul was one of the most perfect knight errants. But what am I saying, one of the most perfect? I should say the only, the first, the unique, the master and lord of all those who existed in the world. ...I think ...that, when a painter wants to become famous for his art he tries to imitate the originals of the best masters he knows; the same rule applies to the most important jobs or exercises which contribute to the embellishment of republics; thus the man who wishes to be known as careful and patient should and does imitate Ulysses, in whose person and works Homer paints for us a vivid portrait of carefulness and patience, just as Virgil shows us in the person of a valiant captain; and it is understood that they depict them not as they are but as they should be, to provide an example of virtue for centuries to come. In the same way Amadis was the pole, the star, the sun for brave and amorous knights, as we others who fight under the banner of love and chivalry should imitate him. Thus, my friend Sancho, I reckon that whoever imitates him the best will come closest to the perfect chivalry.” (Girard, 1976)

The model is the one imitated, is the one having the control on the choices of the subject. In metaphorically speaking, he is the sun that the subject rotates around. Don Quixote and later Sancho Panza as imitating Don Quixote himself, “borrow their desires from the other in a movement so fundamental and primitive that they completely confuse it with the will to be Oneself.” (Girard, 1976) Don Quixote decides to set off a journey “to redress the wrongs and outrages committed by the wicked and insolent man,” (Cervantes, 2003) because he was Amadis himself who has already performed the journey to redress the wrongs and outrages. For Foucault, “The chivalric romances have provided once and for all a written prescription for his adventures.” (Foucault, 2002) Although Don Quixote’s journey seems to be full of incidents or adventures, it is not. It is a repetition of the journey of Amadis. Hence, in the case of *Don Quixote* (due to the fact that, it is unknown whether Amadis is imitating some other bodies) Amadis and his adventurous journey are original, Don Quixote and his journey, on the other hand, are the imitations of the original body and the journey. In other words, Don Quixote can not exist before Amadis, similarly, before chivalric romances, as they are the “written prescriptions,” Don Quixote’s adventures can not exist. This is the absolute appearance of the model before the

subject and the object. This reversal is the element generating the comedy in Cervantes' novel.

What make the reader laugh are basically the things that the protagonist judges them wrongly. He confuses, for instance, windmills to be giants. Owing to the fact that Amadis in the chivalry romances fights against the giants, Don Quixote who considers himself a hero, a knight errant like Amadis, and therefore, fights against the pseudo-giants which are actually some ordinary windmills. According to Girard (1976), in the case of Don Quixote, the problem is *quid pro quo* meaning something for something else. Don Quixote confuses, for example, windmills with enemy giants as he misjudges them.

“‘Look you here,’ Sancho retorted ‘those over there aren’t giants, they are windmills and what look to you arms are sails - when the wind turns them they make the millstones go around.’

‘It is perfectly clear,’ replied Don Quixote, ‘that you are but a raw novice in this matter of adventures. They are giants; and if you are frightened, you can take yourself away and say your prayers while I engage them in fierce and arduous combat.’” (Cervantes, 2003)

A much less worn example can also be given. Owing to “being so absorbed in these books that his nights spent reading from dusk till dawn, and his days from dawn till dusk,” (Cervantes, 2003) Don Quixote starts to live mentally inside of chivalry romances. The more he reads the less he lives his daily life in his village in La Mancha. His past world gradually dissolves into the world of chivalric stories and the vocabulary he uses to define his life changes into one of chivalry. Don Quixote comes across a man wearing what he imagines to be the famous helmet of Mambrino when it starts to rain a little. Mambrino is a fictional king, famous in the romances of chivalry, having a gold helmet which makes its owner untouchable and invulnerable. To have this gold helmet is the dream of all the great knights in the romances.

In reality, the man Don Quixote comes across is a barber and what he carries upon his head is an upside down basin to protect the barber against the rain. However, Don Quixote is blind to the ordinary facts or objects of life. For his eyes, there is nothing like a dull basin simply functions to protect from some sort of weather situations, but glorious things such as a king called Mambrino, a magical gold helmet, heroic acts

etc. Moreover, the magnificence of these objects never stems from Don Quixote's life and experiences but from prescriptions gathered from chivalry books.

Kitsch is doubtless a denial. In Kundera's (1999) terms it is "the absolute denial of shit". The above quotation of Adorno also indicates the same fact as stressing on "the positive element kitsch³" which renders the world into a bearable one as eliminating the overall negativity it contains. Don Quixote and the lover of kitsch are alike in the sense that they both deny the ordinary realities of life.

Kundera (1999) in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* tells a story of an American senator who describes "a circle with his arm" surrounding his children and the grass on which they are playing. *Circle* is a common metaphor also appearing in his early books other than the cited one here⁴. To circle, for Kundera (1999), is to put certain things inside, therefore inevitably, to discard certain things outside. What are kept inside should always become the ones considered as positive, such as good, beautiful, cute etc. Thus, it can be said that, Don Quixote also "describes a circle with his arm" and disposes anything outside of chivalry books.

As it has already been discussed in the previous chapter, "there are various kitsches," (Kundera, 1999) in other words, there are various circles encapsulating and disregarding things. At this point, it would also be nice to remember Rorty's (1989) concept of final vocabulary. For him, human beings have a final vocabulary which is "a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, their lives. ...These are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives." (Rorty, 1989) This vocabulary is final in the sense that it designates the limits of man's thoughts and perceptions of life. On that account, the shift in the set of words is the shift of realities. The contrast between Don Quixote's past vocabulary and his new vocabulary creates a misunderstanding. Don Quixote's being inside of chivalry romances seems to blind him to the common vocabulary which he used to share with others before. Hence, the romances are the source of Don Quixote's illusions and are his blind spot where his eye lacks

3 "The positive element of kitsch lies in the fact that it sets free for a moment the glimmering realization that you have wasted your life." (Leppert, 2002)

4 Especially in *The Joke* as ring and ring dancing.

understanding or its view is obstructed. The source reflects an ersatz light on the everyday object and ascribes it an illusionary value which is, in fact, does not exist. Thanks to the existence of the model, the basin turns into a magical, glimmering, golden helmet. Because, “From the moment the mediator’s influence is felt, the sense of reality is lost and judgment is paralyzed.” (Girard, 1976)

5.2.1.2 The Portrayal of Mediation

A schema of mediation would be helpful in demonstrating the mechanism of mediation. In a general schema, Figure 5.3, there is the subject, the object and the mediator.

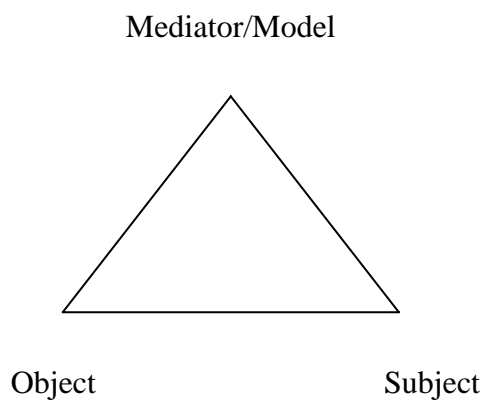


Figure 5.3: Mediation – Common Representation

In the case of Don Quixote, the schema would be like in Figure 5.4.

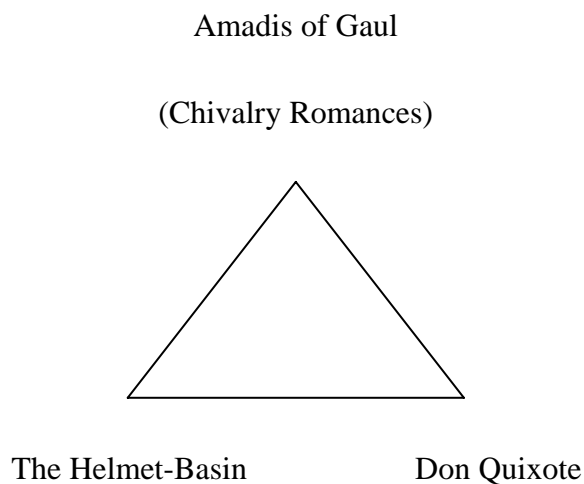


Figure 5.4: Mediation – The Helmet-Basin Representation

The Helmet-Basin is a multi-layered object. It is a basin looks like Mambrino's helmet when the model appears and paralyzes the judgment of the subject, in this case, Don Quixote. Strange enough, kitsch follows the same path. The museum shop of The Art Institute of Chicago sells cases, totes, purses, umbrellas of the masterpieces of Modern Art like the one with Monet's *Water Lilies* in Figure 5.5.



Figure 5.5: Water Lilies Cases – *Water Lilies* by Claude Monet

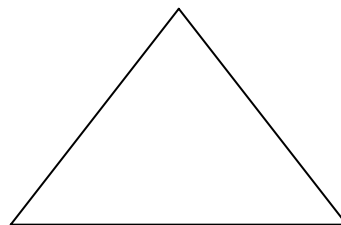
It is very obvious that the appeal and the value of these objects do not originate from their use values. For instance being light, strong or ergonomic etc. has nothing to say about the umbrella and the tote, their functions have obscured behind the model that is imitated. The strength of the references, in the above cases the paintings, is wrongly equal to the strength of the objects but nothing else. Therefore, the value does not stem from the object but from what it parasitically captured. “Value is measured directly by the demand for spurious replicas or reproductions of the objects whose original aesthetic meaning consisted, or should have consisted, in being unique and therefore inimitable.” (Calinescu, 1987)

If the elements of pseudo-umbrella are placed at the corners of subject-model-object triangle (Figure 5.6), it can be claimed that the subject or the consumer does not

straightly direct himself to the painting-umbrella. The path followed is rather a mediated or triangular one. The subject should visit the top corner, in order to be seduced by the umbrella due to the fact that its functional qualities have nothing to appeal the consumer. The top corner is the space of the mediator and the mediation which are shaped and constituted by longings, aspirations, and various types of positive emotions. Besides, the more they “trigger an unreflective emotional response,” (Kulka, 1996) the more they “derive from the basic images people have engraved in their memories,” (Kundera, 1999) therefore identifiable, the more successful they are.



Paris Street; Rainy Day by Gustave Caillebotte



The Painting-Umbrella

The Consumer/The Subject



Figure 5.6: Mediation – The Painting-Umbrella Representation

The ordinary umbrella needs an artificial ray reflected from the model in order to “shine with a false brilliance.” (Girard, 1976) “The mediator’s prestige is imparted to the object of desire and confers upon it an illusionary value.” (Girard, 1976) In other words, the value of the Paris Street; Rainy Day umbrella originates from the original *Paris Street; Rainy Day* which is, in this case, “unique and inimitable.” Romantic point of view discards the entity of the mediator and therefore sticks to the illusionary value and the romantic subject is blind thanks to the false brilliance” of the object. He has a self-deception in the sense that what he consumes is the umbrella. This is the fall of reality⁵ and the ability of judgment.

Kulka (1996) claims that kitsch resembles a pictogram due to its tendency of schematizing and standardizing things. “We can thus see that kitsch functions as a *transparent* (or quasi-transparent) *symbol*. To say that kitsch functions like a kind of pictogram is just another way of saying that it functions like a transparent symbol, or that the effect of kitsch is totally parasitic on its referent. Although there is a world of differences between a kitsch picture of a crying child and the inscription “crying child,” semantically they function alike.” (Kulka, 1996)

A transparent symbol or a transparent envelope, as Proust (2002) names it, “packs the physical outline of the creature we see with all the ideas we have already formed about (it), and in the complete picture of (it) which we compose in our minds those ideas have certainly the principal place.” The transparent envelope covers the creature or the object below and makes it unrecognizable. The situation can be portrayed as Figure 5.7:

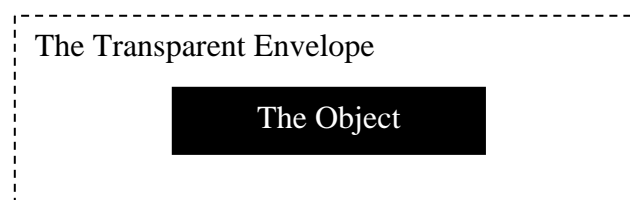


Figure 5.7: Transparency – Common Representation

⁵ In this point, it would be helpful to remember, 1. “There is no counterconcept to kitsch. Its antagonist is not an idea but reality,” (Rosenberg, 1959) and 2. Kitsch is the “aesthetics of simulation.” (Baudrillard, 1998)

Therefore, each time what is seen is not the object as it is assumed to be but the transparent envelope. So that, it will not be wrong to claim that the umbrella or the tote disappears beneath the referent paintings. (Figure 5.8 and Figure 5.9) The fall of the object beneath the symbol or the envelope is equal to the rise of the referent or the model. That is to say, the envelope is the area of illusions in the sense that “the mediator’s prestige ...confers upon (the object inside) an illusionary value” (Girard, 1976) and the transparency is the reason of illusions.

The situation both defines the desire to be a knight-errant raised by the being of Amadis in the case of Don Quixote and the “social class aspirations and anticipations, of expressing the magical affiliation with a culture, with the forms, manners and markers of the upper class” (Baudrillard, 1998) in the case of kitsch lover.

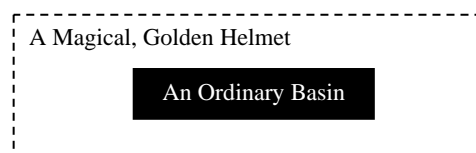


Figure 5.8: Transparency – Basin Representation

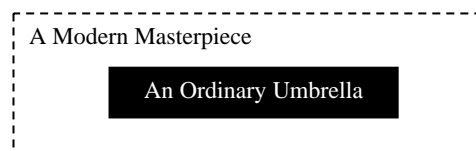


Figure 5.9: Transparency – Umbrella Representation

What is crucial at this point, however, is the need to state that a transformation of the objects (as explained above) requires a transformation of the subject, his way of living, thinking etc. What should be focused on, then, are again the subject and the disguised relationship with his mediator. The change that is performed by the modern subject in his mental and cultural life has the key for an explanation of the change within the modern object which is actually a production of his mentality and the culture he generated. As it has already been stated, the desire of the modern individual does not follow a straight line but rather triangle as it is mediated above. Consequently, the similarity between the kitsch lover and Don Quixote is that, they are no longer capable of keeping the romantic lie as a secret thanks to their half-mad

and confused state. For Broch (1950), “from a contemporary historical viewpoint ...the relationship between neurosis and kitsch (is) rather significant.” What is happening in both cases is a crisis *to be* occurring inside of modern individuals. The crisis produces a gap, and simultaneously, a need to fulfill this gap.

The power of the phenomenon of mediated desire lies in the fact that it offers a possibility so as to understand what is lacking.⁶

5.2.2 The False Promise

In the overall *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, he is not only Cervantes and his adventure loving pseudo knight-errant used for the explanation of the mediated desire. The reason to choose this very first author and the novel, however, depends on a possibility Don Quixote suggests. The advantage of studying on *Don Quixote* is that he deciphers the fact of imitation by himself. Other novel characters, for instance, in *Madame Bovary*, *The Red and The Black*, *Remembrance of Things Past* or in *The Possessed* keep the act of imitation as a secret, he is the author who ought to express the fact on behalf. The analysis carried on Don Quixote is a much easier and a more direct, therefore, a better example.

Girard (1976) groups mediated desire into two categories:

1. External mediation, in the case of Don Quixote.
2. Internal mediation, in the rest of the cases.

The distinction between these two types of mediation depends on the factor of ‘distance.’ “We shall speak of *external mediation* when the distance is sufficient to eliminate any contact between the two spheres of *possibilities* of which the mediator and the subject occupy the respective centers. We shall speak of *internal mediation* when the same distance is sufficiently reduced to allow these two spheres to penetrate each other more or less profoundly.” (Girard, 1976) What is briefly needed

⁶ Jacques Lacan, and his theory of Mirror Stage may be a nice source to understand the identity crisis of modern subject and the concept of Lack. However, owing to the fact that this study aims at developing an understanding on kitsch but not the construction of identities, a distinction will not be made and a discussion will not be pursued here.

to be highlighted, however, is that in the case of external mediation, the imitator speaks out that he imitates, and declares the being of the model just like Don Quixote declares the name of Amadis. Conversely, when the mediation internalized, the subject/the disciple never proclaims aloud that he imitates. As soon as the one that is imitated approaches, the imitator tends to remain quiet. He disguises, even rejects, the existence of his imitation owing to the fact that the model starts to turn out to be a rival.

“If the modern emotions⁷ flourish, it is not because ‘envious natures’ and ‘jealous temperaments’ have unfortunately and mysteriously increased in number, but because *internal* mediation triumphs in a universe where the differences between men are gradually erased.” (Girard, 1976)

First of all, it is needed to be acknowledged is that the modern subject “expects his being to be radically changed by the act of possession.” (Girard, 1976) The possession of the object should not, however, be considered as the final destination but rather a means: “...A means of reaching the mediator.” (Girard, 1976) Both Don Quixote and the lover of kitsch define a transformation of objects. Don Quixote actualizes the shift in his mind. He constantly translates the objects of the everyday life into ones of his deviated reality full of obsessions. The producer of kitsch, on the other hand, actualizes his aspirations by manufacturing kitsch objects and comfortably enjoys them everywhere. The disparity between these two situations is that Don Quixote is particular in the universe of the novel. Nevertheless, in the universe of modern quotidian life, Don Quixote’s are in majority.

The main idea on which the theory of mediation is constructed upon is the exertion *to be* and the intention “to steal from the mediator his very being.” (Girard, 1976) Don Quixote wants to be Amadis and to enjoy chivalric adventures. The urbanized masses want to move up in the social ladder and enjoy city life and the values of genuine culture. Once it was the nobles mediating the class of bourgeoisies, today, it is the dominating bourgeoisie seducing the rest. With the crown he worn, the throne he asked for, Napoleon for instance, aspired the privileges of the ruling aristocracy.

⁷ Girard (1976) borrows the term from Stendhal who is one of the great writers of internal mediation. For Stendhal, modern emotions stem from vanity and are “envy, jealousy, and impotent hatred.”

However, being noble in a democratic age is a phantasm like the phantasm of being a knight.

Kitsch uses a “considerate mirror,”⁸ as Broch (1950) suggests, providing a “counterfeit image,” to the subject. So that, by using the mirror of kitsch in which the object “shines with a false brilliance,” the subject can recognize himself as the desired self. Therefore, an umbrella becomes a sign of, for instance, having a good taste, coming from upper class, being well educated or, let us say, appreciating modern beauty rather than a tool functioning to protect against the rain. This growing deviance in the value of the object depends on a peculiarity of the democratic ages and its unquestioned emphasis on individualism⁹.

“For two or three centuries this has been the underlying principle of every ‘new’ Western doctrine: God is dead, man must take his place. Pride has always been a temptation but in modern times it has become irresistible because it is organized and amplified in an unheard-of way. The modern ‘glad-tidings’ are heard by everyone, the more deeply it is engraved in our hearts the more violent is the contrast between this marvelous promise and brutal disappointment inflicted by experience.” (Girard, 1976)

Girard (1976) talks about a false promise which is heralded by modern individualism: Metaphysical autonomy. This promise is false in the sense that it claims originality and autonomy of the self. What the self, nevertheless, is destined to learn simultaneously with the falsehood of “a man's own energies may place him at the top of any one of them.”¹⁰ (Tocqueville, 2001) These individualisms hide a new form of slavery: If you are not the slave of God, you are a slave of earthly gods. Dethroning the God, therefore, did not bring the promised freedom like dethroning the King did not bring happiness and an ease to move up in the social ladder.

⁸ “Kitsch represents falsehood (it is often so defined and rightly so) this falsehood falls back on the person in the need of it, on the person who uses this considerate mirror so as to be able to recognize himself in the counterfeit image it throws back of him and to confess his own lies (with a delight which is to a certain extent sincere).” (Broch, 1950) See page 3.

⁹ See page 34-38.

¹⁰ See page 47.

“The impulse of the soul towards the God is inseparable from a retreat into the Self. Inversely the turning in on itself of pride is inseparable from a movement of panic toward the Other. ...Denial of God does not eliminate transcendency but diverts it from the *au-delà* (further) to the *en deçà* (close). The imitation of Christ becomes the imitation of one’s own neighbor. The surge of pride breaks against the humanity of the mediator, and the result of this conflict is hatred. ...Hate is the reverse image of divine love. ...Deviated transcendency is a caricature of vertical transcendency.” (Girard, 1976)

The need for transcendency remains, while its shape becomes upside down. Similarly, kitsch is the Anti-Christ in the system of art like the mediated desire in the system of vertical transcendency. “The Anti-Christ looks like Christ, acts and speaks like Christ, but is all the same Lucifer.” (Broch, 1950) Broch explores the same transformation of divine to the earthly. The overall *Notes on the Problem of Kitsch* is an attempt to understand the phenomenon of kitsch within the framework of bourgeois’ tendency for exaltation.

“The courtly tradition was predominantly an aesthetic one; its ethical conception was confined to set mystical portrayals of a God-willed hierarchy, to which, quite independently of any enlightened rational skepticism, man had to adjust with an attitude which was at once amused and stoical; in return, they were entitled to make their lives a work of art and to produce for themselves, by means of unbridled debauchery of the senses and of the mind, and all the pleasures possible, including those of art. In other words - and this is the privilege of the ruling class - they had the right to embellish their lives with exuberant decorative splendour, which would be all the more exuberant because it was subject to the formal influence of Baroque.” (Broch, 1950)

For Girard (1976), “the nobility is the first class to become decadent.” Hereafter, they will be leading other classes with their decadence. This is the transformation of the universe of the external mediation to the “...*internal* mediation (which) triumphs in a universe where the differences between men are gradually erased.” (Girard, 1976) What is needed to be done from now on is to try to state pseudo distinctions: The noble becomes the debauchee and the libertine, while the bourgeois becomes the virtuous.

“The bourgeois tradition on the other hand, had a fundamentally ethical stamp. In Protestant countries this was influenced exclusively by the ascetic Puritan-Calvinist ideal, while in Catholic countries the parallel revolutionary movement (which was

also a protest against the *libertinage* of the *ancien régime*) had made *virtue* into a universal guiding principle. ...ethical imperative was founded exclusively on reason, and in both cases this was opposed to art and decoration, or at least indifferent to them. The middle class had to remain absolutely faithful to their severe tradition, so as to be able to make the distinction between themselves and the feudal aristocracy, seeing themselves as the class destined to come to power in its stead.” (Broch, 1950)

What happens in the end is quite noteworthy. Bourgeois, following the seizing of the power, becomes very interested in the *libertinage* he once used to oppose and raises the “love issues” to the stars. This is the process of exaltation but in a quite deviated sense. Hereafter, “...love itself has to come down from its celestial heights to consecrate and take part in every human act of love, so in the aesthetic field beauty has to be incarnated in every work of art and consecrate it.” (Broch, 1950) Therefore, it becomes “...a sort of religion of beauty which is not very different from the religion of reason which the French Revolution tried to establish when, having dethroned God, it saw the need of basing its *virtue* on something absolute, and accordingly had to invent its ‘Goddess of Reason’ ... which was soon forgotten. In kingdom of art, on the other hand, absurdities are much less disturbing, so that the horrible spectre of divine beauty that enters or is introduced into the work of art... ...we can safely say that the goddess of beauty is the goddess kitsch.” (Broch, 1950) That sort of a beauty fetish is somehow the final product of a deviated transcendence. The middle class both want to remain loyal to the virtue and “enjoy all the pleasures of *libertinage*, in an even more concentrated form as possible.” (Broch, 1950) Because, the disciple subject always “imagines a perfect synthesis” of his mediator’s qualities with his own and “he wants to become the Other and still be himself.” (Girard, 1976) *The Other* is the new name for the mediator in the universe of internal mediation. Because, when the revolutionaries destroyed the privileges of the noble, every man in the society becomes a model, and due to the condition of equality, becomes a rival for each other. This is the ultimate fungibility of mediated desire spreading and growing in every man’s heart.

“Henceforth men shall copy each other; idolatry of one person is replaced by hatred of a hundred thousand rivals. In Balzac’s opinion, too, there is no other god but envy for the modern crowd whose greed is no longer stemmed and held within

acceptable limits by the monarch. ...Democracy is a vast middle-class court where the courtiers¹¹ are everywhere and the king is nowhere.” (Girard, 1976)

For Girard (1976), Tocqueville too speaks of the same transformation into courtier mentality. He quotes:

““The constant opposition on the one hand of instincts which give birth to equality and on the other of the means provided to satisfy them, torments and tires souls. ...However democratic the social state and political constitution of a nation may be, yet inevitably ...each of the citizens will behold around him several aspects which dominate him, and it can be anticipated that he will obstinately fix his eyes in this direction.”” (Girard, 1976)

In conclusion, it can be said that what “torments and tires souls” are the broken promises. Modern individual rushes to the objects in which he thinks he has finally found what has been lacking inside of his Self. What is understood by frustration, however, is that no object has the ability to fulfill the gap inside. Whether kitsch or not, objects are consumed more and more for their promises and less for their real functions. Kitsch object’s peculiarity is its stress on sentimentality, dreaminess and transcendence. Modern man needs a self-deception which relieves the pain inside of the souls. What is preferred the most would be the one that deceives the best. It is, doubtlessly, kitsch what deceives the most thanks to its capacity to produce illusions. Kitsch is a nice tool to flatter the pride of the defeated individual, to whisper sweet lies to mass begging for lies and to re-render the ugliness left from the broken promises into a beautiful one.

11 Here courtier implies serving, flattering and fawning.

6. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study is to break with the common inclination to define kitsch as an expression of insult and to embrace it as a fertile source having a lot to say about both the modern object and the subject. Within the framework of this study, the phenomenon of kitsch is taken into consideration as a typical product of modernity and tried to be explored due to its aesthetical and sociological features as making the exemplification mostly on industrial products. However, the scope of the thesis is not limited with an investigation of the enumerated two features above. The study has a peculiarity in the sense that, it aims to include the subject, *the lover of kitsch*, into the very general discussion of kitsch owing to the fact that in order kitsch object to come into being and flourish, a subject calling for this particular object is required. Therefore, this study can be considered as a departure from the limited readings of kitsch based solely on an analysis of objects. Inasmuch as the kitsch object is in the need of a person, than the query of the study should focus either on the former or the latter but both as aiming at tracing and questioning the elusive relationship in between them.

Besides, since the phenomenon of kitsch is rather a complicated one having several vantage points rejecting a single definition as it is said to be, and since it is what is closely linked with the subject's world inside, than how a researcher studying the phenomenon of kitsch can possibility expect people to expose their privacy by a couple of survey questions? An inquiry of kitsch entails a penetration of people's private worlds. Then, it would be nonsense to expect people deciphering their secret desires. That is why, this study draws its strength from *the art of novel* which depends on the process of revelation of people's inside worlds.

If "the whole concept of kitsch clearly centers around such questions as *imitation*, *forgery*, *counterfeit*, and what we may call the aesthetics of *deception* and *self-deception*," (Calinescu, 1987) than what is needed to be focused on is exactly the whys and wherefores of these questions. In order to achieve this, the study introduces

the concept of *mediation* and *mediated desire* developed by the contemporary French thinker Rene Girard (1976), and applies his theory to the phenomenon of kitsch.

The theory of *mediated desire*, also defining the boundaries of the thesis, pursues a coherent investigation on the masterpieces of modern literature and promises us a passkey to figure out the complicated nature of *deceit* which is claimed to stay at the heart of romantic world view which is “without therefore being kitsch itself, is the mother of kitsch.” (Broch, 1950) Kitsch inherits the desire of imitation from its “mother.” And the ultimate aim of this study is to decipher this particular desire with both kitsch and the romantic world view and to disclose the vague relationship between those. Cervantes’ famous novel, *Don Quixote*, is taken as an example in order to reveal the *existence of the model* who the subject imitates and the object loses its reality and turns into a fake object as it “shines with a false brilliance.” (Girard, 1976) This false brilliance will be taken as the cause of illusions and the relations brought from the case of Don Quixote will be applied to kitsch object in order to understand what its “hallucinatory power and spurious dreaminess” (Calinescu, 1987) derive from.

Hence, one of the main conclusions that can be derived from this study is that a discussion concerned on kitsch cannot be constructed without taking *the existence of mediation* into consideration. This study, first of all, should be considered as an attempt to develop an understanding on imitation. In order to achieve this, it aims at stating the substance of *the model*, radiating towards the subject and the object and giving the former the direction of what to desire and the latter an imaginary light producing a fruitful environment for illusions. Therefore, it can be said that under the model’s being, both the object and the subject loses their bounds.

The issue of democracy and the condition of equality will be stated as grounds for the disappearances of *difference* and the accompanying the need for *social distinction* which is the motor of consumption. Following to the fall of “ancient regime” and the well-established hierarchical orders, and simultaneously, the rise of the bourgeoisies, and therefore, social mobility and the individualism have brought about “the need to manifest status in signs.” (Baudrillard, 1998) Kitsch object adds nothing novel to the logic of consumption; it magnifies certain features and makes them more visible. Its distinctiveness, nevertheless, originates from the fact that kitsch packs the real

outline of the object with a *transparent envelope* as entering into parasitic relations with the model whose “prestige is imparted to the object of desire and confers upon it an illusionary value.” (Girard, 1976) Thus, kitsch represents a feeling of failure in the process of climbing the social ladder and a continuing dissatisfaction for one’s own position. The reason for an application to the distorted mirror of kitsch is nothing but a need for overcompensation of a fail in succeeding in social life. Another conclusion which can be derived from this study is that by referring exclusively to kitsch and not considering the conditions of modernity, the phenomenon of kitsch cannot be fully grasped.

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