ART CRITICISM

The present version has been lightly corrected for missing quotation marks and italics. The wording, even when open to correction, has been left in its original form. The pagination is still that of the original (a subsequent remark, added to page 56, has been set in a different type and color to avoid confusion). Except for the aforementioned minor corrections, this is a facsimile of the original.

NOTE. For ease of use, this version has a supplementary WORKS CITED list, not supplied with the original publication.

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KITSCH AGAINST MODERNITY[1]

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Preface: Dorfles' Compendium of Kitsch

The standard English-language text on kitsch is Gillo Dorfles' *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, which came out almost simultaneously in a number of languages around 1968-9.[2] Dorfles' *Kitsch* brings together a number of essays on various subfields in the topic of kitsch,[3] interspersed with Dorfles' introductions and commentaries. In addition, the book is literally and haphazardly supplied with hundreds of photographs of various "kitsch" items.[4] Overall, the presentation makes the book somewhat confusing; even though the text speaks of "the shrewd [indictment] of a situation which is so dangerous for our society," the numerous photographs, which are accompanied by (presumably) Dorfles' editorializing, and which frequently threaten to crowd the text right off the page (sometimes leaving only five lines per page of the essay for which they are ostensibly illustrations), give the impression more of celebration than condemnation. Curtis F. Brown's *Star-Spangled Kitsch*, which refers to Dorfles' book as "informative, at times abstruse,"[5] shares this seemingly self-contradictory trait, but to a much higher degree: the text loses even more ground to the illustrations, and the tone, though occasionally moralizing and always derogatory, actually inclines more towards laughter and a sort of 'aren't we Americans silly?' attitude.[6]

I was drawn to the subject of kitsch to a large extent for this very reason, i.e., the peculiar ambivalence which almost always haunts its discussion. When I first came across Dorfles' book, I thought it was hilarious. My first reaction to it was enjoyment; I joined the editor in his amazement at the stupidity, shallowness, and basic tackiness of the great majority of objects with which we surround ourselves. Each page presented yet another functional mismatch, another invitation to a rugged suspension of disbelief. And yet, as I spent more time with the book, I began to question the disdain which my laughter presupposed. On one level, I wondered to what degree my laughter and dismissal could be part of a maneuver to achieve a(n unjustified) feeling of superiority. On an even deeper level, I began to come across moments when the object which was presented for my disapproval had once been — or still was — something I honestly enjoyed or respected. At

these points, my reflections upon the naive consumer were no longer theoretical, not even empirical observations, but extremely intimate.

Clement Greenberg's essay, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" appears in the Dorfles collection abridged. When I read the essay in full, I came across this comment:

> Kitsch is deceptive. It has many different levels, and some of them are high enough to be dangerous to the naive seeker of true light. A magazine like *The New Yorker*, which is fundamentally high-class kitsch for the luxury trade, converts and waters down a great deal of avant-garde material for its own uses.[7]

Now I had always considered the idea of being published in *The New Yorker* as a sign of quality, as an honor, a true mark of distinction, and had noted how many of (what I considered to be) the best pieces of fiction (such as Mark Helprin and Denis Johnson) had first seen print in its pages. I was familiar with the 'watered-down avant-garde' phenomenon of which Greenberg spoke, but had usually noticed this sort of dishonesty or structural ambivalence when I had come across it.[8] Had I now come across — in Greenberg's words — one of "these accidental and isolated instances [which] have fooled people who should have known better"? I could excuse myself by arguing that perhaps *The New Yorker* of the late 30's was a different creature than in later decades, but that might well only be a cheap shot at dodging a criticism which happened to include me.[9]

Furthermore, and at an even shorter distance, there were the undeniable examples of the kitsch attitude which I discovered in my own diaries (from my late teens), which I had just recently unearthed from my attic. All the signs were there: paeans to the glories of the later Pre-Raphaelites, sketches from Edward Burne-Jones, idealizing prose poems on nature and love, half-hidden lust, and misty aspirations, all written in calligraphy and abundant flourishes, peppered with occasional runes. I can remember during that time the indignation I felt upon reading a comment that Burne-Jones' work was "suffocated in syrup." Reading over these diaries again, after having for the most part forgotten what they contained, I am reminded of Marx's self-criticism of his state of mind upon arriving in Berlin:

> lyrical poetry was bound to be my first subject ... owing to my attitude and whole previous development it was purely idealistic. My heaven, my art, became a world beyond, as remote as my love [Jenny von Westphalen]. Everything real became hazy and what is hazy has no definite outlines. All the poems of the first three volumes I sent to Jenny are marked by attacks on our times, diffuse and inchoate expressions of feeling, nothing natural, everything built out of moonshine, complete opposition between what is and what ought to be, rhetorical reflections instead of poetic thoughts, but perhaps also a certain warmth of feeling and striving for poetic fire.[10]

(We may note that Marx's self-criticism culminated in his burning his attempts at

"poetic fire.")

Now, I have heard the charge brought against discussions of kitsch that they characteristically begin from hypothetical consumers going through hypothetical emotions based on hypothetical motives — in other words, that the standard 'kitschographer' does not speak from knowledge, but has simply made up the entire phenomenon under discussion. Vis-à-vis the theory of artistic choice as status-drive, for example, we find this:

> Not one empirical study ... finds respondents offering status as the main reason for their [artistic] choice. [It may be objected that people would not want to admit this.] Perhaps. But how do we know? Unsystematic data? Our own longing? For so empirically minded a discipline as sociology, this weak support for a central thesis is unsatisfactory, and perhaps even scandalous.[11]

At least in the case of these diaries, the complaint of speculation or armchair psychologizing cannot be lodged, for I know this sappy sentimentalist personally; indeed, these were events and emotions that I myself lived and believed!

The ambivalence I have sensed in relation to the kitsch concept serves as a sort of preliminary intuition. The upshot of this inkling is that the kitsch concept as I have come across it will, upon closer examination, probably exhibit a combination of useful and useless insights. Therefore, the goal of this essay will be to perform an examination of the kitsch concept, in order to discover what it is, if it has any legitimate use, and, if it does, to discover what the limits of that legitimate use are.

Introduction: Defining Kitsch

When one discusses kitsch, what is one discussing? Though for anyone presumably reading this, the term "kitsch" will automatically bring to mind a number of related terms (e.g., "schlock," "schmaltz," "bric-a-brac," "tchotchkes," etc.), let us begin at the beginning, with a short list of "typical" or "traditional" kitsch items.[12] In his essay, "Notes on Traditional Kitsch,"[13] Aleksa Celebonovic ticks off a healthy number of examples: traditionally, kitsch is understood to refer to such things as "souvenirs, animals, sickly statuettes, non-functional tumblers and dinner services ... [p]lastic knick knacks, plaster Buddhas, bare-breasted enameled negresses, celluloid trays with lace engravings ... [and] huge cushions of fake velvet." Dorfles' own list gives a feel for the wider application he wants to give the word: "the brazen styling of the bodywork of cars, the vulgarity of tourism, the inhuman horror of summer beaches and winter skiing resorts, and, similarly, the newly-weds' bedroom furniture, American kitchens, hordes of garden gnomes and rabbits and Disneyland characters, the Swiss-miniature phenomenon and so on."[14] Though something ineffable seems to float between all these things, what really strikes one is the incredible variety and chaotic hodgepodge, as if the collation of kitsch results itself in something not unlike the mess of trinkets on a bedroom shelf destined for a kitsch catalog.

Hermann Broch, in the first lines of "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch," warns us not to "expect any rigid and neat definitions. Philosophizing is always a game of prestige played with the clouds, and aesthetic philosophy follows this rule just as much";[15] elsewhere, he observes that most concepts in the human sciences evaporate "upon closer inspection into something vague and therefore highly unscientific."[16] Our topic — kitsch — is subject to these observations in an especially marked fashion.

This is due, I suspect, to the frequent use of the term "kitsch" to mean simply anything done in "bad taste," which can be discovered in as wide a field as the person applying the word wishes to leave remaining as the focal circle of "good taste" is increasingly narrowed. Indeed, the critical lens can be focused to such a fine point that the miniature projection of the sun which results leaves behind only a smoking scar of burnt flesh. On the other hand, like any other word, the word "kitsch" can be used with a higher or lesser degree of precision and care, and, to the degree that it is used merely as a sign of denigration and is practically interchangeable with any number of other pejoratives, its usefulness — or revelatory power — is greatly (if not completely) diminished. We should, however, not make these observations sloppily; for in discussing the scope of "kitsch," we can refer either to the degree of precision which a user gives to its meaning, or we can refer to the number of things which will be allowed to fall under this term, whether in its more precise or less precise use. Even if "kitsch" is defined in a very restricted way, cases can be found in which the restricted meaning is allowed a wide field of application and a great number of examples.

Surveying the literature, we find "kitsch" appearing rather regularly in association with a sort of family of related terms. Certain adjectives, for example, appear regularly in its company (notwithstanding that many of these words are English translations of words from non-English books and essays). This family of related terms has a number of more or less distinct subdivisions — I have lettered
* them (a) through (h), and supplied each subdivision with representative terms. Taken at once, we seem to already have a rather unmanageable collection,[17] but, we might reassure ourselves, kitsch can be taken to appear in a variety of milieus.

By creating these subdivisions, we have generated a rough-and-ready survey of the topics broached in most scholarly discussions of kitsch. Even though our list has given us a start, this sorting of qualities into categories still comes off rather clumsily. It might be noted that, given the generally negative import of these characteristics, each characteristic actually forms just half of an opposition, the other half of which is easily generated by supplying the reverse, say, with the word "not." Tadeusz Pawlowski has generated a list of the key oppositions necessary for a discussion of kitsch, which he refers to as an expandable "comprehensive typology" necessary for "cop[ing] with existing diversity," though his oppositions are of opposing approaches to the question of kitsch.[18] He concludes that, "[a]t best kitsch phenomena form a family of subsets, connected only by partial similarities."[19] Pierre Bourdieu observes (though in a radically different context) that, "when confronted by a confusing multiplicity in cultural phenomena, the first natural reaction for the professional intellectual, who is inevitably imbued with structuralist habits, is to

* The list in question can be found on page 80, following note 91.

draw up a 'table' of the pertinent oppositions, for each author as well for the set of related authors. In fact the effect of such a formal construction would be to destroy the specific logic of these ideological clusters. The specific feature is their indeterminate nature, which makes them akin to the fundamental polarities that structure mythical systems. ... Thus, any thinker may, in a particular situation or context, develop applications which seem contrary to rigorous logic, yet may be justified in terms of the logic which matches the pairs of practical contradictions that found the partial systematizations." [20] Presumably the situation is a little bit different here, for unlike Pawlowski, who is attempting to map the whole tradition of 'kitschography' into a system, what we are attempting to do is to rescue the valid conceptualizations (should any exist). On the other hand, Bourdieu seems to suggest that any systematization based on oppositions is likely to be less rigorous than it takes itself to be, and there is a chance that any answers we come up with may exhibit this tendency.

The Deduction of Kitsch

Pawlowski raises the question of "corroboration," or the justification for declaring something to be kitsch (he seems to concentrate mostly on the intention of the producer). He observes that most of the statements made about the intention of the author or producer of that which is alleged to be kitsch rarely finds substantiation. [21] What needs to be clear is that there are two levels to this "corroboration." There is the level at which Pawlowski discusses it, namely, (a) determining whether or not the object to be designated as kitsch actually conforms to the definition of kitsch then being used (in his discussion he refers to "false naivieté," pretentiousness, and imitativeness). [22] At another level, one must (b) determine whether or not the characteristics being scrutinized deserve the kind of attention they receive, especially given that discussions of kitsch usually hinge upon putting a good/bad opposition into play.

This observation brings us to a particularly entrenched set of good/bad distinctions which often work their way into evaluations — whether or not they are consciously intended to have such an effect. The analytic triad of class, gender, and race, though a conventional one, is so for a good reason: these are three aspects which inform almost all aspects of life, even if only as strong influences or parameters of meaning, and not completely determinant. I will only have the space to sketch out the beginning of an analysis into the effects of these topics upon the articulation of the kitsch concept as it appears in the standard literature. But this sketch should be enough to alert us to their implications (difficult though they may be to lay out systematically) for the kitsch concept in terms of this second level of "corroboration."

Concerning class, it seems that a number of 'kitschographers' wished to take this variable into account, but did so on the assumption that status (or status-seeking) was the primary category for investigating class and kitsch. [23] For example, an idea frequently broached in discussions of kitsch is that members of the "lower" classes only purchase kitsch because it is an imitation of "upper" class art forms, and they would like to have the appearance of belonging to that class, even though they do not possess the skills (education or socialization) necessary to recognize

"real" art, let alone understand it. Therefore, goes the argument, they are dependent upon the advice of experts (who do understand these "upper" class art forms) or are dependent upon advertisers who simulate such expertise and advice.[24]

This contention, however, if true occasionally (it is always a possibility), is not born out by the research done by David Halle, who found out e.g. that people who own and display a reproduction of Leonardo's *Last Supper* frequently do not know (and apparently could not care less) who the painter of the original was. So the motive for purchasing these reproductions was not to show it off as a Leonardo! In another instance, Halle describes asking a woman about the painter of Vincent van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (a reproduction of which was displayed in her home): "she examined the signature and said it was by someone named 'Vincent'!"[25] Nonetheless, class distinctions are not unimportant; the point is merely that in pointing to an object as kitsch because it has "lower" class consumers may reveal more about the untested — perhaps class-based! — assumptions of the pointer than the meanings of class differences.

The category of gender also makes its mark on the kitsch concept of the 'kitschographers.' This is most obvious in the denigration saved for the experiencing of emotions or levels of emotions associated with women (even if the perhaps the writer bears no particular animus against women). All of the "overly sentimental," "weepy" emotions usually associated with and criticized in kitsch are emotions or emotional responses normally associated with women. We find a gentler example us such an attitude in a recent movie review: "What are two intelligent people ... doing in this retro weepie plot? *Love Affair* is kitsch derived from old 'woman's film' formulas"; at its strongest, we have the warning from Lenin: "I can't listen to music often, it affects my nerves, it makes me want to say sweet nothings and pat the heads of people who, living in a filthy hell, can create such beauty. But we mustn't pat anyone on the head or we'll get our hand bitten off."[26]

Immanuel Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*—which, for a book which focuses on beauty, certainly has some repulsive observations on gender and race!—though it does not deal specifically with kitsch, bears out the above remarks on kitsch and gender, and touches on the long history of such attitudes. For if one examines the dichotomies set up therein between the beautiful and sublime (which Kant associates with women and men, respectively [see esp. section III]), one will find an almost one-for-one correspondence with the emotions most 'kitschographers' connect to kitsch (the beautiful, 'womanly' emotions) as against 'real' art (the sublime, 'manly' emotions).[27] Just as with the class category, things are not as simple as they may at first appear, and due caution must be used.[28]

The main caution is to be wary of searching out phenomena which are representations from faulty oppositions or baseless conceptions, or if one does search them out, to investigate them rather as indicators than sources. It may not be the phenomena under observation which need to be critiqued, but the schemas from which they get their present meaning. And yet so far we have only sketched out a negative description of the kitsch concept, i.e., what it should not be. It is time to push forward into an attempt to describe that conception which deserves not

attack but support. Nonetheless, if such a conception is found, it will still have to pass the test of the first level of "corroboration"—whether or not the kitsch objects or kitsch experiences exhibit the characteristics they are claimed to have.

Suffice to say that to gain more cohesion one would have to move beyond the qualities of kitsch objects (such as we have arranged in our table of kitsch qualities, see end) and on to what kitsch is alleged to "do," or what the kitsch "attitude" reveals or promotes, much of which cannot be easily captured in single adjectives or even tables of such adjectives. The basic thrust of Dorfles' anthology is to press for the progression from an understanding based on classifying objects, through structures which these objects exhibit, the techniques used to produce them, and finally to the psychic phenomena which support them, culminating in the concept of the "kitsch-mensch," or the obsessive consumer of kitsch.

We shall also use this more "subjective" approach, but only to a degree. For even though it turns out that a subjective analysis will be central to the kitsch concept here advanced, we will not abandon the imperative to find empirical support for this conception either. Collecting and cataloging kitsch objects, however, would be much too de-contextualized for our use. In Giesz' words, the idea would be "to start appreciating the superiority of an analytical, apparently over-generous outlook which speaks for example of kitsch-man and does not collect ('scientifi-cally') kitsch postcards, cushions and souvenirs, nor worry about cataloging them."[29]

After the Groundclearing: Preliminary Distinctions

We have, then, eliminated a number of standard elements in the use of the kitsch concept, or at least marked them as questionable and admissible only when handled with an extremely light touch. In general, the 'ethical' or 'psychological' uses of the kitsch concept, in their tendency to degenerate into heavy-handed derogatory evaluations, reveal less about the psychology of their ostensible focus than the psychological state of their proponents (angry, silencing, polemical, polarizing, self-opaque).[30] The perspective which holds more promise for actually revealing something about its object is a 'historical' (or even an 'art historical') conception of kitsch.

The last assertion may require some clarification. For though my claim is that this 'historical' view of kitsch is better than the 'ethico-psychological' perspective, the psychological perspective has as its very point the idea that "kitsch-mensch" tries to escape the surrounding historical conditions. A better formulation may be that the downfall of the 'ethico-psychological' perspective is its inclination to conceive of this escape as the symptom of a necessarily morally weak or emotionally diseased psyche. Broch, for example, states that "if you ask yourselves to what extent you are affected by this avalanche of kitsch, you will find — at least I find it as far as I am personally concerned — that a liking for kitsch is not all that rare. The conclusion that we are heading towards an ever-increasing universal neurosis does not seem unfounded."[31] The difference would have to be that between (a) a psychological conception which is a psychological analysis (a diagnosis or evaluation) and (b) a psychological approach which by any other name would be a subjective (i.e., 'mental' or 'intentional') investigation. The adequate perspective

will then inspect the 'subjective' (or 'psychological') aspects of coping with relevant historical phenomena.

Kitsch as Modern
If the kitsch concept includes modernity (as it does e.g. for Broch and Calinescu),[32] then the first step in its justification is accomplished: we rescue kitsch — or at least one conception of kitsch—from the first obstacle, namely, that it is a concept so vague and pliable that it can be applied anywhere at will. To connect kitsch to modernity attaches it to a specific historical period with particular characteristics. It thereby has at least a referent with certain boundaries, a referent with a certain structure (dialectical though it may be).

This move also answers the question of the range of kitsch in place and time. Kitsch, in this conception, would not embody a 'type' which could descend anywhere upon a universal field (granted that, even in its widest conceptions, it still confines itself to the advent of humanity). We need not deliberate endlessly over whether the erotic decoration of Etruscan tombs and situlas or the gaudy spectacles of the Caesars also constituted kitsch (though the question would still be open should they be imitated today). We can also dispense with the question of kitsch in cultures unreached by modernity (should any exist).[33]

The Dorfles anthology for the most part presents the kitsch concept as historically restricted ("not ... outside our own age; or at least no earlier than the Baroque period"),[34] for two reasons: (a) the historical function of art was categorically different in pre-modern societies (on the one hand, it had "religious, ethical or political" functions which were conceived of within an "absolute" realm,[35] and which took place in a sacred or ritual context;[36] on the other hand, it had not yet been absorbed into a mass-production process,[37] nor could it take part in the romantic conception of the world);[38] and (b) our knowledge of antiquity is extremely limited (at the crudest level, only a few documents from that time have survived, and almost exclusively from the aristocracy);[39] furthermore, the recognition of the kitsch 'tone' requires a lived familiarity with cultural materials and meaning, so that recognizing kitsch in unfamiliar materials is basically "impossible."[40]

Granted, both reasons given by Dorfles rule out finding kitsch amongst the ancient Romans, but how these exclusions play out in each case is not the same. Consideration of the 'historical function' takes place on an 'a priori' (or 'theoretical') level, whereas the 'limits of knowledge' approach offers an 'a posteriori' ('practical,' 'technical,' or 'contingent') criterion. This 'practical' criterion, due to the distance which critics of kitsch usually seem to have from the subculture they critique, while presumably bracketing, say, ancient or medieval culture or even 'primitive' cultures in our own time, is also liable to bracket subcultures within our own, the very groups so often taken to be in the dangerous thrall of kitsch![41]

Giesz' discussion of the kitsch attitude endemic to tourism, in particular packaged tour-groups,[42] presents the two alternatives of universally possible versus strictly historically confined kitsch as "the two extreme positions."[43] From the basic fact that we (humans) live as it were in the tension between the transcendental and the empirical (or even between the transcendent and the worldly), he argues for

navigating between the "extreme" poles, namely, recognizing that kitsch involves elements of the psyche (e.g. tension, release, boredom, curiosity, projection, etc.) which are indeed universal,[44] but which are nonetheless brought to bear upon specific historical processes and conditions (any "mass age"), and which only thereby occur as kitsch.[45] This nuance is what allows Giesz to discuss the holy water brought back by the crusaders and "[cans] of 'Berlin Air'" brought from a modern-day vacation as "kindred phenomena ... anthropological[ly]."[46] The position we take, then, would be characterized as "extreme" by Giesz; for we are positing kitsch as confined to, and indeed structurally dependent upon, the modern age.

Modernity and Its Inflections

If we are going to discuss kitsch as a co-phenomenon with modernity, what are we referring to as 'modern'? Most certainly not a bald assertion of date which would impermeably separate to realms, one before, one after. Two conceptions in particular seem the most promising, and will lie at the base of our discussion: what we could call (a) the 'immanent' conception and (b) the "linear" conception.

The immanent conception of modernity concentrates on the increasing compartmentalization, specialization, and autonomy of different realms of life and thought following the loss of control over the Western world on the part of the "Catholic" Church (reflected in the world of ideas by the disintegration of the wholistic world view).[47] Through this process, each realm seeks to (or has no choice but to) develop its own logic without the prescriptions of other realms. Philosophy, for example, once the "queen of sciences" (taken up and internalized by the Catholic church), sees the various divisions within it (once understood as integral elements) separate like buds of yeast into their own domains of natural science, psychology, political science, etc.; natural science itself splits off into physics, chemistry, biology, etc.; and physics divides from Newtonian mechanics into macro- and microphysics.

In general, each of these new divisions in the theoretical realm is carried by divisions in their human departments. All realms split apart and — each according to its own "freedom" — develop their own languages and methodologies. Each seeks to find its direction from within, so that e.g. in the fine arts an increasing formalism and purity takes hold of the influential movements and seed ideas. Traditional content evaporates as painting looks to its materials and becomes a logic of color arrangements, poetry concentrates on its word, sculpture becomes the composition of three-dimensional form, and music, seen as the most pure and contentless art form, becomes the model.[48]

In the *German Ideology*, Marx describes the seemingly contradictory logic of this increasing division. In the broadest terms it is the movement from history to world history. On the one hand, each geographical region becomes less and less isolated, more connected to the others, and more strongly affected by developments elsewhere, so that an invention in England causes famine in India.[49] On the other hand, accompanying this increased interdependence is a multiplication of the divisions of labor, initially between different regions which had all been more or less self-sufficient, and eventually down to the individual worker, who once com-

manded an entire craft but who now, with the rise of manufacture and big industry, performs one task alone.[50] In a pre-industrial, 'merely' historical, and yet holistically conceived world, the wholistic world view allowed theologians to discuss the angels on the head of a pin; the fragmented yet interdependent world-historical world only allows the worker to make pin heads.

The linear conception of modernity focuses instead upon the logical conclusions of the ascendancy of linear, historical time over cyclical, mythological time — conclusions which have only fully emerged in the last few centuries. Calinescu's elucidation of the linear conception describes the ascendancy of linear time and the subsequent development of what he calls "the two modernities," namely "bourgeois" modernity and "aesthetic" modernity.[51]

Linear time was the revolutionary seed inside Christianity's world view. Originally, time had been conceived in a mythical, generally cyclical manner, involving cycles of reincarnation (e.g. Plato), endlessly rotating spheres (cf. Aristotle) — two philosophical elaborations of the mythological view — or repeating conflicts and rebirths (e.g. Indian mythology). These myths, while indeed including grand narratives of creation from chaos and final battles of the gods (e.g. Greek or Norse mythology), in general incorporated humanity into repeating universal cycles which came long before and would follow long after. Calinescu underscores the fact that, while modernity is usually associated with the falling away of the church as the leading force in society, the forward-moving, historical, non-repeatable time which is modernity's fundamental presupposition does not contradict, but instead finds its most important center of propagation in, the Christian world view.[52]

The Old Testament world view did posit the world as historical (indeed the universe itself was only seven days older than humanity's organization of it!), but Christianity, with the stark, radical break and unrepeatability of Christ's appearance at its center, coupled with its messianic spirit, heightened this historicity and proclaimed this "good word." Granted, the revolutionary import of the Christian conception of time was dampened during the Middle Ages (during which time it was covered over with the earlier mythological, organic-continuous additions), but eventually (with inter alia the spread of the Bible itself) it took root.[53] In the secularism of modernity we see that Christ the table-turner proclaimed a world view of discontinuity and radical change which in the end outstripped its very messenger.[54]

Calinescu describes "two modernities." The first he calls "bourgeois" modernity. Bourgeois modernity developed as linear time eventually came free from Medieval accretions and Christianity itself. This first modernity is, he says, "a stage in the history of Western civilization — a product of scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes |of| capitalism."[55] Emblematic of bourgeois modernity are "[the middle-class values of] the doctrine of progress, [optimism in] science and technology, the concern with time [as measurable and buyable], the cult of reason, and the ideal of [abstract humanist autonomy, coupled with a worship of practicality and] success."[56]

Over against this stands "aesthetic" modernity (often called "modernism"). This modernity is an artistic or "aesthetic" concept. Over against bourgeois moder-

nity, which exhibits linear time as positive progress or improvement, aesthetic modernity expresses the constant change of linear time more radically, as disgust with the recent past, and defines itself principally in opposition to bourgeois modernity. The heterogeneous positive programs of the modernists (such that they existed at all) only make sense when seen through their centrally negative stands.[57] "When modernity comes to oppose concepts without which it would have been inconceivable [e.g., reason, progress, science] it is simply pursuing its deepest vocation, its constitutive sense of creation through rupture and crisis."[58]

As regards the relation between these two ways of conceiving modernity (i.e., the immanent conception and the linear conception), it can be seen that the immanent conception forms a component of the world, seen as bourgeois modernity — the increasing purity of science, technology, and time, the increasing specialization in manufacture, packaging, education, entertainment, etc. There seems to be a conflict between the immanent conception (insofar as it approaches a material description, especially in Marx) and the linear conception (insofar as it takes what could be called a history of ideas approach), but it is easy to see that the two complement each other: insofar as, within the increasing world situation of specialization (material immanence), each successive group which takes over control breaks with the past, the concept of change and irreversibility (linear time) taken up by these groups lends authority and meaning to their actions; on the other hand, insofar as each group accelerates change towards compartmentalization within the world, the concept of linearity only receives more support and reality, and the wholistic mythical conceptions of the world make less and less sense.[59]

Kitsch against Modernity
So far, the picture we have drawn depicts kitsch as coeval with modernity. What must be shown, of course, is that kitsch did not simply happen to occur after the advent of modernity, but that modernity had something to do with this occurrence. What then does kitsch have to do with modernity? Taking up what we chose as the best method for approaching the question of kitsch, namely, that perspective which inspects the 'subjective' aspects of engaging historical phenomena, we can formulate a preliminary definition: kitsch is the modern coping-mechanism for modernity. Kitsch is not as such evil, but rather an attempt to deal with the vicissitudes of modern life, to make it, in its implacability, inhabitable.[60]

As has been made clear by the preceding exposition, modern times are marked by increasing encounters with change, discontinuity, instability, complexity, breaks with tradition, and (due to the division of labor, coupled with the lack of continuity) confinement. (Remember that increasing interconnection of a world-historical world produces at the same time an increasing compartmentalization and fragmentation of individuals living in that world.) To the degree that these forces create difficulty, stress, unease, and discomfort — and it is hard to see how they could not — there are basically two choices for finding relief: (a) to counteract these forces (work against them) at some level by replacing them (if only temporarily) with stability (real or imagined, local or general), or (b) to forget them (opt for distraction) by substituting a different instability, which although an instability,

is at least a chosen one. Kitsch (as product) follows the first path (that of counter-action), takes up the materials and techniques at hand (i.e., modern materials and techniques) and fashions some sort of stability from them, principally through projecting images of nature, stasis, and continuity, our separation from which bourgeois modernity has made it difficult not to feel. The second path could best be labeled entertainment (diversion, "fun": video games, action movies and television, and perhaps even sports).

To make a crude analogy, imagine a ship without a pilot which seems to be approaching a whirlpool. Most of the passengers find themselves becoming more and more frightened. Some of the passengers try to do something to counteract their precarious situation: a few strap themselves to the ship (some because they feel it would be best to hold onto something which floats, others simply because they have followed the safety manuals) and a few board the lifeboats (though the lifeboats seem just as likely to follow the ship). A certain number even resorts to prayer. Some of the passengers, however, take the other path (that of distraction and diversion): they open the hold and have a merry time with the champagne. (Now at the head of the ship there is a great, heavy anchor which might be able to save the ship, but unfortunately releasing it would probably require the strength of most everyone on the ship.)

In any case, this move against the stresses of unstable "mechanical" modernity, this move towards placidity and tradition, explains kitsch's repeated attempts to bring back the "natural." This can be seen in the imagery of return to origins so often invoked in political campaign material, advertising, arts-and-crafts, and new-age culture, which (in offering itself to the kitsch defense maneuver) proclaims itself in turn as "natural," "folk," "country," "valley," "home-made," "hand-made," "farm-fresh," "April fresh," "family values," "genuine," "organic," "time-less," or "authentic," e.g. Mountain Spring Dawn (Dishwashing Detergent), Irish Spring (Deodorant Soap), Surf (Laundry Detergent), Light Scent SunRise Fresh Downy (Fabric Softener), Pepperidge Farm (Cookies), etc.[61] This same impulse informs even such apparently marginal contemporary activities as witchcraft[62] and membership in the Society for Creative Anachronism.[63] Spengler noted strikingly similar impulses in the first half of the century:

> A weariness is spreading... Men are returning to forms of life simpler and nearer to Nature; they are spending their time in sport instead of technical experiments. The great cities are becoming hateful to them... And it is precisely the strong and creative talents that are turning from the pressure of practical problems and sciences and towards pure speculation. Occultism and Spiritualism, Hindu philosophies, metaphysical inquisitiveness under Christian or pagan coloring, all of which were despised in the Darwinian period, are coming up again.[64]

It could appear that we are dealing with merely a perennial human urge for stability and comfort. But what we have here is not someone closing the door against the rain. Rather, these expressions are anti-progress, anti-rational, and anti-science —

and require the advent of progress, rationality, and science in the same way that expressly anti-Christian atheism makes little sense in the absence of Christianity.[65]

These impulses, when they are amplified, reach a level of crisis. Those movements which Spengler noted as the Nazis came to power reached their fruition in a political culture the excesses of which find their only meaning in a crisis outlook. Hans Sluga notes (in *Heidegger's Crisis*) that, in the first decades of the century, the symbolism of crisis "served as common coinage ... passing from hand to hand as the metaphor for the age [which allowed] philosophers and politicians alike ... to move easily back and forth between philosophical discourse and political rhetoric."[66] But he questions this vision of the present which sees it on a historical scale, and questions the epistemological possibility to discern, before a great historical turning point has passed, that a crisis is actually upon the world.[67] And yet the very structure of modernity, with its essential discontinuity, encourages the crisis interpretation to be chosen. Sluga continues:

> [The] sense of crisis is a product of a culture of subjectivity in which the structure of individual experience is projected as the order of time itself. This is also the mark of modernity, and hence we are entitled to say that the thinkers of crisis, from Fichte through Nietzsche to Heidegger, are all essentially modern thinkers, even though they may have described themselves in other terms. Indeed, their conviction of having transcended modernity appears to us now as just one more expression of their moment of transition, one more sign of an essentially modern belief in crisis.[68]

The same structure appears in aesthetic modernity. Aesthetic modernity, which pushes the discontinuity of linear time into high relief, beyond a spirit of optimistic change, and into a disgust with the past and even the present, can reach an even more frenzied form in avant-gardism, which essentially exhibits the artist's vision of crisis. Calinescu observes that the concept of the avant-garde was able to survive the inspection it received in the 60's because it was secretly protected by its inner contradictions, indeed by its innumerable aporias (extreme forms of modernity's insoluble antinomies), and paradoxically, by its long and almost incestuous association with both the idea and praxis of cultural crisis. The fact is that from its very outset the artistic avant-garde developed as a culture of crisis.[69]

We saw in Marx's description of the development of high industry the double nature of modernity — a higher integration of economic effects over the world, coupled with an increased division of labor and life. It is precisely this double nature which allows the same changes in society (i.e. modernity) to be taken as either progress (optimistic bourgeois modernity) or decadence (negative aesthetic modernity).[70] Marx saw modernity as both a promising tool for the future (an organization of the world to be taken over by the proletariat) and a horrible oppression (a fetter to the development into full humanity). And modernity as decadence, as oppression, as increasing fragmentation, is precisely the object against which kitsch also labors.

Kitsch: A Concrete Example

So far, our discussion has remained at a relatively theoretical level. The time has come to discuss a concrete example in more detail. One of the kitsch items which exhibits most clearly the characteristics we have highlighted is the contemporary (i.e., recently produced) landscape picture. It is difficult to discuss the production and meanings of most of these landscapes, since they are almost all done anonymously — either because they are photo-litho reproductions, or because the single artists who produce the hand-painted pictures are not well-known (some landscape paintings are apparently also produced by a division of labor, in which different people are responsible for different elements of the painting).

A certain number of contemporary landscape painters, however, such as Leroy Nieman and Bob Ross, have attained some degree of fame.[71] Leroy Nieman's output is available in a range of products (and prices), from original paintings, through limited edition serigraphs, to photo-litho reproductions for the Olympic games and in *Playboy* magazine. Owing to its dissemination principally through television, Bob Ross' output is even more accessible (though one can also purchase Bob Ross videos, books, and painting kits). Since Bob Ross' show, "Joy of Painting," offers us a direct observation of the production of and, indeed, the intention behind, a popular landscape artist's work (work which our kitschographers would undeniably place in their pantheon/penitentiary), we shall concentrate on a description of the genesis of a Bob Ross painting.

"Joy of Painting" is a weekly television how-to program which shows Bob Ross producing a complete landscape painting in a half-hour.[72] It opens with a title sequence in which Bob Ross uses a paint roller to fill a giant canvas (via Chromakey) with a finished painting in a few strokes, underscoring the ease with which a painting can be made. Then Bob Ross appears in front of a blank canvas, greets the viewers, and begins to paint. The most frequent subject in his paintings is a view of a mountain range through a lakeside forest. Usually he begins with a wet canvas (the "wet-on-wet" technique), blending in a sky/water background with a large brush. On top of this he pokes a few white clouds. With a palette knife he spreads on dark, basic mountain shapes and adds highlights to the sides of the mountains. He blurs the base of the mountain range with a brush. He scumbles in background color for a forest. On top of this he applies the basic tree shapes with a fan brush. He smears the tree colors with a brush to create the effect of reflecting water. He puts details in the trees, scumbles in foreground grass and bushes, and puts details at the water's edge. Finally, after these details, he normally paints in a small cabin or hut. The painting is complete.

So far we only listed the technical information of the half-hour sequence. But Bob Ross supplies us with much more than that. This entire process is accompanied by a rhetorically supplied aura. His running commentary is flavored throughout with diminutive language and reassuring asides which let us know that painting is not anything to be afraid of, that nothing can really go wrong, and that we are always in control. He paints the "little painting" on a "standard ol' pre-stretched canvas." The blender brush should be "very soft, as my father used to say, tender as

a mother's love." He pokes in clouds: "add your own, add or subtract whatever you want ... another little cloud, you put as many clouds as you like ... in your world, you decide how many clouds live in it." When painting a landscape, "we don't make mistakes, we just have happy accidents," and you can paint "any dream that you can conceive" because "in your world you have total and absolute power."

An even more important element remains. For, besides offering a non-threatening, friendly, and inviting atmosphere, Bob Ross also permeates his commentary with organic — almost animistic — metaphors. Everything "grows" or "lives" (one might even say, 'dwells'). Bob Ross lays down a few black strokes: "we had a mountain in our world, and it lived ... right here at the top." He considers a "big ol' tree" behind the covered bridge — "maybe he'll live over here" — and another: "now let's give this tree a friend ... there." His brush moves under the bridge: "the water's going to live right down here." Back in front of the bridge, "maybe a couple little happy trees live here ... maybe he had a friend."[73] We watch the painting slowly come to life and bring forth its own inhabitants at the command of the painter. The painting, overflowing with life, is ready. "Happy painting, and God bless."

As we have seen, in most cases the intention of the painter is at best conjectural.[74] In contrast, the Bob Ross painting appears as the conclusion to its own story of creation (not unlike Hegel's *Phenomenology*). The intention is supplied, not through guesses about symbolism or iconography, not through the advice of press kits and dealers, not even through interviews and biographical research, but with the painting, at every step in its development. And what is that intention? Precisely to supply an emotional resting place, an unbroken continuity through time, and a sense of connection with nature — the goals of the kitsch maneuver. (At this level we are simply discussing "Joy of Painting" as something being watched, but even to the degree that a possible application is the viewer's attaining mastery of a "do-it-yourself" genre, we would still be dealing with the creation of an emotional resting place through the viewer's painting — as production, of course.)

We are still left with the question of the reception of such a work. Again, in general, theories and discussions of reception are usually weakly grounded and are supplied with guesses and imagination. Halle, however, has done an exemplary study (*Inside Culture*, 1993) to determine how works are actually received. Halle interviewed hundreds of residents and investigated the works hung in homes from across the class spectrum in the New York area. Now, the received wisdom holds that the "easier" landscapes would find preference among the "lower" classes, that is, people unfamiliar with or uneducated in the fine arts or avant-garde culture. Contrary to this assumption, Halle discovered that people prefer landscapes across the board. Not only was the preference for landscapes a feature of every class, but the percentage of landscapes among pictures displayed in homes was the same in every class (a little above 30%).[75]

This universal preference was confirmed by the 1994 installation at the Alternative Museum in New York by Russian expatriate artists Komar and Melamid, *People's Choice: The Polling of America*.[76] Komar and Melamid's idea was (parodying political opinion polls) to conduct an opinion poll to determine the tastes of

Americans regarding art, and then, using the poll as a sort of instruction manual, to do a series of paintings which reflected the various tastes associated with different income levels. The Boston firm of Mertilla & Kelly conducted the survey, polling 1001 people nationwide. The results however came to Komar and Melamid as a "shock": "initially, the idea was to paint different pictures for different incomes, but we realized that there's no difference! The [preference for the color blue] diminishes with income and education, but still the color blue is the majority in every group. And every group wants these landscapes, with soft curves."[77] Led by the results of their poll, Komar and Melamid went ahead with the installation, but only made two landscape paintings, *America's Most Wanted* and *America's Most Unwanted*. *America's Most Wanted* was a medium-sized landscape with a few "fully-clothed" figures, and *America's Most Unwanted* was a small, orange-black geometric abstraction, along the lines of Kandinsky.

Even though the artists were plagued by the fear that people would only respond with "what people think they should say as opposed to what they truly [prefer],"[78] Halle's research seems to indicate that the poll respondents did for the most part give honest answers, since Halle recorded the actual work which people displayed in the privacy of their own homes, for their own viewing. The similarities between the two investigations are striking — they agree on almost every question of taste which appeared in both studies. The "People's Choice" survey found that outdoor scenes were preferred (88%) over indoor scenes (5%), and that, of outdoor scenes, bodies of water (49%), forests (49%), and rural scenes (18%) were preferred over man-made structures (8%).[79] Presumably, Halle would be pleased to see the results of the "People's Choice" survey.[80]

The agreement between the studies also includes, over and above the kind of picture that people prefer, information pertinent to the meaning of art for its viewers, or the reasons for the choices they make. Halle discovered that the landscapes people chose for display in their homes "reflect an overwhelming preference for a sedate and tranquil nature. Almost all are calm, not turbulent. Rivers flow serenely, oceans are placid; trees are unbent by the wind; snow lies evenly, fallen, but rarely falling"; he continues, "Of the 349 landscapes prominently displayed in the houses samples ... only two were turbulent. And one of these met its downfall during the study."[81] Answers to queries about people's reasons for choosing landscapes only confirmed this observation: "They like these pictures because they are 'calm,' 'restful'; they offer 'solitude' and 'quiet'; they soothe."[82] Likewise, the "People's Choice" opinion poll found that people preferred art which made them happy (60%) and which was "relaxing to look at" (77%).[83]

We posited that kitsch was a modern coping mechanism for the general structure of modernity, and that it sought to produce a reverse image of modernity, a locus of stasis, continuity, and connection to nature. Granted that empirical investigations will only give partial results (the results of polls being even more open to question), if our theory is right, it must still say something about the real world. With the little direct or solid evidence available, what have we been able to confirm? The kitsch mechanism described above (as a coping mechanism) does indeed seem to explain the phenomena in question. In particular, we have been able

to find evidence relating to the content in and intention behind the production of the contemporary landscape picture (taken as a paradigm kitsch object), and the content of and intention behind its reception. As Matisse put it, art is analogous to "a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue."[84]

Kitsch and Art

Now why should we end a discussion of the kitsch mechanism with a Matisse quote on the function of art? Precisely to underscore their affinity. For if both 'fine' (modern, abstract) art and kitsch have as their primary function a counter-movement to modernity, as it were an emotional negative print of modernity, then obviously the two are similar in a very important way, and not, as Greenberg asserted, mortal enemies. Indeed, it seems that the basic difference between the two is that 'fine' art has, over and above its primary emotional functions, additional 'intellectual' functions, or at the very least stylistic, formal, or contextual markers which allow it to more easily perform another, possibly unrelated task as an object of 'fine' art.

As we saw earlier in Dorfles' treatment of the range of kitsch, kitsch did not occur before the advent of modernity because (among other reasons) in pre-modern societies, art had a different historical function. This points to another aspect of kitsch: kitsch analyzed as an art form. There are a number of ways to understand this. The first involves utility: in general we could say that kitsch does not serve a 'physical' purpose, but an emotional or symbolic one. By this criterion, then, a wedge of wood which serves as a doorstop, or a metal container for serving coffee, would be tools for accomplishing some physical goal, whereas a stuffed animal or postcard of a kitten serve primarily emotional purposes. This distinction, however, can become problematic, because there are for instance door "cosies" (or "mufflers") fashioned in the shape of a snake (some people call them "door snakes")[85] and teapots in the shape of a cat. In such cases, perhaps the answer is to ask if the object fills the emotional role, and not whether it fills it exclusively.

Another approach is to consider forms: kitsch appears in the forms which are recognized as art forms, e.g., paintings, photographs, sculptures, monuments, novels, plays, films, etc., even if it is said of kitsch items that they are "merely analogous" to the "real" art forms. Indeed, the objects which are referred to as "traditional kitsch" (kitsch in its narrower understanding, such as bric-a-brac, lawn ornaments, rustic paintings) fall generally into the categories of sculpture and painting (or at least "pictures"). Finally, the status of kitsch as a variety of art can be seen in that it is marked as such, principally through the practice of display. Displaying involves placing an object in a place which is easy to see, and which is marked as a place for looking, such as within a frame or on a pedestal (loosely understood) or both.[86]

Umberto Eco is one person (inter alia!) who argues for a strong distinction between 'fine' art and kitsch. One of Eco's central arguments in "The Structure of Bad Taste" is that kitsch is consumed by people who are too uneducated and too busy to "decode" the complex information stored in 'fine' art, and yet desiring something akin to a 'fine' art experience, instead consume kitsch which has borrowed 'fine' art "stylemes" but which offers these in an unintegrated fashion and

for immediate consumption.[87] Here we see a discussion which applies aspects of a more developed approach to kitsch (the discussion of structural and technique issue as well as subjective reactions in a modern context) but which falls short on the class caveat.[88]

Furthermore, Halle's research shows that those who belong to the 'upper' classes receive abstract art in much the same way as they do landscapes: as a soothing decoration. Even those whose attraction to abstract art is that abstract art "unleash[es] the creative imagination," when asked where their "unleashed" imagination goes, responded half of the time that they imagine landscapes![89] Of those who did not imagine landscapes, most of the remainder reported family motifs and relationships between people coming to mind — the very material of the family snapshots that are a close second to landscapes in universal popularity.[90] Again the most reasonable conclusion is that the function of even abstract art is more akin to that of kitsch than opposed.

In summary, it would seem that if there were a difference between 'fine' art and kitsch paintings, it would be that 'fine' art has markers or involves a reception context which allows it to also take on a additional 'intellectual' task, presumably for artists, dealers, critics, scholars, and upper-level students. But this does not seem to touch the essence of what the works accomplish, merely an additional function.[91]

Conclusions

What, then, have we accomplished? We have reviewed the variety of kitsch concepts and placed them into an order of kitsch qualities, formal structures, and subjective aspects. We have discarded kitsch conceptions which were overly dependent upon unexamined assumptions about class, race, and gender differences. In doing this, we arrived at a kitsch conception which concentrates on subjective elements in their relation to the complex known as modernity. By this means we see that there is focal point for a legitimate investigation of kitsch. Using this focus, we see that the kitsch object is best understood as a tool in a struggle against the particular stresses of the modern world, insofar as that struggle in understood as an attempt to provide (at least) temporary relief, a place for recovery. Finally, this conception was tested against the most direct evidence available.

What do these accomplishments mean, at least practically? At the very least it seems that positing a stark or absolute contrast between kitsch and fine art is unjustifiable; both exhibit the same roots and have the same goals (though it appears that fine arts add some others). Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, we should view the impulse to extend such absolute value judgments of the consumers of kitsch with suspicion, including when we are the targets of those judgments. In my own case, it should be clear that my teenage journal entries conform to the kitsch concept here developed, and that this conception makes my entries more understandable — at least to the degree that they exhibit any general tendencies. Even if one should wish to examine the kitsch mechanism under a harsher light, it seems that approaching it as a psychic disease would be unfruitful, given that it is a part of a general human defense strategy, a healing process, an expres-

sion of the pysche's own strength.

Granted, over the course of this investigation a great simplification has occurred. Our conception of kitsch is still inadequate to that multiplicity and unending variety which falls under the rubric of "kitsch"; nonetheless, with our conception, a wide range of kitsch entities can be legitimately grasped and basically understood. There may indeed be a great number of particular aspects which will forever elude a rational explanation, but then again these have not been the focus of our energies.

NOTES

1 This essay was delivered in earlier versions as a paper at the Graduate Student Colloquium, "Kitsch and Collecting" (together with Kevin Melchionne; comments by Prof. Robert Crease and David Salz), on Sept. 28, 1995 at SUNY Stony Brook and as a guest lecture ("Der Kitsch gegen das Moderne") in A. Jürgens-Kirschhoff's course "Kunst und Trivialkultur" (WS 97) on Jan. 21 and 29, 1997, at the Universität Tübingen. I gratefully thank Profs. David Allison, Edward Casey, Robert Crease, and Donald Kuspit (all of SUNY Stony Brook) for their support and guidance as I worked on this essay. The artist Nancy Romines of New York City also made many useful comments on an early draft of the work.

2 Gillo Dorfles, ed., *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste* (New York: Bell Publishing, 1969). Some information on the translation of Dorfles' *Kitsch* can be found in Tadeusz Pavlowski, "The Varieties of Kitsch," *Dialectics and Humanism*, no. 4 (1977), 105, n. 1. Richard Egenter's book claims to be the first on the subject to appear in English, but deals almost exclusively with religious art (*The Desecration of Christ*, ed. Nicolete Gray, trans. Edward Quinn [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1967], 10).

3 Three of the essays are by the reigning 'kitschographers' at the time of Dorfles' book: Clement Greenberg (whose "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" had reached quasi-canonical status), Hermann Broch, and Ludwig Giesz. Subtopics treated included politics, the family, death, film, pornography, and architecture. References to those authors will first give the page from the original (or parent-language) source, followed by the corresponding page of the Dorfles' English translation, if available. I have used the Greenberg "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" essay from *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965): 3-21. Likewise, though the Broch essay excerpted by Dorfles was taken from Broch's *Dichten und Erkennen*, Vol. 1 (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1955), my references are to the more recent *Schriften zur Literatur 2: Theorie*, Ed. Paul Michael Lützeler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975). References to Giesz use "Der 'Kitsch-Mensch' als Tourist" in his *Phänomenologie des Kitsches*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971): 75-84.

4 "More appalling pictures than you can shake a stick at," says the *New York Times* back-cover blurb [no date supplied].

5 Curtis Brown, *Star-Spangled Kitsch: An Astounding and Tastelessly Illustrated Exploration of the Bawdy, Gaudy, Shoddy Mass-Art Culture in This Great Land of Ours* (New York: Universe Books, 1975), 200.

6 Its subtitle captures this jovial tone perfectly, and may be exactly the sort of phenom-

enon Harold Rosenberg had in mind when he spoke of "kitsch criticism of kitsch" ("Pop Culture: Kitsch Criticism" in *The Tradition of the New* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965], 261). Cf. Ludwig Giesz' observation, "It is infinitely simple to list mass-produced [objects] in bad taste and without any artistic value, and to criticize their faults either kindly or mercilessly. There are countless albums and anthologies which serve this purpose" (75/Dorfles, 156). There is reason to doubt that Dorfles' book escapes Giesz' characterization — which it of course contains! The idea of "kitsch criticism of kitsch" is also taken up by Haroldo de Campos in "Vanguarda e Kitsch," *A Arte no Horizonte do Provável* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1969), 195-196. In the case of Brown's book at least, given its less biting tone, one could perhaps argue that it is an attempt at a criticism through good-natured humor (of the type advocated by the Earl of Shaftesbury), and if so, is perhaps the more 'effective' criticism.

7 Op. cit., 11.

8 An example of which could be Thornton Wilder's play, *Our Town*, which blends futurist/'non-objective' theater technique with full-blown narrative.

9 The complexity and ambivalence surrounding kitsch can be seen in the example of Milan Kundera's novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which I have heard called kitsch, which is a meditation on kitsch, and which includes a particularly schmaltzy scene involving a pet near its end. It first appeared in English in the pages of — what else? — *The New Yorker*, and the passage of the novel there selected dealt precisely with kitsch. (Prof. Robert Crease reminded me of the novel's discussion of kitsch.)

10 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., Ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), 7.

11 David Halle makes this charge in *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 5-11 (esp. 6 and 7) and 120. This issue will be further discussed under the topic of "corroboration" (see n. 21).

12 I should note at the beginning that I am discussing kitsch qua kitsch — not kitsch which has been taken up in an ironic fashion, such as the case of someone who buys kitsch precisely because the items seem ugly and in bad taste. I am reflecting upon "innocent" kitsch. In a strange parallel to the impossibility of reflecting upon one's own mind immediately (contemplating one's own experiences always pushes them one step away), the label of kitsch under discussion points to kitsch as it exists before it has been labelled as such. Put simply, I am here focusing on first-order, non-self-conscious kitsch.

13 Dorfles, 280-289.

14 Op. cit., 292.

15 Op cit., 158/Dorfles, 49.

16 Op. cit., 89.

17 Not to mention self-contradictory — compare from our list of representative terms, e.g. "chaste" and "obscene"!

18 Op. cit., 105-106. His typology consists of eight oppositions:

   1. "Kitsch as a product of human action versus kitsch man, kitsch attitude, kitsch experience, and kitsch behaviour."

   2. "Intentional and non-intentional kitsch [in reference to the artist's intention]."

   3. "Kitsch characterized internally and externally" [structure of kitsch object vs. comparison between objects, usually between one which is original and another which is derivative].

.4. "Kitsch as a natural creation and as a human product."

5. "Relative and absolute concept of kitsch" [kitsch as a bad quality vs. kitsch as being such within a certain range of comparison].

6. "Subjective and objective concept of kitsch."

7. "Classificatory and comparative concept of kitsch."

8. "Historical and universal concept of kitsch" [105-106].

This paper will be taking up principally (1), (2), and (6), which seem to me to amount to the same thing, and also a consideration of kitsch as product produced and product consumed.

19 Op. cit., 115.

20 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, Trans. Peter Collier (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), 20-21. Though Bourdieu is discussing the attempt to sort out the variety of Nazi writers, we may note that the cultural products of the Nazis have not infrequently been criticized for their kitschiness! Cf. Hermann Wein, "Nietzsche und Faschismus," *Club Voltaire: Jahrbuch für kritische Aufklärung*, no. 4, (1970), 332-341: 335; Saul Friedlander, *Reflections on Nazism: Essays on Kitsch and Death*, trans. Thomas Weyr (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); and of course, Greenberg's "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," op. cit.

21 Op. cit., 107-108. "Authors writing about kitsch often refer to an intentional property, but they do not always substantiate their statements in a clear and methodologically correct manner. Even if they do make a conscious effort to ascertain the intention of an artist, they can do it only indirectly by way of drawing conclusions from observations of the kitsch object and from available external information" (107-108). The question of corroboration is also touched on a number of times in Robert C. Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 49 no. 1 (Winter 1991), 1-14, and, as we have seen, discussed directly in Halle (n. 11).

22 Op. cit., 108.

23 The word "class" is usually taken by 'kitschographers' to refer to a directly proportionate relationship between (a) income and economic/social level and (b) education, acculturation, and accumulation of "cultural capital." The question however is whether these two are always found together; this question is touched on e.g. in Greenberg, 8-9. In the immediately following discussion of status-seeking, the focus is on acculturation (to "high" culture), seen as a means to a higher social position.

24 See Umberto Eco, "The Structure of Bad Taste," in *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 180-216 (we will discuss this in more detail later); Greenberg on kitsch as "ersatz culture" (1965) 10-11 and 15-16 [Dorfles: 116]; and de Campos 198-201. The following discussion utilizes Halle's observations, but Andrew Ross also subjects the status argument to scrutiny in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 58-64. Both Halle and Ross bring a good amount of attention to the status argument put forward in Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), passim.

25 Op. cit., 80.

26 David Denby, "Love Affair," *New York Magazine* (November 7, 1994), 97; the Lenin quote is from V. I. Lenin, *On Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967), 226, cited in David Laing, *The Marxist Theory of Art: An Introductory Survey* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), 135, n. 5. Robert C. Solomon's detailed essay defends sentimentality against the various attacks it routinely suffers.

Rosenberg's comment that "kitsch is much more likely [than art] to exclude personal malice" (264), at least, conforms to the basic idea behind Solomon's essay.

27 Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldwaith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

28 For example, though it is often said that women are traditionally associated with nature and men with culture, and that therefore women are seen as more emotional and men as more self-controlled, there exists at the same time a traditional opposition which posits women as more civilized than men, less likely to allow themselves to get dirty, and more sensitive in general, whereas men are seen as the type to go hunting in the woods, to pursue blood sport like an animal, and to get covered in mud without hesitation in doing so (Kant remarks e.g. that women "are cleanly and very delicate in respect to all that provokes disgust," [ibid., 77] and have made "men's customs ... gentler, their conduct more polite and refined, and their bearing more elegant" [ibid., 95]). One explanation for this apparent contradiction is that the more "natural" woman is seen as belonging to the home, whereas the more "cultural" men are placed outside the home, whether that home is in an urban or forest dwelling. At any rate, it is a complex phenomenon. Added to this is the debate over whether the traditionally ascribed gender roles should be equally valorized, reversed, combined, or abandoned altogether.

As concerns race categories (about which I am still not well-enough informed), these too should be treated with caution. In relation to kitsch, it may be noted that the same idea of polarization and mutual interpenetration often posited between kitsch and the avant-garde (stealing and appropriation of kitsch by the avant-garde vs. adulteration and coöptation of the avant-garde by kitsch [cf. Dorfles, Eco, et al.]) can be set up in regard to categories of "authentic" and "inauthentic" black culture. And yet "white" and "black" music, for example, are very hard to completely separate and distinguish [see the boggling symbiosis described in Ross, op. cit., 67-68]. On the other hand, Curtis Brown's *Star-Spangled Kitsch* often makes kitsch a target of his good-humored criticism precisely for its racism.

29 The concept of the "kitsch-mensch" was first proposed by Broch, adapted by Giesz, and finally used as a core concept for the Dorfles anthology (see in particular Broch, 158 /Dorfles, 49; Giesz, 8, 77/Dorfles, 159; and Dorfles, 4.

30 Egenter characterizes kitsch as a tool of Satan for obstructing souls from reaching God [op. cit., 13-14], but Broch's discussions are just as extreme: "He who produces kitsch is not one who produces low-quality art, he is no figure of little or no ability, he is definitely not to be judged according to the standards of aesthetics, rather he is ..., to get to the point, a bad person, he is an ethically depraved person, a criminal who desires the radically evil. Or, put less dramatically: he is a pig. For kitsch is the evil itself within art. Would you like a colossal example of kitsch? — Nero playing to the fireworks of burning Christians: the specific dilettante, the specific aesthete, who does everything for the sake of beautiful effects" (op. cit., 95, my translation. Cf. also p. 154/Dorfles, 76).

Incidentally, concerning Egenter's opinion of the relation between kitsch and Jesus, a dissenting voice can be found in Hans Conrad Zaner, a former Dominican monk who writes of his life in the monastery that he then "experienced the verses from the Old Testament as primal, powerful, and true. And the verses from the New Testament as kitsch" (*Ecce Jesus: Ein Anschlag gegen den neuen religiösen Kitsch* [Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992]), 12.

31 Op. cit., p.171/Dorfles, 65.

32 Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernity, Avant-Garde, Decadence,*

Kitsch, Postmodernism, 2nd ed., (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987). I should thank Prof. David Hertz of Indiana University, Bloomington, for directing me to this book.

33 These pan-historical possibilities have indeed been taken up, as we have seen in the case of Broch, who, though he characterizes kitsch as the offspring of Romanticism, draws comparisons between his "kitsch-mensch" and Nero's aestheticization of torture [n. 30]. As we shall see, Giesz takes a similar stance.

34 Op. cit., 11-12.

35 Ibid., 10.

36 Ibid., 40, 32, 107.

37 Ibid., 20, 31, 94-95, etc.

38 Broch, 162-166, Dorfles, 54-59.

39 Op. cit., 9.

40 Op. cit., 26. "[I]t is almost impossible to judge the 'kitschiness' of a translated passage or even a piece written some twenty years before," ad loc.

41 Dorfles' comments on comics for example ("such stupid and utterly dull figures as Superman and Batman," 40) give me the impression of someone who is indeed familiar with, but who does not however know, them. Of course, the whole point of such continuously derogatory rhetoric is to demonstrate a proper distance.

42 Op. cit., 75-84/Dorfles, 156-174.

43 Ad loc.

44 Giesz uses elements of the psyche kindred with Heidegger's existentialia or human "categories" (*Being and Time,* Trans., John Maquarrie and Edward Robinson [San Francisco: Harper, 1962], §9, 70). But his indebtedness to Heidegger is also linguistically indicated. This indebtedness, palpable in the German, is dulled in the English translation of Dorfles' anthology. The English "[a]nalyzed from the existentialist point of view," 162, for example, translates Giesz' "[d]aseinsanalytisch betrachtet," 78. My impression is that the English translation suffers because it is a translation from the Italian, itself presumably translated from the Giesz' German original. At any rate, the German is appreciably clearer than the Dorfles translation — was the English perhaps intentionally aimed at a 'lower' American audience, 'kitschified'?

45 See esp. ibid., 78-81/Dorfles, 162-166.

46 Ibid., 79/Dorfles, 163. This comparison was more recently taken up in a discussion of ancient religious relics as momentos and souvenirs in Vicki Goldberg, "In Search of Diana of Epheseus," *New York Times* (August 21, 1994), sec.2, H33.

47 Our discussion will (as will become clear) cite principally Marx, but we may indicate others: Dick Howard, *From Marx to Kant,* 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), esp. 34; and Greenberg, op. cit., 5-7.

48 This development was worked out in particular by Greenberg. Besides the passages already indicated from "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," see his "Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* Vol. 1, Ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 23-38. Later, non-formalist developments in the art world have their parallels in other modern forms of the division of labor such as free-lancing and multiple-task work also described by Marx.

49 Op. cit., 172.

50 Op. cit., 180-186, 190. Martin Heidegger makes strikingly similar observations. He had aligned with a party which saw itself as an alternative to both modernity (America) and one response to it (communism) — "between two great pincers"; his vision, too, was thus a response to the challenge of modernity. He describes the same

world-historical world as Marx ("when any occurrence, in any place and any time, has become accessible at any speed, when an attempt on the life of the King of France and a symphonic concert can be lived at the same time") and his questions, "What for? Where to? — And what now?" echo Lenin's "What is to be done?" from 33 years before. All quotes (except Lenin) are modified from Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 2nd ed., trans. Ralph Manheim (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 31, as cited in Conceição Neves Gmeiner, "Martin Heidegger e o Nacional-Socialismo," *Leopoldianum*, Vol. 2, no. 1 (1975), 32.

51 Op. cit., 5, 7, 10, 19-22, 41-42.

52 Op. cit., p.10.

53 Calinescu notes: "The overall traditionalism of the Middle Ages and the prevailing medieval disregard of historical time, made up of unique, unrepeatable moments, go against the deep sense of historicity implied by Christianity's philosophy of time. The paradoxical view of the Middle Ages' rejection of the original Christian notion of time has been convincingly argued by Denis de Rougement in *Man's Modern Quest*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Harper, 1957). To the revolutionary challenge of the Christian time, Denis de Rougement writes, 'the middle ages resisted by going back to cyclical conceptions and by a sharp limitation upon the size of the past and the future: the effect of the kind of congelation of time which this entailed was the elimination of all becoming' (95). According to de Rougement, 'the Middle Ages were the "Eastern" period of Europe,' because of their 'growing propensity ... to substitute tradition, mythical allegory, and legend for the facts which only Scripture, very little read at the time, showed to be historical. All this strengthens my view that the Middle Ages, far from standing for some "golden age of Christianity" — as the Romantics were the first to allege and has been repeated ad nauseum ever since — were rather, generally speaking, a long defensive reaction against the revolutionary ferment introduced into the world by the Gospel' (90)," 313-314, n.4.

54 Perhaps the epitome of radical difference in the succession of time can be found in Heidegger's description of the Hegelian presentation of time, a succession of "nows" each of which is "either 'now' is-no-longer, or now is-not-yet" — in other words, completely different from the singular "point" of the now in the present, which conception however "mov[es] wholly in the direction of the way time is ordinarily understood" (*Being and Time*, 483).

55 Op. cit., 10.

56 Ibid., 41-42.

57 Ad loc.

58 Ibid., 92.

59 The great interconnectedness of the immanent and linear conceptions of modernity results in their often being conflated or discussed in the same breath. The implications of both conceptions play out in Wittgenstein's comment, "It sounds too simple: the difference between magic and science can be expressed in [the fact] that there is a progress to science, but not in magic. Magic has no direction of development which lies internal to it" [trans. altered] (*Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, Trans. A. C. Miles [Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1991], 13); cf. Foucault's account: "A profound historicity penetrates into the heart of things, isolates and defines them in their own coherence, imposes upon them the forms or order implied by the continuity of time ... things become increasingly reflexive, seeking the principle of their intelligibility only in their own development" (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Trans. anon. [New York: Random House, 1973], xxiii).

60 This thesis is greatly indebted to Calinescu (see esp. his Introduction and 246-248).

61 We could extend our list with the brand names noted by Adorno, albeit in a different context: "Jägermeister, Alte Klosterfrau, Schänke" ("Master Hunter, Old Nun, Ye Olde Tavern"; *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973], 44)

62 Referring to what she calls "cosmic feminism" or "ecofeminism," Kathy E. Ferguson notes that it "typically invoke[s] the political and epistemological possibilities of transcendence and return ... invoking the traditions of premodern societies ... as sources for cosmic feminism's struggles against modernity," this modernity being seen as "the gradual attack on and erosion of the boundary between wilderness and civilization" (*The Man Problem: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], 98-100).

63 An organization with clubs across the United States which establishes imaginary medieval societies, complete with royal titles, jousting, swordfights, and unicorn dolls.

64 *Man and Technics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932), 97, as cited in Bourdieu, *Political Ontology*, op. cit., 11. The italics are Bourdieu's.

65 Ferguson notes: "Any vision of early societies available to the residents of modernity, no matter what their spiritual sympathies, is a version filtered through modernity's categories and affected by its conquests," op. cit., 100.

66 Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 61.

67 Ibid., 65.

68 Ibid., 73-74. As regards the Nazis in particular, Sluga warns: "the notion of great crisis that motivated Fichte, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Nazis is, to use Foucault's words, one of the most destructive habits of modern thought. The idea promises us an unconditional liberation from whatever we have found constraining in the past. It promises a moment of transformation and a world that is in no way like the old one. It loosens all moral and traditional bonds and projects the right to total freedom. Nietzsche wrote that 'individuals and generations can now fix their eyes on tasks of a vastness that would have seemed madness in earlier ages, and a trifling with Heaven and Hell. We may experiment with ourselves! Yes, mankind has the right to do that.' He could not foresee that National Socialism would teach us a quick and ugly lesson concerning the perils of all such experimentation." To this he cites Foucault's rejoinder: "One must probably have the humility to admit that the time of one's own life is not the one-time, basic, revolutionary moment of history, from which everything begins and is completed" [73-74]. (We should note that the equality of Nietzsche's conception of experimentation and that of the Nazis is still in debate.)

     I should clarify here that I do not wish to say that kitsch is always beneficial. Though I am in general arguing against the idea of seeing kitsch as a sickness or virus, my analysis refers mainly to kitsch when it is a tool for creating a domestic sanctuary; but when such tactics are applied on a large, national-political scale, then kitsch becomes questionable, even dangerous. The Nazis are a case in point, but Reagan's "Morning in America" television campaign ads move in the same direction.

69 Op. cit., 123-124.

70 Compare the futurist F. T. Marinetti and the dadaist Hugo Ball. Items #4 and #9 of Marinetti's futurist manifesto assert: "We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched with a new form of beauty, the beauty of speed." and "We will glorify war — the only true hygiene of the world..." ("The Foundation of Futurism" [1908], from *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. Herschel B.

Chipp [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968], pp. 284-289; p.284). In opposition to this, Hugo Ball writes in his diaries: "The war is based on a crass error. Men have been mistaken for machines. Machines, not men, should be decimated. At some future date, when only machines march, things will be better. Then everyone will be right to rejoice when they all demolish each other" (*Flight Out of Time (1910-1924)*, ed. John Elderfeld, trans. Ann Raimes [New York: Viking Press, 1974], entry for July 26, 1915, p. 22). In regard to the simultaneous ability of progress to equal decadence, one may note an odd linguistic coincidence: the word "modern" in German can also mean "decaying."

71 Also worthy of mention are Mark King, a Leroy Nieman imitator (or at least a competitor for Nieman's market), and Alexander, Bob Ross' predecessor and mentor, whom (as far as I can tell) Bob Ross long ago superseded.

72 This description relies upon a number of broadcasts during the month of August, 1994, on WNYE, Channel 25, in new York, and WLIW, channel 21, in Long Island. All quoted material was transcribed live from these broadcasts.

I should mention that Bob Ross died on July 4, 1995; I believe his son will be taking over the television show. Examples of Bob Ross' painting can be seen at his company's webpage, http://www.bobross.com/, which includes pictures of paintings by people who have applied his do-it-yourself techniques.

The artist Alix Lambert curated an interesting exhibit, "Joy of Painting," involving Bob Ross' television show; the show took place at the cultural center HERE, in New York City in January of 1995. She distributed copies of a Bob Ross instructional video to various artists and had them paint from it. The video and the resulting works formed the basis of the exhibit. The paintings shown exhibited the entire range of reactions, from faithful — even loving — reproduction to passionate hatred.

73 Unless I am mistaken, all of the life forms in Ross' paintings answer to "he."

74 Cf. the Preface and the discussion of Pawlowski.

75 Op cit., pp.59-61. The next most popular subject for display in homes is the portrait, almost exclusively of members of the nuclear family, pp.87-118 (ch. 3). It should be noted that this investigation of taste via art displayed in homes is skewed in one important way — toward homeowners, that is, people arguably predisposed to seek stability. This focus also leaves out another type of domestic projection which still needs explanation, namely, the decorations native to the teenager's room, usually collages of magazine clippings, posters, postcards, photographs, and assorted cultural flotsam and jetsam, sometimes completely covering over the original surface of the wall. It seems that we are again dealing with diversion from modernity. To argue that younger people do not mind the constant upheaval of modernity would be to ignore the undeniable pain brought about by broken families and frequent moving, two increasingly frequent conditions brought about by the modern situation.

76 Alex Komar and Vitaly Melamid, "Painting by Numbers: The Search for a People's Art" (interview), op. cit., Vol. 258, no. 10 (March 14, 1994), pp. 334-348, and Victor Navasky, "People's Artists," The Nation op. cit., pp. 328-329.

77 Ibid., pp.342-343.

78 Ibid., p.343.

79 Ibid., p.340.

80 The survey (and painting) was then performed for Russia, with essentially the same results (Susannah Cassedy O'Donnell, "The People Speak: 'Blue Landscape, Please,'" *Museum News* [November/December 1994], 9-10, 26). As of 1998, the survey has been performed repeatedly across the globe, including such countries as Turkey and Kenya. Again and again, the poll returned the same results — landscapes

are preferred over abstractions or interiors. The only exceptions were Holland (which "most wanted" a small abstraction consisting of bright, swirling colors — as over against a brownish interior scene) and possibly Germany and Italy, whose "most wanted" landscapes were a little off the beaten track — or were Komar and Melamid getting tired of painting the same landscapes? (All of the paintings can be viewed at the Dia Center's webpage at http://www.diacenter.org/km/painting.html/.)

81 Op. cit., 69.

82 Ad loc. In more detail, "A Manhattan man, about a Chinese garden scene, with mountains in the background: 'It's so calm. That's what I like about it.' A Manhattan woman, on her photographs of the coasts of Greece and Mexico: 'They have a feeling of solitude, beauty, quiet, and peace.' A Greenpoint woman, on a landscape of trees and a river: 'It's very restful.' Another Greenpoint woman, on a rural street scene lined with autumn trees: 'It's peaceful and restful.' A Manhasset man, about two beach scenes: 'They're peaceful.' A Medford woman about a beach scene, with seagulls but no people: 'I like it because it's tranquil. No one bothers you'" [69-70. The Manhattan households were the upper-class urban homes, Manhasset upper middle-class suburban, Greenpoint working- and lower middle-class urban, and Medford working- and lower middle-class suburban]. Another common aspect of the landscapes Halle studied was that they depicted no people; of the landscapes that did show people, they were almost all of landscapes of previous historical periods, while the "depopulated" landscapes were usually of modern-day vistas.

83 Op. cit., 343. Again, it may be that the "People's Choice" poll might partially reflect what people believed they would choose, as opposed to what they actually had chosen or do choose.

84 Cited in Halle, 72. Halle contends that the basic reasons behind people's preference for calm landscapes relate to "an orientation to nature as the arena for leisure" (a) because the "home, and viewing landscape therein, offers some respite from the perceived hustle and hubbub of the outside world, especially the world of work" or (b) because "the modern orientation to nature [is] as scenery to drive past...or as the arena for trips and leisure time" (72-73). This contention could probably be taken as either backing up or contradicting my thesis.

85 The name for these objects, as can be seen, is hard to nail down. One mail-order catalog lists them as "Draft Dodgers" (the copywriters apparently missed the possible political connotations of the name — unless they meant to say that "draft dodgers" are snakes!). Thanks to Liz French for bringing the catalog my attention.

86 On "display" as a constitutive of art, see Halle (95, 111-112, and 120). This has been rather intuitively summed up by David LaChapelle: "The way I see it, the magazines are the galleries... And the museum is the refrigerator. If someone rips out the photo and puts it on the fridge, that really is something" (Amy M. Spindler, "Mixing Dada, Cher, Middle America," New York Times, [November 29, 1994], B14).

87 Op. cit., 200-205.

88 Cf. the discussion of the "status" argument in the "Deduction of Kitsch" section.

89 Op. cit., 132-134. On a more anecdotal plane, in an interview with Doris Lessing which took place at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Lessing expressed disdain for most of the "abstract" sculptures and paintings in the exhibition, "The Italian Metamorphosis 1943-1968," but (reports Diana Jean Schemo) eventually Lessing "warms to a few of the works. In a 1961 sculpture called 'White Fire' by Fausto Melotti, she sees a castle. Lucio Fontana's 'Spatial Concept. Expectations,' colored panels with almond-shaped slits, reminds her of the seashore" ("A Portrait Unwinds, As In Life," New York Times [November 2, 1994], C10). Likewise, we

discover that Greenberg spent his spare time at the end of his life painting landscapes (Robert Burstow, "On Art and Politics," interview with Greenberg, *Frieze*, Issue 18 [September/October 1994], 33).

90 Halle, op. cit., 132-134.

91 As far as the question of "postmodern" art is concerned, for now all I can offer is preliminary. If "postmodern" art does, as is sometimes held, not have relief or stasis as its goal, but instead further alienation, then it would apparently conform to the description of a reaction to modernity that walks with it (entertainment), or tries to run ahead of it, instead of standing against it. On postmodernism as 'hypermodernism,' David E. Pettigrew notes: "Kant and Freud's fragmentation of the subject, their critical identification of the illusory metanarratives of reason, and their necessary recourse to the ir-rational, serve to debunk the myth that modernity was simply obsessed with unity, and rather exemplifies tendencies which have traditionally been associated with post-modernity. Moreover, ... the exemplars of the postmodern, particularly Derrida and Lacan, themselves exhibit certain pathologies of modernity. Reason is portrayed as displaced from its propriety" ("The Crisis of Reason in Modern Philosophy: The Pathological Case of Kant and Freud," Diss. SUNY at Stony Brook [1991], xxix). Otherwise, "postmodern" art would conform to the same structure as 'fine" art and kitsch, as a movement against modernity.

That which is called "kitsch" is also regularly taken to be:

(a) false ("fake," "inauthentic," "non-authentic," "illusory," "substitute," "spurious," "mystified," "counterfeit," "hypocritical," "imitation," "ersatz," "ahistorical," "seeming," "synthetic," "vicarious," and "deceptive")

(b) of low quality ("cheap," "mediocre," "inferior," "vulgar," "degraded," "levelling," "trashy," and "insipid")

(c) dependent upon 'simple' or 'low' emotions ("sugary," "pretty," "sentimental," "cute," "naïve," "sensational," "obscene," "saccharine," "comforting," "chaste," and "romantic")

(d) focused on the inessential or trivial ("frivolous," "superficial," and "decorative")

(e) strongly connected to mass production, systematization, and marketing ("commercial," "packaged," "standardized," "clichéd," and "formulaic")

(f) dependent upon laziness or fatigue ("facile," "immediate," "bigoted," "unreflective," "uncultivated," "philistine," "predigested," and "unimaginative")

(g) calculated for 'mass' appeal ("conformist" and "popular")

and, finally, (h) ethically or morally wrong ("depraved," "fetischistic," "dangerous," "evil," and "virulent")

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH MATTER?

PROBLEMS IN THE CRITICISM OF GREENBERG, FRIED, AND KRAUSS

HOPE MAUZERALL

Formalist critic Clement Greenberg has been, and in many ways continues to be, the foremost architect of our vision of Modernism—a vision extended, and to varying degrees modified, by two initial followers: Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss. Though Greenberg has come under increasing attack since the Seventies, his "significance," as Donald Kuspit tells us, "cannot be overestimated. He is the designer and subtle manipulator of modernism, which is the single most important and influential theory of modern art."[1] Similarly, when Leo Steinberg embarks in *Other Criteria* on an analysis of American formalism, it is to Greenberg, and Greenberg alone, that he turns—largely crediting the approach's "strength," "enormous influence," and "theoretical justification" to Greenberg.[2] Consequently, Kuspit's conclusion seems justified: that even Greenberg's "detractors" participate "in what...psychoanalysts call the killing of the father—the father," in this case, "of modern American art criticism," since "they are all, in the last analysis, his sons."[3]

      Such hegemony makes crucial a precise understanding of what motivates Greenberg's criticism. This requires more than merely acknowledging, as is often done, his allegiance to basic principles of Western metaphysics,[4] since doing so still falls short of our appreciating its full impact on the present vision of Modernism. This essay, then, will explore more deeply the often taken-for-granted aspect of Greenberg's criticism—namely, the extent to which his approach is tied to basic, idealist tenets of Western metaphysics: the privileging of form over matter; a concern with transcendence; a stress on abstraction, purity and essence, as well as on intelligibility, clear definitions, and distinctions. Matter, in this tradition, is the stuff of this world; form belongs to a higher, abstract realm that transcends worldly materiality. Greenberg's own commitment to this tradition, though, is at times obscured by his early advocacy of medium—exemplified by his championing of

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