In the Mood for Kitsch? Linking Aesthetic Appreciation to the Dynamics of Social Motivation

Inaugural-Dissertation
in der Fakultät Humanwissenschaften
der Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg
Stefan Andreas Ortlieb

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vorgelegt von
Stefan Andreas Ortlieb
aus Nürnberg (Bayern)

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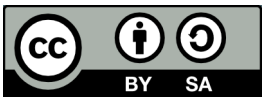

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Abstract

This thesis explores the aesthetic concept of *kitsch* from a psychological viewpoint. More specifically, it deals with a fourfold paradox: (1) Kitsch is so popular nobody likes it, (2) aesthetically it is never cutting edge but always fashionable, (3) despite its short history and poor reputation, it looks back on a long and prestigious past, and (4) although highly significant for Western popular culture and contemporary art, it is conspicuously absent in theory and practice of empirical aesthetics. The present thesis, which is mainly based on four peer-reviewed articles and five conference contributions, addresses these contradictions both theoretically and empirically.

Paradox #1. Drawing on a formalized kitsch definition that unites ideas from philosophical and empirical aesthetics with concepts from art sociology, it is stated that both popular success and highbrow rejection of kitsch derive from its capacity to elicit a spontaneous, positive affective response without any intellectual effort. A comparison of implicit and explicit attitudes and a cross-cultural study underscore the inherent ambivalence of kitsch and prepare the ground for a more dynamic approach to kitsch that goes beyond a culture capital account of popular taste.

Paradox #2. The *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* is introduced to account for the ambivalent on-again off-again relationship with kitsch. It identifies the polar opposition of avant-garde art and kitsch with two types of aesthetic experience: A future-oriented one that promises new insights but requires expertise and cognitive elaboration (*art*) and a backward-oriented one that gives effortless emotional gratification but leaves us with what we already know (*kitsch*). Based on the *Zurich Model of Social Motivation* (Zürcher Modell der sozialen Motivation), it further contends that (dis)taste for the one or the other is dynamically related to conflicting needs for self-directed exploration and secure relatedness. The model's main propositions were tested in a rating study and two experiments.

Paradox #3. Historically, one usually thinks of kitsch as a by-product of 19^{th} century industrialization. Our model's psychobiological foundations, however, beg for an evolutionary explanation. Reviewing evolutionary and anthropological accounts of aesthetics and prehistoric art-making, it appears that both functionally and formally modern-day kitsch, not avant-garde art, is our missing link to the premodern arts. Moreover, since Pop Art has bridged the gap between high art and popular taste, it is also key to many contemporary artworks.

Paradox #4. Despite its importance for 20^{th} century art theory, kitsch has gone widely unnoticed by empirical aesthetics. Against Fechner's vision of an *Aesthetics from Below*, research in this field is mainly concerned with high art at the expense of everyday phenomena. As a result, today's paramount models of aesthetic liking are essentially models of *art* perception that provide little guidance with regard to popular taste. With their narrow focus on processing speed even fluency-based frameworks are deliberately excluding what makes popular aesthetics popular: Emotionally rich content that strikes a chord in the viewer.

General Discussion. Finally, the kitsch criteria and the functional model are discussed in light of the cumulative results and competing theoretical approaches. At first glance, kitsch makes a textbook example of hedonic fluency. In perfect accord with Fechner's still widely unknown *Principle of Help or Amplification*, it illustrates how perceptual (identifiability) and conceptual fluency (conventionality) work together to enhance the emotional impact of its subject matter. Yet kitsch also reveals a strong limitation of fluency-based aesthetics. After all, it is not processing ease but emotionally rich content that separates kitsch from everyday symbols without any aesthetic pretense (e.g., traffic signs). This strong dependency of kitsch on the affective charge of certain themes and subjects directs our attention to a general deficit of today's models of aesthetic liking and a second long-forgotten principle of Fechner's *Aesthetics from Below*: The *Aesthetic Association Principle*. As a prototype of popular taste uniting immediate accessibility with primacy of content, kitsch reminds us that everyday aesthetics and avant-garde art cannot be evaluated by the same criteria and that all kitsch-related paradoxes result from the misleading attempt to do just that. To account for these differences in low- and highbrow aesthetics, our

functional model goes beyond a dual-process perspective by bringing content-related stimulus information and social distance regulation into play. Due to its connection with broad social motives, it is currently the only theoretical framework that makes testable predictions about age, gender, and culture differences in aesthetic liking. Naturally, the present approach to kitsch has its limitations. So far *sweet* kitsch in the *visual* domain has been emphasized at the expense of its bittersweet, sour, literary, and musical forms. All of these varieties deserve closer examination. Currently available findings on the functional model are as yet inconclusive and certain hypotheses are still to be tested. In its present form, the model also shows several areas of conceptual improvement. Feedback loops are needed for a better compatibility with transactional models of stress and coping, while connectivity with relevant philosophical and sociological accounts calls for a consistent distinction between power, prestige, and achievement motives. Based on a revised model, effects of life events, habitual coping behavior, love styles, and basic value orientations on aesthetic preferences could be examined more systematically. Despite these limitations, both the aesthetic concept of kitsch and the functional model are of considerable heuristic value: Apart from drawing our attention to blind spots in theory and practice of empirical aesthetics, kitsch makes a promising research object for the study of art expertise, dual attitudes, and cognitive dissonance (e.g., guilty pleasure) in aesthetics. In tandem with the functional model, it may inspire a more dynamic view on aesthetics. With its assumption of an intimate relationship between aesthetic and affiliative choices the model raises many new research questions that touch upon a wide range of topics ranging from Darwinian aesthetics and anxiety-related coping styles to nostalgic consumption. Moreover, it may stimulate further cross-cultural research on prominent themes of popular culture such as romantic love and cuteness. Perhaps it can even shed light on the question why art attracts more research interest than kitsch.

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Preface

It was my pleasure to read this work before it was handed in as a doctoral thesis. Stefan Ortlieb answers more questions about kitsch than I had ever asked myself. In contrast to the subject of his investigation, the topic is surprisingly complex. So while reading, I was grateful for Stefan's tender illustration of the text with hand-drawn pink elephants of all kinds. As a close friend of the author, one underlying question became more and more pressing with every chapter I read: Why would someone with a keen interest in fine art, who enjoys drawing and plays the violin, spend a decade of his life investigating kitsch? Stefan collected everyday things at the boundaries of good taste, categorized them and meticulously addressed numerous questions about when and why people are drawn to kitsch. The question about *his* motives, however, is the pink elephant which stays in the room even after reading the last chapter.
For an answer, it might be worthwhile to consult the writings of Sigmund Freud, an authority in the field of pink elephants, who once described the phenomenon of sublimation. Sublimation is classified as a mature defense mechanism. Freud assumed that socially unaccepted needs and desires are transformed and lived out in a socially acceptable manner in order to be satisfied. This unconscious process is said to be the basis for the development of cultural achievements and societal progress.
Anyone who has been fortunate enough to stroll through streets decorated for Christmas with Stefan, always on the lookout for eccentric and kitschy objects with his camera, may begin to wonder. Is there, hidden behind this lively scientific interest in kitsch, a lover of glittering shaking balls with Santa Clauses, cuckoo clocks adorned with edelweiss, and paintings of roaring stags? This question is probably the only one that will remain unanswered.

Bamberg, January 8th 2022

Dr. Julia Finmans

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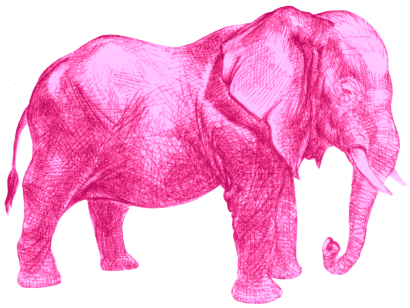


Figure 1: A *pink elephant in the room* is a perfectly obvious issue everybody prefers to ignore. Drawing by the author.

In 1939 art critic Clement Greenberg wrote an influential essay on the irreconcilable opposition of *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* in 20th century aesthetics, with its Cubist paintings and twelve-tone music standing in sharp contrast to cover illustrations of the *Saturday Evening Post* and Tin Pan Alley[1] tunes. Greenberg (1939) asked himself with puzzlement and concern how such disparate things could possibly be products of the same culture, even the same society. Meanwhile, it has become increasingly difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between avant-garde art and kitsch. On the one hand, the collection of the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) unites Picasso's *Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon* and Piero Manzoni's tinned feces with adaptations of commercial pin-ups by Mel Ramos and paintings of Campbell's soup cans by Andy Warhol. On the other hand, art is made readily available for mass-consumption (Benjamin, 1982/2002). Museum shops around the world sell fridge magnets and coffee mugs imprinted with Van Gogh's once unmarketable sunflowers and the Campbell Soup Company capitalizes on a Warhol-inspired edition of soup cans (Bearn, 2012). In tandem with the commercial exploitation of iconic artworks, Pop Art's playful incorporation of kitsch elements has finally put *kitsch* among "the most bewildering and elusive categories of modern aesthetics" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 232). Without a neat line separating kitsch and art, these terms have become moving targets that may take on different meanings depending on the time and context under consideration. And yet, one is reluctant to dismiss these categories altogether: Is visiting an art exhibition really the same as window shopping? Do original artworks and their high-kitsch renderings provide the same rewards, the same unique experience? Why are Cubist paintings less prone to kitsch exploitation? And why do people still pay to see the original, if a digital reproduction is just one click away? All of this has direct implications for empirical aesthetics, especially art perception. If we show a digital version of Van Gogh's sunflowers to participants on a test computer in a perceptual laboratory what exactly are they seeing? Art or kitsch?

Despite its importance for 20th century art theory and its practical implications for empirical research, kitsch has so far been overlooked by empirical aesthetics (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). How could this "gigantic apparition" (Greenberg, 1939, p. 39) of popular culture go unnoticed? Are we onto a hidden bias or blind spot of such vast dimensions or is there perhaps a theoretical perspective in empirical aesthetics broad enough to account for the pink elephant in the lab? To explore kitsch from a psychological viewpoint, to provide a preliminary understanding of what it means and does for us as social beings, consumers, and researchers, is the main task of this thesis. With Greenberg (1939) I shall make a case that this endeavor "involves more than an investigation in aesthetics" (p. 3) and will raise other and more important questions which may altogether lead us to a different picture of aesthetics.

1.1 Scope and Objectives

The overarching goal of this thesis is to raise awareness for *kitsch* as a prototype of popular aesthetics, a relic of premodern taste, and a key concept in contemporary art, and to prepare the ground for a *New Aesthetics from Below* that allows us to deal with these phenomena more comprehensively.

[1] "Tin Pan Alley is the name given to the collection of New York City music publishers and songwriters who dominated the popular music of the United States in the late 19th century and early 20th century. The name originally referred to a specific place: West 28th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues in the Flower District of Manhattan" (Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tin_Pan_Alley).

1.2 Advance Organizer

Outside of empirical aesthetics the concept of *kitsch* has attracted much scholarly attention. In fact, most of the above questions have already been raised by artists, art critics, art historians, philosophers, and sociologists with each discipline posing them somewhat differently in terms of its own themes and concerns. Across these disciplines, however, controversy boils down to three kitsch-related problems or paradoxes. One by one I shall relate them to concepts and findings from empirical aesthetics, before turning to a fourth kitsch-related issue which, I think, is specific for this field of research (Chapter 1).

Apart from the general problems of definition and assessment, Chapter 2 deals with the most prominent kitsch paradox: Regardless of its vast popularity, kitsch always was and still is a term of abuse. Based on a formalized definition that combines ideas from philosophical and empirical aesthetics (*Defining Kitsch*), I shall propose operationalizations for kitschiness in the visual domain (*Operationalizing Kitschiness*), a partly fluency-based account of its mass appeal, and a culture capital account of its aesthetic deficiency (*Just Loving and Loathing It*). Moreover, I report two studies exploring the inherent ambivalence of kitsch both cross-culturally (*On Kitsch and Kič*) and intra-individually (*Explicit Kitsch Judgements and Implicit Associations*).

Chapter 3 grapples with the observation that kitsch appears both static and dynamic. Scorned as backward-oriented and unchanging, kitsch never seems to grow old thanks to its remarkable adaptability. A corresponding paradox is found in the eye of the beholder: Some accounts of popular taste emphasize the stability of individual differences (*Who* dis/likes kitsch?), while others assume that attitudes toward kitsch may vary on a daily basis (*When* do we dis/like kitsch?). The *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b) is introduced. It dynamically relates the contradictory nature of kitsch to ever-conflicting needs for intimacy and autonomy (*When Familiarity Breeds Contempt*).

Chapter 4 concerns the contradiction between the "'vital significance' of kitsch" (Menninghaus, 2009, p. 39) and its complete lack of "historical depth" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 237). How can it be universally understood, but exclusively modern? Although the concept of kitsch is quite recent (Călinescu, 1987), the functional model strongly suggests that it might be a case for Darwinian aesthetics. And indeed, upon closer examination it seems that what we have come to call kitsch, has more in common with premodern aesthetic sensibility than avant-garde art. Based on this insight an evolutionary account of kitsch is outlined (*Back to the Future*).

Chapter 5 deals with an issue that is specific for empirical aesthetics. Despite its outstanding importance for 20$^{\text{th}}$ century art theory, kitsch is notably absent in empirical aesthetics which is mainly dedicated to art perception. Is there an explanation for this disinterest in popular taste? I hope to show that, contrary to Fechner's (1866) vision of an *Aesthetics from Below* (*Aesthetik von Unten*) and against better knowledge, present-day empirical aesthetics still relies on highbrow concepts of 18$^{\text{th}}$ century philosophical speculation (*On the Shoulders of Giants*). Based on the functional model, a tentative explanation for this proclivity to high art is proposed (*Avant-Garde and Science—It's a Match!*).

Finally, I shall recap and discuss the main findings of this thesis, raise open questions, and draw conclusions for future research on kitsch in particular and popular aesthetics in general.

2 Paradox #1: Unbearable Lightness—Why Do We Love and Hate Kitsch?

Figure 2: *Dumbo* from the 2019 remake of Disney's animated film from 1941. Drawing by the author.

In the 1990s Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid conducted a conceptual art project called *People's Choice*. Together with a team of market researchers the two artists polled average consumers from the United States (N=1,001) and nine other countries, including Russia,[2] Turkey (N=400), Kenya (N=500), and China (N=2,462), to identify their preferences in terms of visual art, especially painting (Wypijewski, 1999). From a welter of survey data, some qualitative some quantitative, Komar and Melamid created a *Most Wanted* (as well as a *Most Unwanted*) painting for each country. With strikingly similar results: Independently of their cultural background most people wanted to see bucolic landscapes in green and blue with a lake, a river, or a seaside vista, loose vegetation with bushes and solitary trees, ordinary (mostly women and children) or famous people (Jesus, Jomo Kenyatta, or George Washington), domestic animals (pasturing sheep) or country-typical wildlife (deer or hippos). In short: What people prefer to see in visual art is "bad taste, it's kitsch, by definition" (Melamid, quoted from Wypijewski, 1999, p. 38). Melamid's tongue-in-cheek statement lends support to the idea that "[i]f works of art were judged democratically—according to how many people like them—kitsch would easily defeat its competitors" (Kulka, 1996, p. 17). At the same time, it raises some controversial questions: For instance, how can we be so sure that people's best-loved paintings are aesthetically bad? (After all, the above description applies equally to landscapes by John Constable and the pastoral phantasies of a Thomas Kinkade.) If kitsch is aesthetically worthless, what makes it so wildly successful? How exactly is kitsch defined? Can it be defined at all? The present chapter deals with these questions based on a peer-reviewed article (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, see cumulus A.4). After looking into the origins of the word "kitsch," its international career, and its ever-growing scope of application (*Etymology*), a formal definition (*Defining Kitsch*) and possible operationalizations (*Operationalizing Kitschiness*) are derived from a set of kitsch criteria by philosopher Tomaš Kulka (1996). Subsequently, these criteria are linked to concepts from hedonic fluency theory and a culture capital account of its aesthetic deficiency is discussed (*Just Loving and Loathing It*).

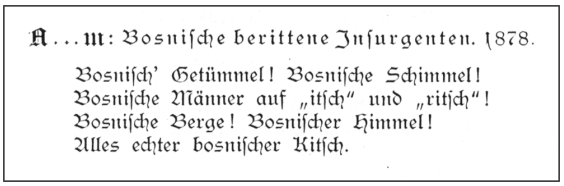
2.1 Etymology

The accepted notion in writings on *kitsch* is that, at some point in the 1860s or 1880s, artists and art dealers from Munich started using it "to designate cheap artistic stuff" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 234). The earliest record is a satirical poem from 1884 by the local art critic Max Bernstein about a contemporary genre piece by a member of the *Münchner Kunstverein* (Fig. 3). Unlike time and place of its appearance, etymology remains unclear (Kluge & Seebold, 2011).[3] According to Avenarius (1920), another art critic, "the German 'Kitsch' comes from a mispronunciation of the English 'sketch' that was widespread among artists who sold oil paintings of poor quality as souvenirs to Anglo-American tourists visiting Bavaria's capital" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, pp. 2-3). Since a typical German mispronunciation of the English *sketch* [skɛtʃ] and the word *kitsch* [kitʃ] sound rather differently, other etymological theories seem more credible (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). Best (1985), for example, derives kitsch from Swabian dialect where it first emerged "to designate scrap wood, flotsam or crude wooden objects, while the corresponding verb 'kitschen' referred to peddling but also to carrying a heavy burden on one's head or by

[2] *Komar and Melamid's Scientific Guide to Art* does not report sample sizes for every country. Survey method and questions varied slightly from country to country. In China, for example, face-to-face interviews were conducted as the distribution of telephones across households "would have badly distorted the results from phone interviews" (Wypijewski, 1999, p. 137).

[3] See Călinescu (1987) for an overview of etymological theories.

means of a back-basket" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 3). What makes this etymological theory rather compelling is that it relates the origins of kitsch to two ground-breaking developments of the 19th century that are regarded as the breeding ground for kitsch production: universal literacy and industrialization (Greenberg, 1939). Improved printing technology in tandem with increasing literacy rates created a huge market for cheap paperbacks that was served mainly by haberdashers roaming the land with their wooden crates and back baskets (Best, 1985). As Schöberl (1984) and others note, many tropes of the later kitsch discourse were first raised by literary critics against writers of commodified literature (Dettmar & Küpper, 2007; Niehaus, 2002), which was "produced for the sole purpose of giving immediate affection and cheap thrills in exchange for quick money" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 3).


A...m: Bosnische berittene Insurgenten. 1878.

Bosnisch' Getümmel! Bosnische Schimmel!
Bosnische Männer auf „itsch" und „ritsch"!
Bosnische Berge! Bosnischer Himmel!
Alles echter bosnischer Kitsch.

Figure 3: *Kitsch* making its first appearance in a satirical poem by Bernstein (1884) about a genre painting from 1878.

Contexts of use. Originally restricted to the visual arts, especially painting, use of the word *kitsch* quickly expanded, extending from literature (pulp fiction), music (muzak), garden and interior decoration (garden gnomes and cuckoo clocks), architecture (Neuschwanstein Castle), advertisement, theater plays and musicals, films (Holly- and Bollywood movies) and TV-formats (telenovelas) to infotainment and "pop science" (Kaeser, 2013). Despite its ever-increasing range of application, we only think about kitsch in visual, auditory, and audio-visual terms. Curiously, it does not apply to any tactile, olfactory, or gustatory sensation, although *touching* or *tasteless* are used almost synonymously (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). Thus, a cuckoo clock can be kitschy, whereas the taste of a traditional Black Forest cake cannot.

International success. After making its way into art theory in the 1920s, the German "kitsch" also entered many modern languages (Călinescu, 1987). In a first cross-cultural comparison, Ortlieb, Stojilović, Rutar, Fischer, and Carbon (2017) found kitsch concepts from Bavaria, Slovenia, and Serbia to be largely congruent apart from some aspects that invite closer examination (see Chapter 2.6 and cumulus A.5 for details). For this inquiry art theory is the most important context of use with the main focus lying on kitsch judgements about visual stimuli. Future research must show whether these results also apply outside of the visual domain. In the following, I shall clarify my understanding of kitsch.

2.2 Defining Kitsch

For aspiring kitsch producers philosopher Tomaš Kulka (1996) has three pieces of advice: (A) Pick a theme or a subject matter with a strong emotional charge and make sure it is depicted in a skilful but otherwise perfectly conventional way so that it is (B) "instantly identifiable" (p. 31), but (C) "does not substantially enrich our associations related to the depicted objects or themes" (p. 37). If these three criteria—emotionally rich content, identifiability, and conventionality—are met, and only then, we may speak of kitsch (Kulka, 1996). Each of these necessary preconditions for kitsch classification deserves closer examination as they will provide the foundation for a preliminary understanding of its mass appeal.

Emotionally rich content. First and above all, kitsch requires a subject matter that will "spontaneously trigger an unreflective emotional response" (Kulka, 1996, p. 26). As many authors have done, Kulka observes that some themes and subjects are more suited to the purpose of kitsch than others (Pazaurek, 1912/2012; Elias, 2004/1934; Greenberg, 1939; Simon-Schäfer, 1980). Pazaurek's (1912/2012) inventory of bad taste, for example, distinguishes four types of kitsch with regard to their content: *Aktualitätskitsch* speculates on the exhilaration related to recent events, *Andenkenkitsch* triggers personal recollections, while *Hurrakitsch* and *Devotionalienkitsch* exploit patriotic and religious sentiments. For best results in terms of emotional impact these subjects may be combined. For instance: Royal wedding ceremonies and the plethora of merchandise to advertise and commemorate such events draw on a complex amalgam of patriotic, religious, romantic, and nostalgic feelings. Formally, kitsch makes frequent use of certain devices such as the *baby scheme* (Lorenz, 1943) in combination with the *peak-shift-principle* (Ramachandran &

Hirstein, 1999) or the *beauty-in-averages effect* (Halberstadt, 2006) to increase both likeliness and intensity of an immediate affective response (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c).

Positive valence. Kitsch does not thrive on highly emotional content per se. After all, "[d]isturbing and saddening events such as illness, death, loss, and separation also form part of the human condition and images of snakes or spiders may reliably trigger strong feelings of fear and disgust due to a 'hard-wired' response mechanism" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, pp. 5-6). Despite their affective charge, these themes do not work too well for kitsch. Though Kulka (1996) claims that kitsch "avoid[s] all unpleasant or disturbing features of reality" (p. 27), his definition does not rule out negative emotional content. Therefore, a small but significant change to the first kitsch criterion was made: According to Ortlieb and Carbon (2019c), kitsch classification "requires a subject matter with a *positive* [emphasis added] emotional charge" (p. 6).

Immediate identifiability. An emotional subject alone, however positive, cannot secure a spontaneous affective response unless it is instantaneously recognizable (Kulka, 1996). Kulka makes a case, that any kind of expressive rendering will impair the depicted subject's identifiability and thereby diminish or even nullify its affective impact. Thus, a Cubist rendition of, say, a mother with baby, should be less prone to kitsch classification than a realistic one.

Conventionality. Paul Klee once claimed that "[a]rt does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible" (Klee, 1920, quoted from Chipp, 1968, p. 182). In a similar vein, many scholars and artist have stated that art does not merely emulate the world but enrich and transform the way we see it. Artworks may challenge us perceptually through stylistic change as well as conceptually on a semantic level (Martindale, 1990). Whatever is perceptually and conceptually challenging will diminish an immediate unadulterated affective response to the depicted subject. Thus, apart from stylistic innovations working against identifiability, kitsch producers should also avoid any deviation from well-tried pictorial conventions that are likely to create ambiguity or lead to new associations regarding the depicted subject (Kulka, 1996). While "Modern art is valued mainly for its capacity to transform the way we see the world" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 4), kitsch leaves us with what we already know for it "does not substantially enrich our associations relating to the depicted subject matter" (Kulka, 1996, p. 37).

Are these three criteria sufficient to reliably discriminate between kitsch and art? What do they tell us about Melamid and Komar's *Most Wanted* paintings? Are they kitsch by Kulka's definition? The poll results indicate a general preference for "realistic looking" (Wypijewski, 1999, p. 95) artworks with a cheerful subject ("I only like to look at art that makes me happy", p. 100) that is "relaxing to look at, not all jumbled up and confusing" (p. 100). More specifically, most people wanted to see tranquil landscapes in green and blue. Literally "painting by numbers," Melamid and Komar produced their series of *Most Wanted* paintings. Each of them reflecting the survey data for a particular country. Nevertheless most paintings look very similar, as all of the details have been arranged along the lines of a 17$^{\text{th}}$ century landscape painting by Domenichino (Danto, 1999).[4] "At first glance," art critic Arthur Danto (1999) remarked, "*America's Most Wanted*, along with its international peers, seems a common thing—no more difficult to understand than the landscapes annually bestowed with calendars and Christmas greetings upon a company's customers" (p. 124). As paintings they are "hardly daring enough visually" (p. 124) to make notable artworks even by postmodern standards (Danto, 1999). In fact, they are prime examples of kitsch according to Kulka's definition. As products of a conceptual art project, however, their very kitschiness becomes highly controversial in that it challenges the way we see the world (in this case, the artworld). The profound ambiguity of the *People's Choice* is typical for postmodern art. In my opinion, it underscores the validity of Kulka's criteria in that it allows us to distinguish between the stand-alone paintings and the conceptual art project as a whole, with its international consumer polls, its travelling exhibition, its townhall meetings, and, not to forget, its series of *Most Unwanted* paintings. And yet, if we wish to address kitsch empirically among non-experts, we need to find some good operationalizations for Kulka's criteria. This is the task of the next section.

[4]For a digital reproduction of Domenico Zampieri's (1620) *Erminia and the Shepherds* see: https://www.pop.culture.gouv.fr/notice/joconde/000PE024837

2.3 Operationalizing Kitschiness

By Kulka's criteria *America's Most Wanted* painting and a cuckoo clock make first-rate kitsch. In both cases there is a subject with a positive emotional charge which is not only depicted in a perfectly identifiable manner but also refrains from any artistic ambition by emulating a well-tried template. However, compared to landscape paintings by Thomas Kinkade[5] the works of Melamid and Komar do not strike us as particularly kitschy. At least not to the highest degree. Though carefully executed and assembled in accordance with Domenichino's blueprint the details do not add up to a unified whole. According to Danto (1999), every specimen of the *Most Wanted* series displays some calculated violation of central perspective or inconsistency regarding its content. In the case of *America's Most Wanted* painting the middle-ground figure (easily identifiable as George Washington) is too tall in relation to the figures in the foreground.[6] More generally, one cannot help but ask what a family from the 1990s and a bellowing hippo are doing on this painting together with the first president of the United States (Danto, 1999). Altogether, these inconsistencies stand in the way of an unequivocal kitsch classification. Is a traditional cuckoo clock the more prototypical kitsch object then? Not necessarily. After all, today's most successful Black Forest souvenir is based on an award-winning design for modern clock cases by architect Friedrich Eisenlohr from 1850 (Jüttemann, 2000). These two examples show how cutting-edge design and avant-garde art may shade gradually into kitsch and that postmodern artists play deliberately with the resulting ambiguity. How might Kulka's definition account for different degrees of kitschiness? As Kulka (1996) already suggests, each of his three criteria should be conceptualized as a continuous variable rather than a distinct category: "The more clearly, saliently, and unambiguously the picture complies with our three conditions, the more paradigmatic an example of kitsch it is" (p. 38). Hence, the product of the following three continuous variables should give us a fairly good estimate for kitschiness of a visual stimulus (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c):

$$\text{Kitschiness} = \text{positive valence} \times \text{identifiability} \times \text{conventionality} \tag{1}$$

Equation 1. Codomain of dependent and independent variables: 0-1.

This formula seems suitable for the empirical study of kitsch since it allows for straightforward operationalization: Standardized rating scales are certainly the easiest way to measure kitschiness, positive emotional valence, identifiability, and conventionality (1=*not at all kitschy*; 7=*very kitschy*). However, with kitsch being a highly derogatory term, it seems advisable to combine such self-reports with implicit measures (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). At least, according to Reiter, Ortlieb, and Carbon (2015), there is preliminary indication that explicit kitsch judgements and implicit attitudes toward kitsch may differ significantly (see Chapter 2.5 and cumulus A.11). Apart from implicit associations (md-IAT; Gattol et al., 2011), "[v]alence and intensity of an emotional response could be assessed via facial expressions (EMG; Cacioppo et al., 1986; Noldus FaceReader™; Weth et al., 2015) [...], while naming latencies and name agreement might serve as behavioral measures of identifiability and conventionality (see Snodgrass and Vanderwart, 1980)" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 9). In Chapter 3 I shall propose a link between aesthetic evaluation and social distance regulation that opens further possibilities for the implicit assessment of aesthetic liking via unintentional body movements associated with attraction and repulsion. Raab, Shengelia, and Carbon (2012) have developed a promising method to measure the motoric correlates of affective responses by means of a digital balance board (Nintendo Wii™). Another asset of Kulka's kitsch criteria is that they may be operationalized in many different ways. As I shall show in the next section, they are also well in line with a culture capital account of popular taste and, at least partly, compatible with concepts from hedonic fluency theory.

[5] For digital reproductions of Kinkade's works see: https://thomaskinkade.com

[6] Perhaps an allusion to the more ancient convention of hierarchical scale, where relative size of figures in paintings or sculptures reflects their social status and importance for the depicted scene (Sofron, 2015).

2.4 Just Loving and Loathing It

"Nobody likes kitsch, it's too popular."

—Norman, 2004, p. 46

Whoever writes about kitsch is sooner or later caught up in a major contradiction between its tremendous popularity and its supposed aesthetic badness. Many authors agree "that its appeal consists of an immediate emotional response, without intermediate reasoning (Benjamin, 1982/2002; Călinescu, 1987; Greenberg 1939; Kulka, 1996; Menninghaus, 2009; Simon-Schäfer, 1980)" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 11). More specifically, I claim that this unreflective emotional response results from at least three different sources: "The positive emotional charge of its content and the inherently pleasant experience of effortless processing on a perceptual and a conceptual level" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 9). Furthermore, I argue that these success factors of kitsch also make for its poor reputation.

Form follows content. According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1979/1984), popular taste is governed by two basic principles which stand in sharp contrast to those of high art: namely, primacy of content over form and the principle of unconditional accessibility and enjoyment. Both principles jointly imply that popular works "have to represent something that perceivers can easily relate to their everyday experience, while stylistic choices are made to ensure immediate apprehension of the depicted subject matter (Hanquinet et al., 2014)"(Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 9-10). Kitsch epitomizes these two principles like no other aesthetic category: In perfect agreement with the first one, Kulka (1996) holds that "[i]n kitsch paintings, unlike in real art, what is represented is more important than how it is rendered" (p. 80), while its content-independent properties—immediate identifiability and conventionality—represent the "principle of immediacy, immediacy of access, immediacy of effect, instant beauty" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 8). But which principle accounts for its mass appeal? Kulka (1996) has a simple answer to this question: "People are attracted to kitsch because they like its subject matter" (p. 28). Indeed, in one of the few studies that actually examined the role of content for aesthetic appreciation, Martindale, Anderson, and West (1988) report that "[a]t least for artistically naïve observers, meaning is by far the most important determinant of preference" (Martindale, 1990, p. 42).

Fluency-affect link. Apart from Melamid and Komar's ironical consumer poll, there is ample evidence from social psychology and empirical aesthetics that people tend to prefer visual stimuli that are cognitively undemanding, i.e. pictures of familiar objects (Zajonc, 1968) with prototypical features (Martindale & Moore, 1988), clear contours (Reber et al., 1998), and a canonical viewpoint (Palmer et al., 1981). These findings have led to the "hedonic marking of fluency hypothesis" (Winkielman et al., 2003, p. 75) which states that fluent processing is pleasurable in itself and that whatever is processed with relative ease will be associated with positive affect and therefore receive more favorable evaluations. Regarding aesthetic evaluations, the authors of the *Hedonic Fluency Model* (HFM) go as far as to claim that "[t]he more fluently the perceiver can process an object, the more positive is his or her aesthetic response" (Reber et al., 2004, p. 366).[7] As I have pointed out, the content-independent aspects of kitsch—immediate identifiability and conventionality—are tantamount to processing fluency at a perceptual and a conceptual level (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). According to Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman (2004), *perceptual* and *conceptual fluency* stand for "the ease of identifying the physical identity of a stimulus" (p. 367) and the "ease of mental operations concerned with stimulus meaning and its relation to semantic knowledge structures" (p. 367). Extensive evidence for a fluency-affect link as well as the remarkable conceptual correspondence have led me to expect that identifiability and conventionality add to the hedonic value of kitsch beyond the positive emotional charge of its content (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). However, one must not overestimate the role of processing speed. Traffic signs are also perfectly standardized and easily identifiable (even at night or in bad weather). And yet, like road maps and technical drawings, they hardly ever

[7] The assumption of a general fluency-positivity link is highly questionable. Flashbacks in people who have gone through traumatic events, for example, indicate that effortless processing is not necessarily linked to positive affect. This particular limitation of the HFM has been addressed by Albrecht and Carbon (2014), who posit that fluency only amplifies the intensity of a stimulus' initial valence. Moreover, as several studies show, the mere exposure effect may be reversed after reaching its highest magnitude between 10 and 20 presentations (Bornstein, 1989).

arouse tender feelings of affection.[8] Obviously, hedonic fluency may greatly amplify but cannot fully compensate for the impact of emotionally rich content. To account for this primacy of content, the relationship between kitsch appeal and the three potential sources of hedonic value is described as a power function (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c):

$$\text{Kitsch appeal} = \text{positive valence}^{(\text{perceptual fluency} \times \text{conceptual fluency})} \tag{2}$$

EQUATION 2. Codomain of dependent and independent variables $0 < x \leq 1$.

Although this "triad of pleasant content-related associations, perceptual and conceptual fluency" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 11) provides a plausible explanation for the appeal of kitsch, it cannot explain why kitsch is, above all, a term of abuse. What is wrong with kitsch? Isn't it perfectly reasonable to prefer things that are convenient and agreeable?

Refusal of the facile. Theaters, concert halls, and art galleries have been described as fitness studios of the mind where people stretch and exercise their mental abilities on works of art (Mandel, 1967). In contrast, kitsch has been compared to fast food and pornography (Waibl, 2004) with which it shares the before mentioned principles of mass appeal: primacy of content and immediacy of access. Again, it was Bourdieu (1979/1984) who observed that "the whole language of aesthetics is contained in a fundamental refusal of the *facile*" (p. 486); whatever appears "easy in the sense of simple, and therefore shallow, and 'cheap' [is dismissed], because it is easily decoded and culturally 'undemanding'" (p. 486). This "refusal of the *facile*" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 486) can be traced back to 18$^{\text{th}}$ century Rationalism, when foundations for aesthetics were laid inter alia by Alexander Baumgarten (1750/1983). To Baumgarten, aesthetics was not so much about art and beauty but "a new branch of epistemology dedicated to the preconditions of gaining knowledge from sensual experience (*scientia cognitionis sensitivae*)" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 12). If aesthetic value implies new insights, kitsch is, of course, disqualified because it draws on familiar, well-tried artistic conventions (clichés) and avoids whatever might create new associations or spark controversy at the expense of spontaneous emotional enjoyment.

Pleasure versus interest. With explicit reference to the Kantian opposition of dependent beauty (*anhängende Schönheit*) and free beauty (*freie Schönheit*), Graf and Landwehr (2015) have combined a dual-process perspective with fluency-based aesthetics and epistemic motivation. Their *Pleasure-Interest Model of Aesthetic Liking* (PIA) distinguishes two kinds of aesthetic appreciation: "*[P]leasure* is a backward-oriented process that is not associated with the motivation for further exploration of the target, whereas *interest* also has a forward-oriented character related to the motivation for learning" (Graf & Landwehr, 2015, p. 404; emphasis added). At first glance, this fluency-based distinction maps neatly onto the opposition of kitsch and avant-garde art. Besides, the model informs us who will prefer the one over the other and why:

> Designed to create a particularly smooth processing experience that 'directly feels good on an affective level' (p. 397), kitsch should excel in the initial 'default type of aesthetic stimulus processing' (p. 399). For perceivers with a low motivation to learn, this inherently pleasurable processing experience directly translates into a positive aesthetic evaluation. However, when it comes to controlled processing, kitsch fails to arouse continuing interest. As an easy-to-process stimulus, it frustrates perceivers with a high need for cognitive enrichment in that it leaves them with what they know. In this case, the positive first impression (How cute!) should be overwritten by a negative interest-related judgement (How kitschy!). (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 13-14)[9]

Indeed, Reiter, Ortlieb, and Carbon (2015) have found preliminary evidence for a dissociation of explicit and implicit attitudes toward kitsch that might support the PIA model's micro-genetic two-stage theory of aesthetic evaluation. After looking more closely into this comparison

[8] The pedestrian traffic light of the former German Democratic Republic—the so-called *Ampelmännchen*—which is still in use regionally, makes an interesting exception to this rule: This icon has indeed become a popular souvenir and may release nostalgic feelings.

[9] Notably, this distinction is based only on processing characteristics, withholding all content-related differences. This limitation of the PIA will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 5 (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c).

of explicit and implicit measures, I report on a cross-cultural study on kitsch concepts from Bavaria, Serbia, and Slovenia. Subsequently, a functional model will be devised that tells us *when* and *why* people are attracted to (or repulsed by) kitsch based on the dynamics of social motivation.

2.5 Explicit Kitsch Judgements and Implicit Associations

"Don't we secretly love kitsch?"

—Finsler, 1956, p. 270, trans. by S.O.[10]

Deep inside everyone has a heart for kitsch although hardly anyone will admit it. This assertion is made in many writings on kitsch (Kundera, 1984/1987; Călinescu, 1987; Schmidt, 1994; Kulka, 1996) and our formula for success suggests that there are indeed good reasons to enjoy kitsch. According to a dual-attitude perspective, conscious and unconscious representations of highly judgemental or controversial concepts are expected to differ significantly (Wilson et al., 2000). In the case of kitsch, implicit attitudes should prove more favorable than explicit ones. This hypothesis was tested by Reiter, Ortlieb, and Carbon (2015) based on a within-subject comparison of implicit associations and explicit ratings. Results were presented at the 38$^{\text{th}}$ *European Conference on Visual Perception* (ECVP) in Liverpool (see cumulus A.11).

Stimulus material. An *Implicit Association Test* (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) requires two concepts (e.g., two rivaling brands) as well as paired visual stimuli to represent them (e.g., two brand logos). In the present study, the concepts "kitschy" and "plain" were represented by two types of everyday objects: richly decorated cups with figurative motifs (kitschy cups) and unadorned monochrome bowls (plain bowls). Based on a previous rating study (N=12), ten images of extraordinarily kitschy cups and ten images of particularly plain bowls were selected from a pool of self-devised digital photographs. According to the rationale of the IAT, the stimuli representing the two concepts must be clearly distinct. Our images of cups and bowls meet this requirement. They were distinguishable by a simple rule: If the bowl on the picture has a handle, it's a cup. Moreover, it seems safe to assume that most people are about equally familiar with cups and bowls and will not prefer the one or the other class of objects per se.[11] Apart from their function, I argue, the depicted objects are only distinct with regard to kitschiness, i.e. the studied concept of interest.

Procedure. The main study included two parts: One part required explicit ratings (7-point Likert scales), the other one targeted multiple implicit associations (md-IAT; Gattol, Sääksjärvi, & Carbon, 2011).[12] To control for effects of sequence, participants were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions: In the first condition implicit associations were assessed prior to the explicit ratings. In the second condition the two parts were carried out in reverse order. In a computer-based procedure the images of high-kitsch cups and simple bowls were evaluated with regard to three pairs of complementary attributes: (1) plain versus kitschy, (2) ugly versus beautiful, and (3) worthless versus valuable. In the explicit part, the same three dimensions were measured by 7-point Likert scales (e.g., 1=*plain*; 7=*kitschy*).

Sample. The sample comprised 31 participants (17 women and 14 men; M_{age}=27.0 years; SD_{age}=5.2). All of them showed normal or corrected to normal visual acuity and were unaware of the experimental hypothesis.

Results. There were no significant differences between the two conditions. Intercorrelations between explicit and implicit measures were generally low ($r_{\text{plain-kitschy}}$=-.107; $r_{\text{ugly-beautiful}}$=-.097; $r_{\text{worthless-valuable}}$=.143). In terms of explicit evaluations, cups were consistently rated more kitschy, ugly, and worthless than bowls. Regarding the multi-dimensional IAT-profile, only for the kitschy-plain dimension a significant difference in reaction times was obtained, $t(30)$=2.49, p = .019. In words: the attribute "kitschy" was more readily applied to the images of cups, while the bowls were more quickly associated with "plainness". This was not the case for the

[10] Original version: "Lieben wir nicht im Geheimen den Kitsch [...]?" (Finsler, 1956, p. 270)

[11] Even a general fear of household objects (*Oicophobia*) or porcelain dishes (*Dishophobia*) would affect both classes of objects in the same way.

[12] Unlike the classical IAT (Greenwald et al., 1998), the multi-dimensional IAT (md-IAT) by Gattol, Sääksjärvi, and Carbon (2011) allows for pairwise comparisons on more than one dimension.

other two dimensions. Although cups and bowls differed significantly in terms of kitschiness (and plainness, respectively), both types of objects were perceived as equally valuable and worthless, beautiful and ugly.

Discussion. Explicit ratings indicate that "kitsch" was used as a derogatory term. In the md-IAT, however, participants were able to discriminate images of cups and bowls only with regard to kitschiness and plainness. This finding underscores the validity of the stimulus material used. However, it also provides first indication in support of the idea that kitsch is possibly better than its reputation and that "we all have an itch for kitsch" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 234), whether we like it or not. What do we make of the observed dissociation of implicit and explicit measures? At least three possible explanations come to mind: (1) The observed discrepancy could imply that participants are in fact unaware of their susceptibility to kitsch. (2) Alternatively, they might be well aware of their weakness for kitsch but unwilling to admit it. In the latter case, explicit ratings reflect a desire to make a good impression, rather than a person's true feelings about kitsch. In both cases, the md-IAT would be the preferable method since it is not as easy to manipulate as ratings. Both interpretations would certainly complicate the empirical study of kitsch: For if we cannot rely on what people tell us about kitsch, all self-report data would have to be backed by implicit measures. (3) Last but not least, one could surmise that explicit ratings and implicit associations measure different things. According to a meta-analysis by Hofmann and colleagues (2005), intercorrelations between implicit and explicit measures are generally low. This has fueled a still ongoing debate concerning reliability and validity of IAT-measures (Azar, 2008). In the light of such methodological concerns, one must not overinterpret a single IAT-study. Future research has to show whether the present findings can be replicated and extended beyond everyday objects. Ideally, such studies should include not only a larger variety of stimuli but also different explicit and implicit measures (e.g., emotional footprint or a micro-genetic approach to kitsch judgements) to account for methodological issues.

2.6 Article: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Kitsch Concepts

With increasing scholarly attention in the 1920s the German word *Kitsch* was quickly adopted by many modern languages (Călinescu, 1987), including Slovenian and Serbian. This remarkable international career raises two important questions: Is the colloquial meaning of kitsch still consistent with the original artworld term? And when people from different cultures say "kitsch" do they mean the same thing? Both questions were explored by Ortlieb, Stojilović, Rutar, Fischer, and Carbon (2017) in a cross-cultural study comparing kitsch concepts from Bavaria (*Kitsch*), Serbia (*Kič*), and Slovenia (*Kič*). Results were first presented at the 39$^{\text{th}}$ *European Conference on Visual Perception* (ECVP) in Barcelona (Ortlieb, Rutar, et al., 2016) and later published in the peer-reviewed journal *Psihologija* receiving the best paper award (see cumulus A.5; Ortlieb, Stojilović, Rutar, Fischer, & Carbon, 2017).[13]

Theoretical background. Variables and hypotheses for the present study were derived "from the extensive literature on kitsch and art" (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017, p. 358). Călinescu's (1987) claim that "kitsch was and still is a highly derogatory word" (p. 235) led us to expect that kitsch and liking ratings would be negatively correlated. Based on Kulka's (1996) kitsch criteria (see Chapter 2.2), it was hypothesized that kitsch judgements are a function of positive emotional valence, familiarity, and determinacy. While art is enjoyed for its arousal potential (Berlyne, 1971), it has been stated that kitsch is a product of mass culture and as such "specifically designed to induce relaxation" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 241). If so, kitsch should be perceived as non-threatening and hardly arousing. And yet, according to our formula for success (see Chapter 2.4), the exact same combination of benign, emotionally rich content, and processing ease may also account for the appeal of kitsch. Which person-related variables might determine whether something is despised as kitsch or enjoyed for its comforting qualities? Another set of possible moderating variables was identified from the relevant literature: Namely, art expertise, ambiguity tolerance, basic value orientation, age, and gender.

[13] Except for the discussion, which is newly written, several of the following passages are identical with the 2016 conference poster.

Stimulus material. Since the word *kitsch* may apply to a great variety of aesthetic phenomena (see Chapter 2.1), we sought to reduce complexity by focusing on the visual domain in general and everyday things in particular. A set of 200 digital photographs of souvenirs (e.g., miniature Eiffel tower), giftware (e.g., ornamented porcelain cups), toys (e.g., teddy bear), collectibles (e.g., action figures), devotional (e.g., religious icons), and decorative objects (e.g., plastic flowers) was created for the study. Another eight photos of plain household objects were included as control stimuli (for example stimuli see cumulus A.5).

Procedure. The study was conducted in parallel at the Universities of Bamberg, Ljubljana, and Belgrade according to the same procedure: After answering demographical questions, participants completed a self-devised art expertise questionnaire (Carbon, unpublished), the *Inventar zur Messung der Ambiguitätstoleranz* (IMA; Reis, 1996), and the *Short Schwartz's Value Survey* (SSVS; Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005), the SSVS-G (Boer, 2014) respectively.[14] Then, the 208 images of everyday things were presented to the participants in a computer-based procedure, who rated them with regard to liking, familiarity, determinacy, arousal, perceived threat, and kitschiness on 7-point Likert-scales. Stimuli were presented in a random order, while the sequence of rating dimensions was identical for every stimulus.

Sample. The sample comprised a total of 36 participants from Bavaria (n=12; M_{age}=22.7 yrs., SD=7.6), Slovenia (n=12; M_{age}=25.3 yrs., SD=9.8), and Serbia (n=12; M_{age}=19.3 yrs., SD=0.9). Each subsample was balanced in terms of gender ratio (six women and six men). All participants were naïve to the purpose of the study. Most of them were psychology students who attended for partial course credit (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017).

Results. Across all subsamples, liking and kitsch were negatively correlated, b=-0.41, $t(7140)$= 41.52, $p < .01$, d=0.50 (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017). Multilevel modeling with crossed random effects (Hox, 2010; Heck et al., 2013) was used to identify best predictors for liking and kitsch judgements. According to the kitsch model, kitschy objects were described "as non-threatening, determinate but hardly arousing" (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017, p. 357), while the liking model revealed a general preference for "[p]articularly non-threatening and mildly arousing kitsch objects" (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017, p. 357). The role of threatening content and familiarity was moderated by gender: Appreciation of non-threatening stimuli was more pronounced among female than among male participants. Besides, only for women a positive interrelation between familiarity and liking was obtained. Independently of gender or nationality, SSVS-scores for *Self-transcendence* made a very good predictor for liking (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017).

Discussion. Regardless of the participants' cultural background, kitsch was used as a derogatory term. The moderately high correlation between liking and kitsch, however, indicates that kitsch objects were not downright rejected. Moreover, across all three subsamples, "liking of kitsch objects was positively linked to emotionally arousing items with non-threatening content" (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017, p. 357). Perhaps the most interesting finding, however, is that, apart from the Bavarian sample, kitsch/kič ratings were significantly and concordantly related to threatening content. This observation deserves closer examination since it challenges the above kitsch definition which insists that kitsch is limited to positive emotional content (see Chapter 2.2). In a follow-up study, it might be worthwhile to collect qualitative self-reports on the stimuli used to clarify whether this is a general aspect of the Serbian and Slovenian reading of kič or just an artefact of the stimulus material used.

Like all studies, the present cross-cultural comparison of kitsch concepts has its limitations. First of all, choice of stimuli was made by researchers from the University of Bamberg based on their personal and possibly culture-specific notion of kitsch. To avoid this bias, future cross-cultural studies should include self-selected kitsch stimuli in addition to standardized ones. Certainly, the most significant limitations of this study are its small homogeneous samples. Especially its homogeneity regarding educational background stands in the way of making generalizations for each of the three cultures.

Apart from looking at larger and more diverse samples, future cross-cultural research might also consider examining differences and commonalities between kitsch and related concepts from other languages. The Spanish term *cursi*, for instance, conveys a similarly complex and contradictory notion of bad taste as kitsch, but is widely unknown outside of Spanish-speaking countries

[14] Slovenian and Serbian versions were translated from the English SSVS-scale by Lindeman and Verkasalo (2005).

(Călinescu, 1987).[15] In Japanese, where *kitsch* did not enter everyday language, the word *kawaii* (cute) deserves closer examination. Although both terms seem closely connected by the concept of cuteness, they represent complementary evaluations since kawaii is used to express aesthetic appreciation (Ngai, 2012). Indeed, a first study suggests that visual stimuli from the BaRoCK database spawn complementary responses in students from Germany and Japan (Ortlieb et al., 2021). Like kitsch, the *kawaii* concept proves internationally successful (Yano, 2013). With cuteness as a dominant aesthetic category of digital culture (Wittkower, 2012) and consumerism (Ngai, 2012), scholarly interest in the conditions of *kawaiiness* and their commercial exploitation (*kawaii engineering*; Ohkura, 2019) is on the rise. Kawaii not only seems to focus on a very specific but increasingly important aspect of the broader concept of kitsch. According to Ngai (2012), its international career also prefigures "a 'soft' aesthetic emerging from the sphere of mass culture as opposed to high art" (p. 58). A more general reason to take interest in the rise of aesthetic categories such as kitsch (or kawaii) is that "[b]y the laws of (linguistic) evolution this is a strong indication that the emergence of the word met a widespread and urgent need" (Menninghaus, 2009, p. 40). What need might that be in the case of kitsch? In the following I shall establish a possible connection between the opposing concepts of kitsch and avant-garde art and two antagonistic needs deeply rooted in human attachment behavior.

[15] Referring to Ramón Gómez de la Serna's (1943) essay *Lo cursi*, Călinescu (1987) claims that it is "the only single word that suggests both the deceptive and self-deceptive aspects of bad taste that are implied in kitsch. The aesthetic paradoxes involved in the notion of *cursi* are very similar to those of kitsch" (p. 233).

3 Paradox #2: When Familiarity Breeds Contempt—Of Kitsch and Social Motivation

"Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same."
—Greenberg, 1939, p. 10

How much kitsch can you bear today?—This is the title of a mixed-media installation by artist and marketing consultant Jörg Schorn (2010). It consists of a large color reprint of Baby Jesus on Mother Mary's lap feeding doves. The image is only partly visible through an antique window frame, while the rest is covered by a pink screen. Frame and screen may be shifted horizontally across the canvas disclosing different details. Depending on the image section the beholder chooses, identifiability of the subject matter is more or less impaired.[16] This artwork, which could serve well as an experimental apparatus to test the role of identifiability in kitsch classification, suggests that attitudes toward kitsch are not fixed but may change on a daily basis. Is there any empirical indication for an occasional "itch for kitsch" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 234)? And if so, why are we sometimes drawn to kitsch rather than repulsed by it? Studies from social psychology and empirical aesthetics show that appreciation of novel and familiar stimuli may vary depending on the observer's current affective state: Novelty becomes more attractive when people feel safe (Carbon et al., 2013), happiness apparently "cools the warm glow of familiarity" (de Vries et al., 2010, p. 321), and under the impression of mortality concerns abstract paintings lose much of their appeal (Landau et al., 2006), while decorative everyday things are rated less kitschy (Ortlieb, Gebauer, & Carbon, 2016, see cumulus A.10). This situational variability in aesthetic liking is hardly compatible with the idea that taste judgments are determined by social status (*habitus*) or art expertise (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). Yet a dynamic view of kitsch also stands in contrast to its conceptualizations on a cultural level where it is identified with stale, motionless academism (Greenberg, 1939) and the mechanical reproduction of familiar forms (Benjamin, 1935/1969). Amidst the routine upheaval of avant-garde art, kitsch is the only constant of modern Western aesthetics. It has, in fact, been described as "the contemporary form of the Gothic, Rococo, Baroque" (Wedekind, 1917, quoted from Călinescu, 1987, p. 225) and the 20th century as the *era of kitsch* (Elias, 2004/1934).[17]

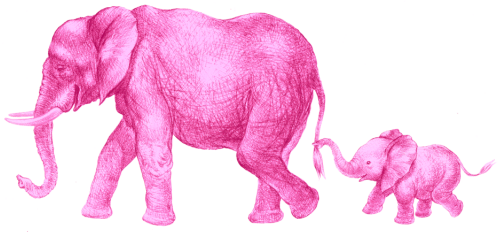


Figure 4: Kitsch appeal, is it dynamically related to attachment behavior? Drawing by the author.

Pitted against avant-garde art kitsch appears hopelessly outdated. Yet on a day-to-day basis it never seems to grow old. How can kitsch be highly dynamic and unchanging at the same time? Before I delineate a functional model that relates short- and long-term changes in aesthetic liking to a basic mechanism of social distance regulation, whose regulatory circuits, I claim, govern both the seesaw dynamics of human attachment behavior and the peculiar on-again, off-again relationship with kitsch, I would like to raise a more general question: Why are novelty and familiarity in aesthetics valued to different degrees in different contexts and at different times and stages of life?

[16] For a digital reproduction of Schorn's (2010) work see: https://joergschorn.com/Objekte

[17] Many now respectable art historical labels, including Gothic and Baroque, were originally terms of abuse (Elias, 2004/1934). Yet to the best of my knowledge these terms were all originally used against artistic innovation. In the case of kitsch, however, scorn is for the first time directed against the traditional ways.

3.1 Novelty and Familiarity

"Something in kitsch refers to homeland and familiarity."
—Schmidt, 1994, p. 143

Philosopher Edmund Burke (1757/1990) long ago remarked that "we are creatures vehemently desirous of novelty, [and at the same time] strongly attached to habit and custom" (p. 188). Indeed the roles of novelty and familiarity in aesthetics have been studied intensively albeit one-sidedly by two complementary lines of research: According to Berlyne's (1971) *new experimental aesthetics*, aesthetic experience is a form of exploratory behavior with a strong emphasis on the arousal potential of new or otherwise difficult-to-process stimuli. Novelty, of course, is ephemeral. Sooner or later, people get used to new things until they take them for granted. This "gradual loss of interest in repeated stimuli [...] is a universal property of all nervous tissue" (Martindale, 1990, p. 11) called *habituation*. According to Martindale's (1990) evolutionary theory of artistic and literary change, habituation is the engine of art history. Its mild but constant "pressure for novelty" (p. 12) is what shapes individual artistic careers and drives stylistic innovation. He argues, for example, that "[f]ew people liked Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata when it was first played: it broke too many rules. If we dislike it today, it is for an opposite reason: It doesn't break any rules at all" (p. 22). But do people really dislike it? A multitude of recent recordings with millions of views and likes on YouTube™ suggests otherwise. Even after some two hundred years, popularity of Beethoven's once revolutionary piano piece remains unbroken.[18] The invigorating charm of the new, I argue, cannot account for the evergreens and timeless classics of our aesthetic tradition, let alone the popularity of kitsch (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c).

Inspired by Zajonc's (1968) discovery of "attitudinal effects of mere exposure" (p. 1) another prolific area of research emerged that seems more suitable for understanding kitsch as a mass phenomenon (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). The so-called "mere exposure effect" (MEE) predicts that appreciation of a stimulus will increase with repeated exposure. This familiarity-positivity link proves remarkably robust (Bornstein, 1989) and extends to a wide range of stimuli from abstract visual characters (Zajonc, 1968) and edible substances (Pliner, 1982) to haptic stimuli (Jakesch & Carbon, 2012). This increase of appreciation, however, tends to level off after some ten to twenty exposures (Bornstein, 1989). Research on the MEE has paved the way for the more general "hedonic marking of fluency hypothesis" (Winkielman et al., 2003, p. 75) which states that the experience of effortless processing is in itself a source of positive affect that will translate into more favorable aesthetic evaluations.

According to Kulka's (1996) kitsch criteria and our success formula (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c), familiarity should be essential for any account of kitsch: After all, conventionality implies familiarity which is only another word for identifiability. Most importantly, however, repeated exposure is needed for a stimulus to acquire personal meaning and a strong affective charge.[19] As early as 1866, Fechner made a strong case that the formation of emotionally rich associations requires previous exposure. Unlike arousal potential, meaning has a monotonically increasing relationship with preference (Martindale, 1990): "the more meaningful something is, the better people like it" (p. 42). So, the reasons why we enjoy Beethoven's piano sonata No. 14 after repeated exposure, are probably different from those that delighted us at first listening. Admittedly, the Moonlight Sonata is a special case, as its popular title (which was coined after Beethoven's death) already excites the imagination. Listening to it for the second or third time, however, will create new layers of personal meaning by evoking memories and mental imagery. For the overall impression of any aesthetic stimulus, these aspects will become increasingly important, while the excitement with formal innovativeness and psychophysical stimulus properties diminishes. With repeated exposures, I expect the appeal of an aesthetic stimulus to shift away from its formal properties toward content-related associations and personal meaning. Future research has to show whether this is also the key to understanding the longevity of kitsch. For-

[18] Of course, every generation discovers the classics anew (Martindale, 1990) and it is through reinterpretation and rearrangement that some of their initial arousal potential may be revived. Nevertheless, based on Martindale's premises, one would expect a decline in popularity over such a long period of time.

[19] With exception of innate affective responses to babies, snakes, or spiders, that is. As part of an innate releasing mechanism, these stimuli do not require previous exposure to trigger an affective response (Hoehl et al., 2017).

mally, it may not be all too exciting, but its emotionally rich motif invites personal associations that create a peculiar sense of attachment and belonging.

As I shall point out in due course, such content-related aspects are widely ignored by the two above mentioned research strands. For now, I conclude that predictions made by an arousal- and a fluency-based aesthetics are highly contradictory. They are, in fact, just as contradictory as modern Western aesthetics with its seemingly irreconcilable opposition of avant-garde art and kitsch (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). Since both lines of research and theorizing have their merits and a good deal of evidence supporting them, the crucial question is *when* and *why* the excitingly new is preferred over the well-tried and familiar and vice versa.

3.2 Curiosity and Nostalgia

"Kitschy objects [...] are aids to memory."

—Norman, 2004, p. 47

In an interview art collector François Pinault confessed that he bought his first painting in 1972 because the woman on the picture looked like his grandmother. Today, of course, he is well aware that this is a ridiculous motivation to buy art. Nevertheless, the Impressionist painting by Sérusier still takes a special place in his private collection for it brings back memories of a time when he was a young man who knew very little about art (Sandberg & Pinault, 2021). This anecdote illustrates that an artwork may be cherished for very personal reasons and/or admired for its sheer innovativeness. Moreover, it suggests that these reasons are not equally valued among art aficionados. Can art be enjoyed for the wrong reasons? It is with the appearance of "'art for art's sake' and 'pure poetry'," Greenberg (1939) informs us, that "subject matter or content becomes something to be avoided like the plague" (p. 9). Although it still adheres to this highbrow doctrine of *style over content*, the *Pleasure-Interest Model of Aesthetic Liking* (PIA) by Graf and Landwehr (2015) offers a compelling explanation why people feel attracted to novel rather than familiar aesthetic stimuli or vice versa. It posits that aesthetic liking has its source in one of "two hierarchical, fluency-based processes" (p. 395) with different outcomes:

> Evaluations of *pleasure* (i.e., immediate affective reactions) result from an initial gut-level process that is stimulus-driven and does not involve cognitive elaboration, while judgements of *interest* arise from a controlled, higher-order process that is activated by stimulus-based affordances [e.g., novelty] and/or the perceiver's need for cognitive enrichment [curiosity]. (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 13)

According to Graf and Landwehr (2015), "pleasure is a backward-oriented process that is not associated with the motivation for further exploration of the target, whereas interest also has a forward-oriented character related to the motivation for learning" (p. 404). This characterization recalls Greenberg's (1939) distinction between avant-garde art and a cultural "rear-guard [...] to which the Germans give the wonderful name of *Kitsch*" (p. 9). As mentioned before, the PIA predicts that a familiar or otherwise easy-to-process-stimulus will provoke complementary preference patterns depending on the viewer's epistemic motivation. In case of a low motivation to learn, the experience of effortless processing yields positive aesthetic evaluations. As for perceivers with a high need for cognitive enrichment this first pleasure-related appraisal is overridden by a negative interest-related one (Graf & Landwehr, 2015).

Thanks to Berlyne's (1971) ground-breaking work, "the motivational importance of factors like novelty, complexity, surprise, and ambiguity" (p. viii) for aesthetics is widely acknowledged and extensively studied. Likewise, Zajonc's (1968) MEE and the hedonic marking of fluency hypothesis have inspired much research. However, like the two research strands it integrates, the PIA fails to recognize the role of content and personal meaning in the formation of aesthetic judgements (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). Is a stronger motivation than *personal* interest even conceivable? The example of nostalgia suggests that highly familiar easy-to-process-stimuli may be just as cognitively stimulating as cutting-edge artworks. For instance, when they remind us of a by-gone era or the absence of relevant others when we are far away from home. Defined by Sedikides et al. (2008) "as a sentimental longing for one's past" (p. 305), nostalgia combines the

Greek words for "returning to one's native land" (*nostos*) and "pain, suffering, or grief" (*algos*) (Holak & Havlena, 1992). Strangely enough, nostalgia is a comparatively new field of research (Sedikides et al., 2008). This backward-oriented counterpart of curiosity and its possible effects on aesthetic choices, I think, deserves further examination. Not only for its close ties with kitsch, but also for its connections with social motivation. According to Wildschut et al. (2008), "[t]he most frequently reported trigger [for nostalgia] was negative affect ('I think of nostalgic experiences when I am sad as they often make me feel better'), and, within this category, loneliness was the most frequently reported discrete affective state ('If I ever feel lonely or sad I tend to think of my friends or family who I haven't seen in a long time')" (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 305). Moreover, according to Batcho (1998; 2007), "individuals who are high in nostalgic tendencies also report higher preferences for activities that involve interaction with other people, as well as a stronger preference for song lyrics containing other-directed themes rather than solitary themes" (Loveland et al., 2010, p. 395). Both a need for arousal and the triggers of nostalgia point to social motivation. In social motivation there is a similarly contradicting preference pattern like the one between arousal- and fluency-based aesthetics. Namely, what Bischof (2001) calls the "primordial conflict of autonomy and intimacy" (p. 1).

3.3 Autonomy and Intimacy

> *"Whether it is a garden gnome, the sound of Bing Crosby launching into 'White Christmas', the blinking innocent eyes of Bambi or the words of Patience Strong, the kitsch phenomenon is there as strong and recognisable as your mother's face."*
>
> —Scruton, 2014

Again Burke (1757/1990) was the first to suppose that the appeal of novelty and familiarity, surprise and predictability in aesthetics arise from two complementary social motives: The sublime, he claimed, creates strong sensations of "delightful horror" (p. 123) that appeal to a drive for self-preservation, while the beautiful evokes "sentiments of tenderness and affection" (p. 39) that resonate with a drive for attachment. As a result, viewers prefer to admire the sublime from a safe distance (tigers at the zoo), while they feel a strong urge to approach the beautiful (fluffy kittens).[20] The *Zurich Model of Social Motivation* (hereafter the Zurich Model) by Norbert Bischof (1975; 1993; 2001) is a psychobiological systems theory of physical distance regulation in social animals, including homo sapiens. In a nutshell, it suggests that two antagonistic needs for arousal and security motivate us to build, maintain, or dissolve social ties. Depending on the currently prevailing need, we either seek the proximity of familiar others who radiate warmth and protection or make contact to strangers who arouse our (sexual) interest. The Zurich Model further specifies that the relative importance of arousal and security changes across the life span (Bischof, 2001) and that it tends to differ between male and female individuals (Bischof-Köhler, 2006).

Independently of gender, security is of vital importance during infancy and childhood. It is ideally represented by one's primary caregivers or any other "individual with a homelike quality [*Heimvalenz*] that is always available providing one with a secure base, where one may seek shelter, whenever one feels lonely or threatened" (Bischof, 2009, p. 417, trans. S.O.).[21] Detection of familiarity is essential for human infants, because it is the most distinctive feature of homelike individuals and the best estimate for kinship (Bischof, 2001). In his evolutionary account of the MEE, Zajonc (2001) argues that familiarity is a valid safety signal and that different degrees of familiarity allow for quick and effortless risk assessment. The logic of sexual selection, however, requires that potential mating partners should not be close relatives. Thus, during puberty the security-oriented preference pattern has to be at least temporarily transformed into an arousal-driven one to reliably prevent incestuous relationships (Bischof, 2001). As a result,

[20] Interestingly, Burke (1757/1990) also "speculates about physiological correlates of the sublime and the beautiful: When we are exposed to something beautiful, we experience an ease of tension, whereas the encounter with a sublime object induces a state of increased tonicity" (Ortlieb, Fischer, & Carbon, 2016, p. 2-3).

[21] Original: "Das Individuum mit Heimvalenz ist ständig verfügbar und bietet dem Subjekt eine behütende Basis, bei der es Zuflucht suchen kann, wann immer es sich einsam und bedroht fühlt" (Bischof, 2009, p. 417).

an aversion toward familiar individuals (parents and siblings) is observable in adolescents as the "exotic becomes erotic" (Bem, 1996, p. 320). If social motivation and aesthetic liking are functionally connected as Burke (1757/1990) claims, one would certainly expect the sharp increase in appetence for novelty (aversion for familiarity) during puberty to affect affiliative and aesthetic choices in a likewise manner. Indeed, there is strong indication that consumption of highly arousing media—horror movies and intense music—peaks in this particular age group (Blothner, 2004; Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2013). More generally, it seems that

> [a]s a young person's claim for autonomy awakens, a shift in aesthetic preferences takes place: For instance, choice of music, clothing, and hairstyle are no longer aligned with their parents' aesthetic standards. Quite the contrary: as curiosity for the exciting outside world—especially peers and idols—intensifies, the familiar sphere of the parental home becomes increasingly 'dull,' 'stuffy,' and 'kitschy' (Stemmle, 1931; Dettmar and Küpper, 2007) (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 2)

From his personal recollections, Avenarius (1920) reports, that in the early 1900s young aspiring artists expressed their contempt for works of their well-established predecessors by scorning them as kitsch and their creators as "Kitschiers" (p. 222). Is kitsch a symptom of inter-generational conflict? So far, this is only anecdotal evidence. To investigate the possible connections between aesthetics and social motivation more closely and systematically is the task of the next section.

3.4 Article: A Functional Model of Kitsch and Art

"I call beauty a social quality."

—Burke, 1757/1990, p. 10

Language of aesthetics is rich in metaphors of interpersonal space. Art is often described as *distant*, *aloof*, *unapproachable* or *inaccessible* (Fig. 5), while kitsch tends to be *close at hand*, *touching*, or even *intrusive*. In a similar vein, Walter Benjamin (1927/2002) once asserted that "art begins at a distance of two meters from the body [while] in kitsch, the world of things advances on the human being" (p. 238). The *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* by Ortlieb and Carbon (2019b) takes these words almost literally for it rests on the basic assumption that social distance regulation and aesthetic evaluations are governed by the same laws of attraction and repulsion. Prior to its publication in the peer-reviewed journal *Frontiers in Psychology* (see cumulus A.3), the model was publicly summarized in three invited talks at the 2012 *Conference for Popular Aesthetics* in Bratislava, the 2015 *Visual Science of Art Conference* (VSAC) in Liverpool, and the 2016 *MVE-Conference on Evolutionary Aesthetics* in Berlin. Firstly, I shall introduce the model's variables and point out their individual connections with ideas and findings from empirical aesthetics. Secondly, I will illustrate how their dynamic interplay is expected to modulate aesthetic appreciation.

Four of its components derive from the Zurich Model (Bischof, 1975, 1993, 2001), a psychobiological systems theory of physical distance regulation in man and other social animals. More specifically, it accounts for the contradicting requirements of attachment and mating behavior and "simulates the transition from a state of attachment to familiar conspecifics and fear of strangers to a stage of detachment from the familiar and exploration of the stranger" (Bischof, 1975, p. 801). It takes three motivational systems to do so: (1) the arousal system, (2) the security system, and (3) the autonomy system. A fourth one—the auxiliary coping system—stands by in case one of the previous is blocked by an obstacle. What are these subsystems for and how do they relate to aesthetic evaluations? The *arousal system* tracks the "unspecific activation pattern of the sympathetic nervous system that accompanies 'interest, fascination, curiosity, as well as feelings of alarm and fear' (Schneider, 2001, p. 10122)" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 7). To determine whether the actual level of arousal is adequate, it is continuously compared to an internal reference variable named *Enterprise* (see [1] in Fig. 6). If activation falls below this individual set point, an appetence for arousal arises ([2] in Fig. 6): One is "likely to show exploratory behavior in search for [someone or] something excitingly new (curiosity). Conversely, whenever arousal exceeds enterprise, [one] experience[s] sensory overload resulting in a temporary aversion

Figure 5: Rembrandt's (1642) *The Night Watch* displayed in a glass enclosure. Own photo.

to further collative stimulation (distress)" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 7). Apparently, the arousal system centers on the main variable of Berlyne's (1971) *new experimental aesthetics*. Its activity should therefore inform us about an individual's current interest in novel or otherwise arousing stimuli, including avant-garde art (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b).

The *security system* regulates notions of warmth and safety usually conveyed by primary caregivers (Schneider, 2001). As security unites feelings of intimacy and protection, the security system monitors both a need for safety *and* a need for relatedness ([3] and [4] in Fig. 6). Its reference variable is labeled *Dependency* ([5] in Fig. 6):

> As long as dependency exceeds security, needs for safety and relatedness are maintained. This induces the subject to show attachment behavior, that is, to reduce the distance to a person who is able to provide security. The opposite situation, frequently encountered in puberty, results in an aversion against security and consequently in an avoidance of familiar persons (surfeit behavior). (Schneider, 2001, p. 10122)

Activity of the security system and fluency-based aesthetics are intimately related through the variable of familiarity (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). Since the security system takes familiarity as a token for safety and relatedness (Bischof, 2001), its actual state should also tell us something about a person's current responsiveness to familiar and otherwise easy-to-process stimuli with a positive affective charge (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). An appetence for security is thus expected to render kitsch more attractive because it unites these properties in a prototypical way. The opposite inclination should be observable whenever a state of security aversion prevails.

Autonomy system. Throughout infancy and childhood the security system easily overrides the arousal system. With adolescence, however, tables turn on security as the requirements of mating behavior come to the foreground (Bischof, 2001). This includes detachment from siblings and primary caregivers and is accompanied by an increasing interest in unfamiliar conspecifics. A

third motivational system is responsible for this profound shift of priorities in social motivation. With its reference variable *Autonomy claim* ([6] in Fig. 6), the autonomy system regulates one's current aspiration for independence and self-determination, that is, to what degree an individual is motivated to free itself from external control and to act upon its own rules and principles (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b):

> [Whenever] individuals feel an appetence for autonomy, they are assumed to behave assertively by becoming threatening, demanding, or even aggressive. In the opposite case, if individuals have too much autonomy and feel aversive, they will show submissive behaviors such as behaving humbly or servilely. (Schneider, 2001, p. 10123)

Autonomy is a key concept to modern Western art as its variegated avant-garde movements join forces in the "breakup of traditional aesthetic authority" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 4). In accordance with Martindale's (1990) conjecture, that "art evolves toward greater arousal potential [...] only when artists have sufficient autonomy from external forces and institutions" (p. 218), our model predicts that a demand for autonomy always comes with an increased appetence for arousing aesthetic stimuli and a distaste for familiar ones (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). Following the Zurich Model, the autonomy system is superordinated to the prior two. Its reference variable (*Autonomy claim*) adjusts the set points of the security system and the arousal system by lowering *Dependency* and raising *Enterprise*. Consequently, an appetence for arousal is more likely to arise when *Autonomy claim* is high, "while needs for safety and relatedness are tuned down" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 9). In the case of autonomy aversion, "needs for safety and relatedness stand a good chance to prevail over a need for arousal" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 9).

Self-efficacy. Apart from its superordinate position, the autonomy system "receives its input from a different source than the other two systems. A person's autonomy claim increases with his or her notion of achievement: When we succeed in solving problems and obtain other people's admiration or acknowledgements our notion of self-confidence increases (Schneider, 2001)" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, pp. 8-9). For the sake of conceptual clarity, the input variable of the autonomy system has been identified with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy concept ([7] in Fig. 6), reflecting "a person's confidence in his or her own ability to complete tasks, solve problems, and achieve goals" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 9). This concordant connection of self-efficacy, autonomy claim, and arousal appetence is well in line with a widely held view that taste judgements reflect power relations (Burke, 1757/1990; Nietzsche, 1882/2001; Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Braungart, 2012). Confidence in one's abilities, however, varies across different domains. This is where previous knowledge, especially art expertise, come into play. Apart from the previous components of social motivation it is hypothesized that

> [o]ne's current level of art expertise defines the anchor point on a continuous dimension connecting the polar opposites of easy-to-process aesthetic objects (kitsch) and difficult-to-process ones (avant-garde art). The more art expertise we command, the closer our anchor point will be to the avant-garde pole and vice versa. Wherever our frame of (p)reference may be located on this dimension, we expect to observe the following dynamics relative to this individual anchor point: Prevalent needs for safety and relatedness will shift the aesthetic comfort zone away from the initial set point into the direction of the kitsch pole, while needs for arousal and autonomy will push it toward the avant-garde pole. (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, pp. 9-10)

Effects should be strongest, when physical distance regulation is ruled out and imbalances of the security or the arousal system must be remedied in a different way (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). This is when the auxiliary coping system kicks in. By default, needs for arousal, security, and autonomy are regulated by adjusting one's physical distance to familiar or alien conspecifics. What happens when this is not possible due to a physical barrier or social constraints, say, measures to contain a pandemic? Social distancing, for example (Fig. 7), runs against the tendency to draw close to familiar others under uncertain and trying conditions. On the other hand, curfews and quarantine measures may increase tensions by forcing members of a household to stay within close range. The so-called coping system offers different coping strategies. One of

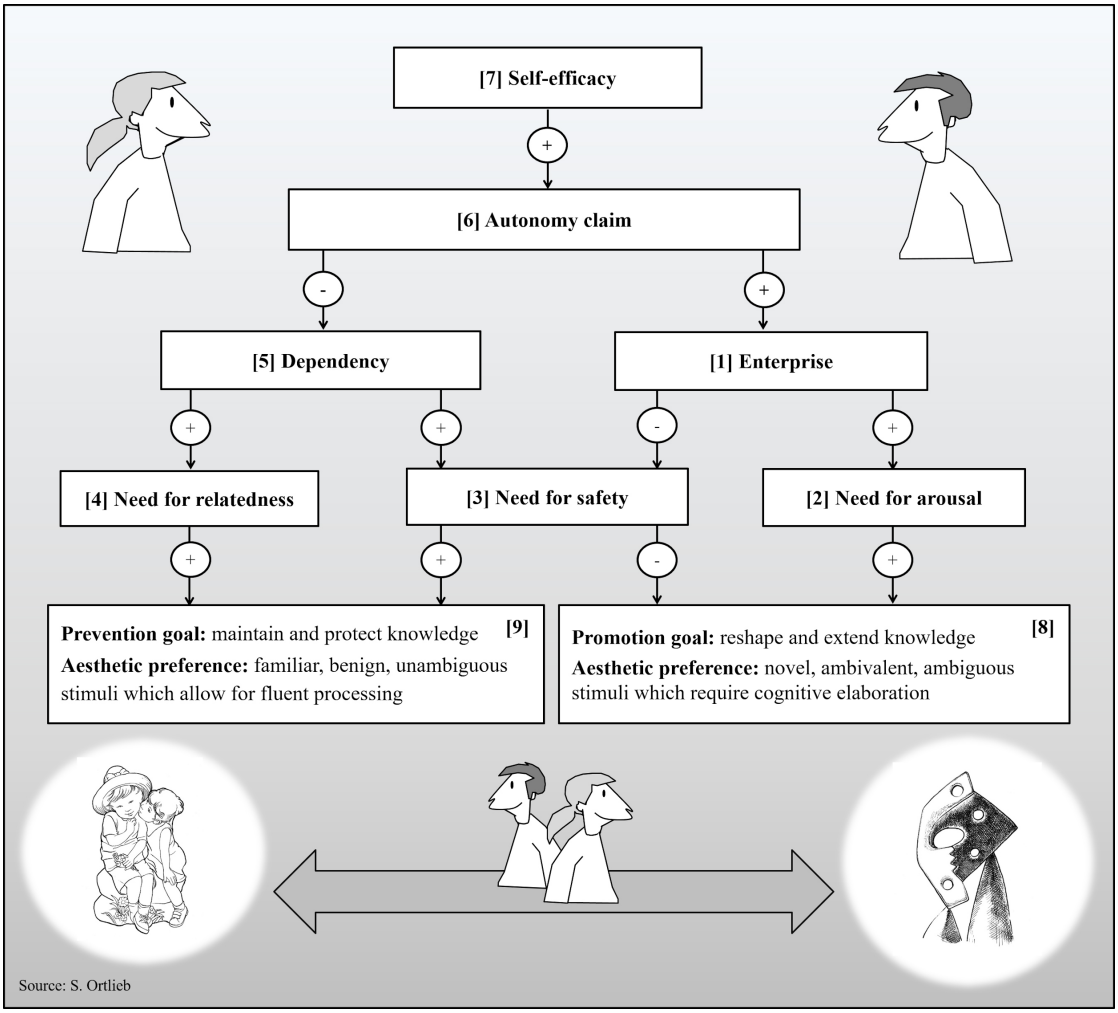


Figure 6: The *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). Legend: Arrows with a "+" indicate that if variable [1] is high, variable [2] is elevated. Arrows with "-" signify an inhibitory relationship (e.g., if variable [1] is high, variable [3] is diminished).

them is invention. It includes creating and operating with symbols, a particularly effective way (if not *the* most powerful one) to bolster one's need for belongingness (Solomon et al., 1991). In everyday life, symbolic representations may compensate for the absence of significant others (e.g., mementos, photos, or text messages). Already at an early age, children grow fond of objects that help them self-regulate distress (Winnicott, 1953). Similar to such comfort objects and security blankets of their childhood days, adults use keepsakes to maintain feelings of safety, relatedness, and achievement in the face of adversity (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). In Chapter 3.6, I will present preliminary evidence that

> people with different anxiety-related coping styles respond differently to everyday things: Participants with little confidence in their own abilities who claimed to be rather intolerant of uncertainty and highly vigilant about threatening information (*sensitizers*) rated decorative objects more likable and less kitschy than participants who overestimated their abilities and habitually avoid or deny threatening cues (*repressors*). This complementary preference pattern in sensitizers and repressors directs our attention to the final component of our model: regulatory focus. (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 10)

Regulatory focus. According to the Zurich Model, there can be either too much or too little arousal, security, and autonomy. A significant overdose of each variable will result in avoidance behavior; a lack thereof will cause appetence behavior. On a cognitive level, this dualism of appetence and avoidance directly corresponds to two motivational orientations proposed by *Regulatory Focus Theory* (Higgins, 1998):

> One directing us toward preventing threats (*prevention focus*) and another one that promotes opportunities for growth and achievement (*promotion focus*). A prevention focus clearly reflects a need for safety in that it increases our sensitivity to possible threats in our environment. Besides, it motivates us to protect and maintain our present knowledge structures. By contrast, a promotion focus is rooted in a need for learning and achievement that closely resembles an appetence for arousal (curiosity): It increases our sensitivity to opportunities rather than potential risks. Thus, a promotion focus entails the urge to extend or at least modify one's present knowledge. (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 10)

Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell (2008) have made a compelling case that "fluently processed stimuli implicate prevention goals that maintain and protect knowledge [while] novel stimuli implicate promotion goals that reshape and expand knowledge" (p. 305). This distinction is well in line with our previous characterizations of kitsch and avant-garde art (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). Since immediate identifiability is a defining property of kitsch, we expect regulatory focus and appreciation of kitsch to be dynamically interrelated. To conclude, I briefly outline these dynamics regarding the above components.

System dynamics. Figure 6 shows the entire cascade of variables connecting self-efficacy expectations with aesthetic choices. In a safe and predictable environment, one's notion of self-efficacy should be highest. Accordingly, "the reference variables of the autonomy system (Autonomy claim) and the arousal system (Enterprise) are increased, while the reference variable of the security system (Dependency) is tuned down" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 11). Hence, a need for arousal is more likely to arise than a need for security. In a state of appetence for arousal, people are expected to show increased interest in unfamiliar conspecifics as well as in new, cognitively challenging aesthetic objects. In an unfamiliar, potentially threatening context, however, this preference pattern should be reversed: Due to a low level of self-efficacy, *Autonomy claim* and *Enterprise* are reduced, while *Dependency* is stepped up. More often than not, this should result in an appetence for safety and relatedness. In this state, the model claims, people will be attracted not only to familiar others but also to easy-to-process aesthetic objects with a positive emotional charge.

Discussion. The *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* rests on three propositions: Firstly, it posits an alignment of aesthetic and affiliative preferences through a "mechanism of social distance regulation that has evolved in social [animals] to reconcile needs for safety and intimacy with needs for arousal and autonomy" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 12). Secondly, it states that, in Western modernity, the underlying conflict between "tradition and innovation has produced a particularly clear-cut dichotomy of kitsch and avant-garde art" (p. 12). Thirdly, it claims that kitsch and avant-garde art ideally represent two types of aesthetic experience—a backward- and a future-oriented one—with distinct processing characteristics. In sum, the present model offers an integrative view on the "dynamics of aesthetic appreciation" (Carbon, 2011, p. 708) by uniting ideas from art history, empirical, and evolutionary aesthetics with a systems theory of social motivation (Bischof, 2001), a dual-process approach to fluency-based aesthetics (Graf & Landwehr, 2015), and *Regulatory Focus Theory* (Higgins, 1998). How does the resulting framework enrich theorizing in empirical aesthetics? What new research questions does it raise, or problems does it solve that current theoretical models are missing out?

The idea that everyone has a heart for kitsch and that aesthetic evaluations might vary on a daily basis, is hardly compatible with the assumption that aesthetic standards are fixed for life by a person's habitus. Unlike Bourdieu (1979/1984), the model can account for experimental data showing that attitudes toward abstract paintings (Landau et al., 2006), innovative design (Carbon et al., 2013) or kitschy everyday objects (Ortlieb, Gebauer, & Carbon, 2016) are sensitive to affective states.

By acknowledging the eminent role of emotionally rich content for the mass appeal of kitsch, it also goes beyond the PIA (Graf & Landwehr, 2015), which deliberately and needlessly excludes this success factor of popular aesthetics from its purview by focusing solely on processing characteristics. This seemingly incidental shortcoming of the PIA deserves closer examination and will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 5.1 (*On the Shoulders of Giants*).

Building on a psychobiological theory with clear developmental implications, the functional model also suggests that these small-scale oscillations are superimposed onto long-term dynamics in aesthetic preferences following the reference variables across the individual lifespan: *Dependency* should be highest during infancy and childhood, before it dips down to an all-time low with the onset of puberty, while *Enterprise* takes a complementary course with a sharp increase in adolescence. Throughout adulthood, *Dependency* and *Enterprise* are thought to be relatively fixed apart from variability caused by critical life events, before, in old age, needs for safety and relatedness (i.e., Dependency) regain importance (Planinc et al., 2013). Do aesthetic preferences change accordingly? Up to now, findings on this topic are anecdotal and inconclusive. Against the model's prediction, that children should prefer familiar stimuli, Bornstein's (1989) meta-analysis finds weaker mere exposure effects in school children than in adults. On the other hand, research on media usage shows that a preference for horror films is highest among (male) teenagers aged between 15 and 19 years (see for example Blothner, 2004). Since cross-sectional data is always to a certain extent confounded with fashion and other aspects of Zeitgeist, a stringent test of these dynamics would require longitudinal data. More naturalistic studies might also include the assessment of critical life events and their possible effects on aesthetic evaluations.

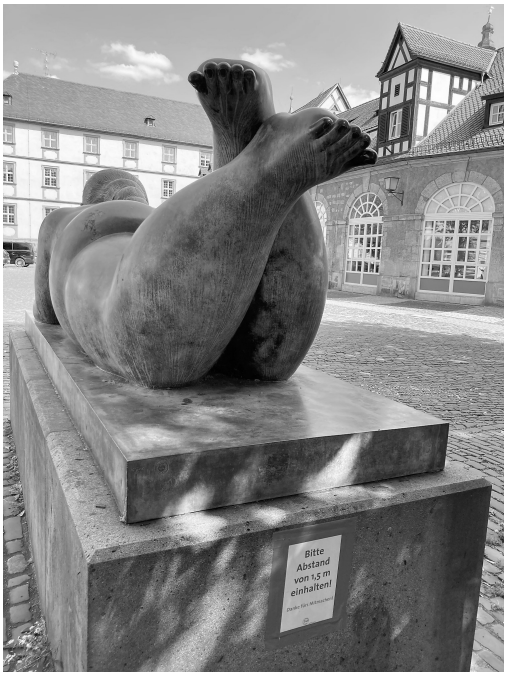


Figure 7: Please keep your distance! Botero (1996): *Reclining Woman with Fruit*. Own photo.

Social behavior is a broad theme in literature on gender differences (for example Eagly & Wood, 1991). Hence, the Zurich Model also predicts gender differences with regard to *Dependency* and *Enterprise* (Bischof-Köhler, 2006): On average, males of all age groups are expected to show a lower level of *Dependency* and a higher level of *Enterprise* compared with females (Gubler & Bischof, 1993). Since our model proposes a close connection between social motives and aesthetic preferences, concordant gender-related differences should be detectable in studies on aesthetic liking. Again, available findings are contradictory. Cross-cultural data strongly suggests that women tend to show a greater openness to aesthetics than men (Costa et al., 2001). Two studies on art perception found that, on average, female participants rated paintings with troubling content less favorably than men (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2010; Ortlieb, Fischer, & Carbon, 2016). This relates to similar findings from basic research, showing that women tend to rate visual stimuli with negative affective content more arousing and show stronger physiological reactions than men (Bradley et al., 2001; Gard & Kring, 2007; Spalek et al., 2015). Finally, there is preliminary indication that men and women tend to respond differently to kitsch objects (Vlasova et al., 2019; Fischer et al., 2019).

Practically all of these conjectures go against Martindale's (1990) *Psychological Theory of Aesthetic Evolution* which deals with the perspective of artistic production and denies the importance of social forces for the understanding of artistic change. Martindale goes as far as to say that it takes a "social vacuum" (p. 15) for artistic innovation to flourish. Given complete autonomy (that is, artists creating art for art's sake), he argues, speed and extent of stylistic change are determined solely by habituation and the principle of least effort: "Habituation forces the poet to express himself or herself in new ways. The principle of least effort leads one to do this in the least bothersome way, and [thereby] prevents explosive increases in novelty" (Martindale, 1990, p. 12). At first glance, this appears highly questionable: How might habituation explain the surge of artistic innovation in Western modernity? Why was this agent of change suspended throughout age-long periods of continuity in art history? And how can the principle of least effort possibly account for pre-historic monoliths, ancient pyramids, and Gothic cathedrals? Despite its poor face validity, Martindale's theory makes very accurate retrodictions of developments in poetry, painting, and music over many decades and even centuries of art history. However, our model complements it in two respects: Firstly, it adds the observer's perspective on novelty and change in aesthetics. Secondly, it introduces the possibility of intra- and interindividual variability, especially age- and gender-related differences. So far, these possibilities are ruled out by Martindale's (1990) basic assumption concerning the "uniformity of nature [with regard to aesthetic evolution in] that people are always and everywhere about the same" (p. 4). In fact, most studies by Martindale and his research group have been conducted only with female undergraduates. Both models could be tested against each other simply by showing Martindale's original stimulus material to samples with different age groups and a balanced gender ratio.

So far, kitsch is treated as a special case of the more general relationship between aesthetics and coping behavior. It would be interesting to learn more about the specific triggers for kitsch consumption. According to a survey by Sedikides et al. (2008), negative affect and especially feelings of loneliness are the most frequently reported triggers of nostalgia. If the supposed connections between needs for safety and belonging, nostalgia and a backward-oriented aesthetics hold true, kitsch consumption should be the preferential coping strategy whenever people feel lonely or ostracized.

Like every theory, our model has its limitations. Apart from missing feedback loops it is not sufficiently formalized to allow for a dynamic computer-based modeling. Nevertheless, it makes testable predictions regarding its reference variables that allow for a stationary systems analysis. Two such hypotheses have been addressed in a correlative study and two experiments.

3.5 Is Kitsch More Popular with People Who Value Security over Arousal?

The *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* posits that appreciation of kitsch is a function of basic needs for security and arousal (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). People with a high need for security are expected to rate familiar, unambiguous, and emotionally rich stimuli more favorably than people with a high need for arousal. Are individuals with a pronounced need for security and a low arousal tolerance more receptive to kitsch? This question was addressed in a rating study based on the standardized *Motive Profile Following the Zurich Model* (MPZM; Schönbrodt, Unkelbach, & Spinath, 2009). Results were presented in 2019 at the 7$^{\text{th}}$ *Visual Science of Art Conference* (VSAC) in Leuven (Vlasova et al., 2019).[22]

Hypotheses. If the preceding model is correct, two linear interactions should be observable: (1) Individuals with higher MPZM-scores for security should rate familiar, unambiguous, and emotionally rich stimuli more likable and less kitschy than individuals with lower security scores. Regarding the complementary arousal motive this response pattern should be reversed: (2) People with higher MPZM-scores for enterprise (need for arousal) should rate the same stimuli less likable and more kitschy than individuals who score lower on enterprise.

Stimulus material. A total of 208 self-devised digital photographs of everyday objects were used as stimuli. Most of these images (k=200) showed a variety of souvenirs, toys, and collectibles as well as devotional and decorative objects. The rest (k=8) depicted plain household objects which served as control stimuli.

[22] Preliminary results were presented at the 6$^{\text{th}}$ VSAC in Trieste (Vlasova et al., 2018, see cumulus A.9).

Procedure. The study was conducted in a perceptual laboratory at the University of Bamberg. After testing of visual acuity and color vision, participants provided socio-demographical information (gender, age, level of education). Moreover, they completed the MPZM (Schönbrodt et al., 2009) as well as the *Angstbewältigungs-Inventar* (ABI; Krohne & Egloff, 1999).[23] The MPZM consists of thirty items targeting five basic motives from the *Zurich Model of Social Motivation* (Bischof, 2001): security, enterprise (i.e., need for arousal), power, prestige, and achievement. Every MPZM-item combines a statement (e.g., "I need familiar people around me" or "I'm always looking for new experiences") with a 6-point Likert scale (1=*very untypical for me*, 6=*very typical for me*). Subsequently, participants saw the 208 images in a computer-based procedure and rated them on six 7-point Likert scales for liking (1=*I do not like it at all*, 7=*I like it very much*), familiarity (1=*not at all familiar*, 7=*very familiar*), determinacy (1=*not at all determinate*, 7=*very determinate*), arousal (1=*not at all exciting*, 7=*very exciting*), perceived threat (1=*not at all threatening*; 7=*very threatening*), and kitschiness (1=*not kitschy at all*; 7=*very kitschy*). The images were presented in a random order, while the sequence of ratings was the same for each image. In the debriefing participants were asked to speculate about the purpose of the study.

Sample. The sample (N=96) comprised fifty women and forty-six men (M_{age}=22.2 years; SD=5.1). Most of them were psychology students from the University of Bamberg who attended for partial course credit. All participants showed normal color vision and normal or corrected to normal visual acuity and were unaware of the study's hypotheses.

Results. The MPZM-scores for security (SEC) and enterprise (ENT) as well as ratings for liking and kitsch were analyzed to test the two hypotheses. Prior to data analysis the sample was split into three homogeneous groups with regard to each of the two MPZM-scales: low scorers ($n_{\text{SEC\_low}}$=31; $n_{\text{ENT\_low}}$=32), moderate scorers ($n_{\text{SEC\_mod}}$=34; $n_{\text{ENT\_mod}}$=31), and high scorers ($n_{\text{SEC\_high}}$=31; $n_{\text{ENT\_high}}$=33) were grouped together. For both scales the 33$^{\text{rd}}$ and 67$^{\text{th}}$ percentile served as cut-off criteria. Descriptively, mean liking ratings decreased across the three enterprise groups, while kitsch ratings peaked among the moderately high scorers. For the security groups all measures were trending into the predicted direction: liking was lowest among the low scorers and highest among the high scorers, while kitsch ratings decreased monotonously across the three security groups.

To obtain a more detailed picture, an analysis of covariance with three repeated independent factors (gender, MPZM-groups, items) was conducted for each MPZM-scale. Gender was included as an independent factor since women showed significantly higher MPZM-scores for security than men, $t(94)$=4.250, $p < .001$, and gender ratio varied accordingly between low (22 men; 9 women), moderate (17 men; 17 women), and high scorers (7 men; 24 women). Due to the diversity of visual stimuli in terms of liking and kitsch ratings, items were treated as a repeated measurement factor. Moreover, as several stimuli stood out in terms of threatening content, ratings of perceived threat were also included as a covariate to control for this source of variance.

A first three-way repeated measures ANCOVA showed the expected linear interaction for kitsch and liking ratings across the three security groups, $F(1, 206)$=38.105, $p < .001$, η_p^2=.156. Upon closer examination, this effect was attributable mainly to the ratings of female participants. In the male subsample kitsch and liking ratings hardly varied across the three groups. Regarding the three enterprise groups, another three-way repeated measures ANCOVA revealed a complementary, albeit weaker, linear interaction for kitsch and liking ratings, $F(1, 206)$=9.503, $p = .002$, η_p^2=.044. Again, results differed for men and women. Apart from lower liking ratings among high scorers neither kitsch nor liking varied across the three enterprise groups in the male subsample, whereas for female participants the interaction for kitsch and liking ratings was confirmed. And yet, apart from trending into the expected direction, it followed a curvilinear rather than a linear trend across the three enterprise groups.

Discussion. Is kitsch more popular with people who value security over arousal? At first view, this seems to be the case. And yet, although the overall trends go into the predicted direction, this cannot disguise the fact that (A) the big picture only holds for female participants, (B) the observed effect is stronger for security than for enterprise scores, and (C) interrelations seem to follow an inverted U-shaped curve rather than a linear trend. What do we make of these

[23] ABI-results were analyzed separately and are reported in the next section.

observations? Above all, findings are supportive of the idea that there is a connection between basic social motives and aesthetic evaluations. This, I claim, is further underscored by the obtained effect for gender. Should there be a functional connection between social motivation which is a broad theme in research on gender differences and aesthetic evaluations, it seems only logical that such differences should surely be reflected by the latter. As far as the asymmetry of effects is concerned, it also seems consistent with the assumption of a connection between kitsch and security needs. After all, only potential kitsch stimuli were used in this study. If kitsch answers to needs for security and affiliation and its defining properties become more attractive when the observer features a prevention focus (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b), it seems only logical that interrelations between MPZM-scores for the security motive and responses to kitsch stimuli should be closer than with the less relevant enterprise dimension. Nevertheless, the question remains why participants with a moderately high enterprise score (need for arousal) showed a similar answer pattern as participants with a high need for security. It could be that kitsch serves different purposes in arousal management. Perhaps, it is not only liked for its capacity to ease tension (*calming down*) but also for a mildly arousing effect (*cheering up*). Explanations for the observed curvilinear trends remain a matter of conjecture. Besides, both the Zurich Model and the MPZM distinguish between three potential sources of self-efficacy: power, prestige, and achievement. It would be desirable to include these variables into the current functional model, especially since they would establish a theoretical connection with ideas from art sociology stating that a refined taste and a "refusal of the *facile*" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 486) are used to rate and rank people in status hierarchies.

The next section is dedicated to the data on anxiety-related coping styles and aesthetic preferences that were collected in the same study and which will help clarify some of the above questions and provide additional fodder for discussion.

3.6 Do Anxiety-Related Coping Styles Modulate Kitsch Judgements?

"Kitsch is the quickest means of reconciling oneself to circumstances."
—Schmidt, 1994, p. 141

According to Ortlieb and Carbon (2019b), there is a functional relationship between kitsch and coping behavior. Whatever shakes our confidence or sense of security will make us more susceptible to the consoling properties of kitsch. This shift in aesthetic appreciation is expected to be more pronounced whenever social support is unavailable and one has to use mental strategies to deal with a potentially threatening situation (e.g., taking an exam). If so, people with different anxiety-related coping styles should respond differently to kitsch. Theoretically, two classical concepts in coping research—*repression* and *sensitization* (Byrne, 1964; Krohne, 1989, 1993)—are particularly interesting as they allow for the following straightforward deductions:

> Individuals with little confidence in their own abilities, who are particularly intolerant of uncertainty and highly vigilant about threatening information (*sensitizers*) should find kitsch more likable than people who overestimate their abilities and habitually avoid or deny potentially threatening information to evade strong affect (*repressors*). (Fischer et al., 2019, p. 1)

Do anxiety-related coping styles modulate appreciation of kitsch? To answer this question, data from the *Angstbewältigungs-Inventar* (ABI; Krohne & Egloff, 1999)—a standardized questionnaire for the scenario-based assessment of habitual anxiety-related coping behavior—were analyzed and the results presented at the 7th *Visual Science of Art Conference* (VSAC) in Leuven (Fischer et al., 2019, see cumulus A.8).

Theoretical background. Repressors and sensitizers are distinct with regard to vigilance and cognitive avoidance (Krohne, 1993). While repressors combine a high level of cognitive avoidance with a low level of vigilance, the opposite is the case for sensitizers. People who score low (or high) on both vigilance and cognitive avoidance are referred to as *non-defensive*, respectively *ineffective copers*. In the present study it was assumed that the answers of ineffective copers would correspond to those of sensitizers, while non-defensive copers were expected to respond like repressors (Fischer et al., 2019).

Stimulus material. As previously mentioned (see Chapter 3.5), 208 self-devised digital photographs of everyday objects were used. A majority of these images (k=200) depicting miscellaneous decorative objects (kitsch stimuli), while the rest (k=8) showed plain household objects (control stimuli).

Procedure. For the assessment of anxiety-related coping styles the ABI (Krohne & Egloff, 1999), a standardized scenario-based questionnaire was used. Before taking the ABI, participants underwent a test of visual acuity and color vision, answered some socio-demographical questions, and completed the MPZM-scales (Schönbrodt et al., 2009). Subsequently, they were instructed to rate 208 images in a computer-based procedure on six 7-point Likert scales with regard to liking, familiarity, determinacy, arousal, perceived threat, and kitschiness.

Sample. 95 out of 96 participants were included (49 female; 46 males; M_{age}=22.2 years; SD=5.1)[24]; a majority of which were psychology students from the University of Bamberg who attended for partial course credit. All of them had normal color vision and normal or corrected to normal visual acuity and were naïve to the study's hypotheses.

Results. Prior to data analysis the sample was split into four subgroups: According to the cut-off criteria from the ABI-manual, sensitizers (n=27), repressors (n=35), ineffective copers (n=27) who scored high on vigilance and cognitive avoidance, and non-defensive individuals (n=6) with low scores on both dimensions were identified. To account for the great variability of liking and kitsch ratings across the 208 images, stimuli were treated as separate units in an ANOVA with two repeated independent factors (coping style and rating item). Regarding sensitizers and repressors, the following interaction was hypothesized:

$$\text{H1: } \mu(kitschiness - liking)_{\text{sensitizer}} < \mu(kitschiness - liking)_{\text{repressor}}$$

A groupwise comparison revealed differences and commonalities among the four subsamples: Repressors and ineffective copers rated kitsch objects less likable and more kitschy than typical sensitizers and non-defensive copers. While the general interaction of rated items and coping styles showed a highly significant effect for the objects, $F(2.33,621)$=64.17; $p < .001$; η_p^2=.237, a specific contrast analysis for repressors and sensitizers revealed a highly significant effect across all stimuli, $F(1,207)$=157.97; $p < .001$; η_p^2=.433. An additional gender-related analysis showed that the contrast effect for repressors and sensitizers was more pronounced in the male subsample, $F(1,207)$=222.08; $p < .001$; η_p^2=.518, than among female participants, $F(1,207)$=15.73; $p < .001$; η_p^2=.071 (Fischer et al., 2019).

Discussion. Are sensitizers more receptive to kitsch than repressors? Indeed, sensitizers rated kitsch stimuli more favorably than repressors. Unexpectedly, responses of non-defensive individuals resembled those of sensitizers, while the answer pattern of repressors was similar to that of ineffective copers. Since repressors and ineffective copers share a high level of cognitive avoidance, these commonalities might "reflect a general reluctance to admit feelings, including the untroubled affection provided by kitsch" (Fischer et al., 2019, p. 1). Furthermore, results differed between men and women: "In terms of liking, differences between coping-styles were more pronounced in the male subsample. As liking ratings hardly varied across coping styles among female participants a smaller interaction effect was obtained for the female subsample" (Fischer et al., 2019, p. 1). Gender differences are much-discussed in literature on social motivation and anxiety-related coping behavior. And yet, they are understudied in empirical aesthetics although there is strong indication that this might be a highly relevant issue, both theoretically and empirically (Ortlieb, Fischer, & Carbon, 2016). If there is a connection between social motivation and aesthetic appreciation as postulated by our model, gender differences in needs for security and arousal should make themselves felt in aesthetics. I shall return to this issue in the general discussion.

[24] One participant was excluded due to missing values in the ABI questionnaire.

3.7 Does Mortality Salience Affect Kitsch Judgements?

"Kitsch is a folding screen set up to curtain off death."
—Kundera, 1984/1987, p. 253

The knowledge that death is inevitable poses a threat to one's sense of safety and control. It has been argued that the arts help us deal with this unsettling certainty in that they provide death-transcending meaning (Landau et al., 2010). What happens to aesthetic evaluations when we reflect on our own mortality? *Terror Management Theory* (TMT) assumes that people will favor unequivocal signs of their own cultural beliefs over unfamiliar and ambiguous ones to ease their fear of death (Solomon et al., 1991). Relevant studies suggest that reminders of mortality tend to amplify both positive and negative attitudes toward aesthetic objects. Under the impression of mortality concerns, art that resonates with the beholder's worldview is rated more positively, while works that defy meaningful interpretation (e.g., untitled abstract paintings) are rated more negatively (Landau et al., 2006). How might these findings relate to kitsch? More specifically, how does death awareness affect responses to kitsch? Since kitsch is clearly a derogatory term used to contrast significant artistic achievements, TMT would predict that kitsch is judged more negatively when mortality is salient. However, with the *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* as a background, the opposite should be the case: By conveying a highly familiar, perfectly clear-cut, and consoling message, kitsch should become more attractive whenever our notion of self-efficacy is impaired, for example, by mortality concerns. Unlike TMT, the model by Ortlieb and Carbon (2019b) posits that changes are not specific for mortality salience but should be observable under the influence of any treatment that affects notions of safety and self-efficacy. Two experiments were conducted to test these mutually exclusive hypotheses using the mortality salience paradigm. Results were presented in 2016 at the 4th *Visual Science of Art Conference* (VSAC) in Barcelona (Ortlieb, Gebauer, & Carbon, 2016, see cumulus A.9).

Experiment #1. The first experiment was conducted online. Participants were randomly assigned either to a mortality salience (MS) or a dental pain condition (DP)—which is a standard control condition in research on TMT. They were either instructed to reflect on their own mortality (MS) or think about their feelings before seeing a dentist due to acute dental pain (DP). After a brief distraction task, participants rated 21 self-devised digital images of decorative objects on three 6-point rating scales for liking (1=*I do not like it at all*; 6=*I like it very much*), acceptance (1=*not acceptable at all*, 6=*perfectly acceptable*), and kitschiness (1=*not kitschy at all*; 6=*very kitschy*). A third group of participants rated the stimuli without any previous treatment (control group).

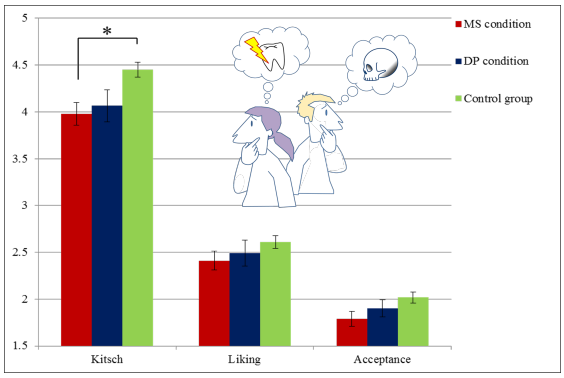


Figure 8: Error bars indicate ± 1 *SEM* (Ortlieb, Gebauer, & Carbon, 2016).

Sample. A total of 50 students (44 women and 6 men) from the University of Bamberg participated in one of the two experimental conditions (M_{age}=21.0 years, SD=4.8). The control group comprised 50 students (45 women and 5 men; M_{age}=23.7 years, SD=5.0). All participants received partial course credit.

Results. Ratings for kitschiness, (M_{grand}=4.2, SD=0.7; α=.88), liking (M_{grand}=2.5, SD=0.6; α=.81), and acceptance (M_{grand}=1.9, SD=0.5; α=.76) were compared using one-way ANOVAs. For post hoc testing Bonferroni correction was applied. Neither liking nor acceptance differed across conditions (all $ps > .094$). For kitsch ratings, however, a main effect was detected, $F(2,97)=5.29$, $p=.007$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$: Under the influence of mortality concerns (M=4.0, SD=0.6) kitsch ratings were reduced compared with the control group (M=4.5, SD=0.6), $t(76)=3.19$, $p=.011$, $d=0.77$ (Fig. 8).

Experiment #2. To secure findings from the first experimental study, the second experiment was conducted in a lab setting at the University of Bamberg. Participants were randomly assigned either to one of two mortality salience conditions (MS-solitary; MS-group) or a car accident condition (CA). In the first MS-condition, participants were tested solitarily (MS-solitary); in the second they were tested in groups of three participants (MS-group). Otherwise, both MS-conditions were identical: All participants were asked to reflect on their own mortality. In the car accident condition participants were instructed to reflect their feelings after a severe car accident. After a brief distraction task all participants rated the 21 images from the first study in terms of liking (1=*I do not like it at all*; 6=*I like it very much*) and kitschiness (1=*not kitschy at all*; 6=*very kitschy*).

Sample. A total of 95 students (73 women and 22 men) from the University of Bamberg participated in one of the three experimental conditions (M_{age}=22.4 years, SD=4.4). The control group from the first study served as a control group (45 women and 5 men; M_{age}=23.7 years, SD=5.0). All students participated for partial course credit.

Results. Ratings for kitschiness (M_{grand}=4.2, SD=0.8; α=.90) and liking (M_{grand}=2.5, SD=0.6; α=.81) were compared using a one-way ANOVA (treatment condition). Bonferroni was used for post hoc tests. Again, no main effect was obtained for liking. A one-way ANOVA (treatment condition) revealed a main effect for kitsch, $F(3,141)$=4.68, p=.004, η_p^2 = .09: Kitsch ratings were diminished for both the MS-solitary (M=3.9, SD=0.8) and the MS-group condition (M=3.9, SD=0.8) compared with the control group (M=4.5, SD=0.6), $t(76)$=3.31, p=.018, d=0.78, $t(84)$=3.28, p=.010, d=0.73 respectively (Fig. 9).

Discussion. How does mortality salience affect explicit attitudes toward kitsch? Is it rated more negatively or more positively? The online and the lab experiment showed consistent albeit inconclusive results. Compared to the control group, kitsch ratings were significantly reduced whenever mortality was salient, and only then, while liking ratings did not change (Ortlieb, Gebauer, & Carbon, 2016). Hypotheses that kitsch would generally become more likable under the impression of troubling thoughts—be it that of one's own death, a severe car accident or dental pain—were not confirmed. Presumably, the experimental conditions affect notions of safety and self-efficacy differently: Car accidents and dental pain are not inevitable. Thus, we may deny our personal risk or take precautions. Mortality, on the contrary, is undeniable and there is nothing we can do about it. That only the mortality salience conditions influenced kitsch judgements certainly corroborates TMT rather than our model. And yet, the direction of the observed changes in kitsch ratings is more in line with the *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* than with TMT. The interesting dissociation of liking and kitsch ratings could be the first stage of an implicit adaptation process preceding changes in acceptance and liking (Ortlieb, Gebauer, & Carbon, 2016). This tentative explanation should be examined more closely together with the observed dissociation of implicit and explicit kitsch-related attitudes (Reiter et al., 2015) by combining explicit and implicit measures (md-IAT; Gattol, Sääksjärvi, & Carbon, 2011) with a repeated evaluation procedure (RET; Carbon & Leder, 2005).

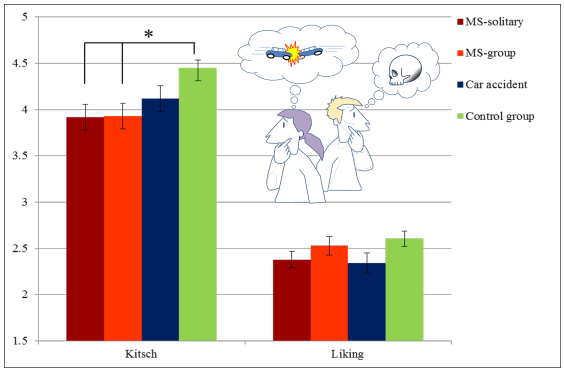


Figure 9: Error bars indicate ± 1 *SEM* (Ortlieb, Gebauer, & Carbon, 2016).

Both experiments have shortcomings future studies should avoid. Average kitsch ratings from the control group were generally high. The obtained effects for kitsch could therefore be ceiling effects. Future studies should include moderately kitschy (likable) stimuli to ensure that an increase in kitsch ratings is equally likely to show.

Failure to replicate classical TMT-related findings by a recent multi-lab study also casts doubt on the mortality salience paradigm (Klein et al., 2019). In the light of these methodological issues, it seems advisable to look for alternative experimental manipulations. Studies on belongingness and nostalgia, for instance, offer a variety of suitable research methods: The life-alone-prognosis

paradigm by Twenge et al. (2001), for example, is proposed to activate a need for belonging by giving "bogus feedback to participants that their personality type is likely to lead to social isolation and loneliness" (Loveland et al., 2010, p. 394), while autobiographical information could be used to activate either the participants' independent or interdependent self. In an experimental study on the effects of ostracism on nostalgic consumption Loveland et al. (2010) used a computer program called *Cyberball* (Williams & Jarvis, 2006) "that allows researchers to control the level to which participants are included (or excluded) in a computerized ball-tossing game by predetermining the percentage of tosses that will be thrown to a participant" (Loveland et al., 2010, p. 394).

Future studies might also consider theoretical sampling by targeting certain age groups with a particularly pronounced arousal tolerance (e.g., teenagers) or people who are confronted with critical life events that require adjustment and implicate a high need for security (e.g., expecting couples). In any case, theoretical sampling includes a balanced gender-ratio. For the sake of ecological validity, life-event based diary studies or autobiographical accounts of instances in which participants felt ostracized could be used to examine the impact of threats to belonging and aesthetic choices. From a theoretical perspective, it is also desirable to cross-check our findings by inducing a sense of achievement and relatedness rather than mortality concerns or threats to belonging, in which case one would expect to find a complementary response pattern.

Can't horror movies be kitschy too? Speaking of mortality salience and terror management one cannot help but think that gaudy Halloween decoration, ghost trains, and horror films challenge our current understanding of kitsch. Although drawing on a clear-cut depiction of clichés, these things are not meant "to curtain off death" (Kundera, 1984/1987, p. 253) and their purpose is not to reduce autonomic arousal. On the contrary, they exploit the cheap chills and thrills related to disgust, physical threat, and fear of death. It seems worthwhile to look at these things more closely under a TMT and a kitsch perspective.

4 Paradox #3: Back to the Future—Is Today's Kitsch an Anthropological Constant?

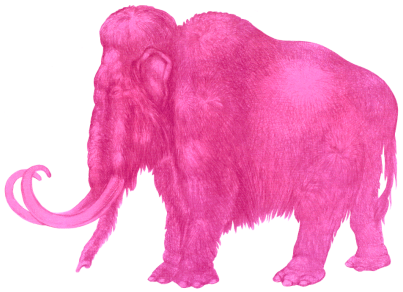


Figure 10: Kitsch, a relic of ancient adaptations? Drawing by the author.

Art critic Clement Greenberg (1939) once asked himself whether the gap between kitsch and avant-garde art in modern Western societies is a "part of the natural order of things [or] something entirely new, and particular to our age" (p. 3). This section is about the contradiction between kitsch as a universal thirst for flawless beauty deeply rooted in the human nature and the concept's rather recent appearance in Western modernity. With its psychobiological underpinnings, the model by Ortlieb and Carbon (2019b) suggests that kitsch is a case for Darwinian aesthetics. And yet, most scholars would probably agree with Călinescu (1987) that the aesthetic concept of kitsch has no "historical depth" (p. 237) whatsoever and "can hardly be used in connection with anything before the late eighteenth century or the early nineteenth century" (p. 237). Its recent appearance, however, does not preclude an evolutionary account. Like modern-day fast food, kitsch may very well be playing on ancient psychological adaptations. If kitsch has an evolutionary basis, one would expect to find some functional equivalent in premodern societies. What might prehistoric proto-kitsch look like? This question was raised after my talk at the *MVE-Conference on Evolutionary Aesthetics* in Berlin (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2016) and further elaborated in a book chapter (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2017, see cumulus A.6) as well as a peer-reviewed article (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, see cumulus A.4). Both publications challenge a basic assumption of empirical aesthetics, according to which "Modern art [...] is believed to be somehow representative for human aesthetic experience" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 15). In the following I shall make a case that evolutionary accounts of human aesthetic behavior apply more readily to kitsch than to avant-garde art and that kitsch is perhaps our missing link to pre- and postmodern aesthetics.

4.1 Too Good to Be True–Can Evolutionary Aesthetics Account for Kitsch?

> *"Kitsch has its source in the categorical agreement with being."*
>
> —Kundera, 1984/1987, p. 257

It was the striking cross-cultural uniformity in Komar and Melamid's *Most Wanted* paintings that caught the attention of evolutionary psychologists (Dutton, 2009): Overwhelmingly, people preferred realistic representations of tranquil landscapes with distant views, loose vegetation, a source of water, small groups of human beings, or country-typical animals, for the most part large mammals (Wypijewski, 1999). According to Dutton (2009), these are not only "the very elements we see repeated endlessly in both calendar art and in the design of public parks worldwide" (p. 697), but also the distinguishing features of the exceptionally food-rich environment where most of hominid evolution supposedly took place: the East African savannah (Orians, 1980). Especially the discovery that a preference for savannah-like landscapes is also found in certain indigenous people from the rainforest with little contact to Western calendar art (Falk & Balling, 2009) underscores the hypothesis that an innate preference for savannah-type habitats might have evolved in our Pleistocene ancestors to help them identify places that are safe and predictable with regard to possible threats (distant view, loose vegetation), food supplies (fish, game, low-hanging fruit[25]), and water (Orians, 1980; Orians & Heerwagen, 1992). Do we still carry a blueprint of this "lost paradise" in mind? Bischof's (2012) remarks on the adaptive value of an inborn sensibility for beauty suggest just that:

[25] According to evolutionary psychologists, there also is an innate preference for trees that branch out near the ground, offering easily accessible fruit or a safe retreat from the predators of the savannah.

> Where the world is beautiful, everything is in perfect order; hence there is no need to depart on a restless journey in search of alternatives. In its broadest and most comprehensive sense, this idea implicates that we have a sense of beauty, which does not draw on our intellectual resources, but is deeply rooted in our mind, possibly in parts that are called our 'biology'. Might we be able to sense instinctively where the world is 'in perfect order'? (p. 327, trans. by S.O.)[26]

According to Bischof (2012), it is at the sight of ideal environmental conditions, that everyone, independently from his or her intellectual resources, enjoys a spontaneous, positive affective response. Does this sound familiar? Without knowing it, he seems to be proposing an evolutionary account of kitsch here. There is a poetic German expression for the illusion of a perfectly unspoiled world (*Heile Welt*) which is closely associated with kitsch and well in line with Kundera's (1984/1987) assertion that "[k]itsch has its source in the categorical agreement with being" (p. 257). Is this perhaps the missing link between kitsch and evolutionary aesthetics? Does a general "itch for kitsch" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 234) reflect some ancient psychological adaptation telling us not only whom to date but also where to settle down and raise our offspring? Is there by any chance a primordial appetite for the "low-hanging fruit"? Intriguing as it may sound, this cannot be the answer to our question. In fact, it answers quite the wrong question for it defies the important distinction of natural and artificial beauty. As Dissanayake (1998) points out, the remarkable

> congruence of Komar and Melamid's findings with those of Darwinian aesthetics has undeniable interest, along with entertainment value. More importantly and seriously, however, considering the two endeavors side by side provides an opportunity to address what seems to me a mistaken assumption in both projects—namely, the implication that studies of preferences provide insight into human artmaking or aesthetic experiences, either today or in the Pleistocene. (p. 448)

This objection applies to any form of artificial beauty, including kitsch. After all, it is never the real sun set that is scorned as kitsch, but its overly saturated reproduction on the cover of a travel catalog (Kulka, 1996). Together with the polls of Melamid and Komar, environmental aesthetics only explains why untainted landscapes make gratifying kitsch subjects. However, they are by no means specific for kitsch. Savannah-like landscapes and large mammals are equally present in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* and Constable's *Wivenhoe Park*, in Pleistocene cave paintings, and mass-produced picture postcards (Fig. 11). However, apart from the choice of subject[27] environmental aesthetics cannot explain why humans put considerable effort and material resources into creating objects and symbolic representations without any direct contribution to survival. Why did our Pleistocene ancestors choose caves—dark, inaccessible, and potentially dangerous places—for their paintings, instead of simply enjoying nature's unspoiled beauty at their doorstep? What were the arts for in the first place? And is there any indication for prehistoric kitsch?

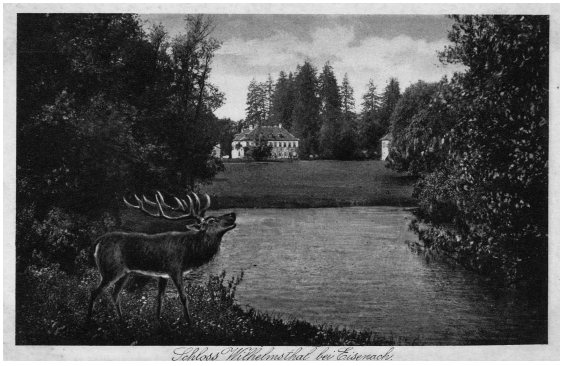


Figure 11: Postcard (19th century) showing Wilhelmsthal palace and gardens in Thuringia. Verlag Carl Jagemann.

[26] Original version: "Schön ist die Welt dort, wo sie in Ordnung ist, wo es nicht nottut, ruhelos aufzubrechen und nach Alternativen zu suchen. Das ist die weiteste Deutung des Begriffs, zugleich aber auch die anspruchsvollste: Sie unterstellt, dass wir für Schönheit einen Sinn haben, der nicht auf die Ressourcen unseres Intellekts zugreift, sondern tiefer in unserem Gemüt wurzelt, womöglich in dem, was man unsere 'Biologie' nennt. Sollten wir vielleicht instinktiv erahnen können wo die Welt 'in Ordnung' ist?" (Bischof, 2012, p. 327).

[27] This evolutionary account of landscape preferences has its limitations for it cannot explain why hostile environments such as deserts, glaciers, and snow-covered mountains also figure prominently in landscape painting.

4.2 Prehistoric Proto-Kitsch

"The very last, the topmost face on the totem pole, is that of kitsch."
—Benjamin, 1927/2002, p. 238

While innate landscape preferences are debatable, a universal human art-making impulse can hardly be denied. Though not every culture values all art forms to the same degree (Dutton, 2009), some kind of artistic behavior is found in every human culture known to us (Dissanayake, 1990). In combination with its capacity to "provide people with pleasure and emotions, often of an intense kind" (Dutton, 2009, p. 696), the urge to make and enjoy art strongly suggests adaptive relevance and begs for an evolutionary explanation (Dutton, 2009). Why is it advantageous for individuals and groups to spend time and resources on dancing, music-making or symbolic representations? How does carving a flute or a figurine from mammoth ivory (Fig. 12) contribute to survival or reproductive success?

Ultimate evolutionary explanations[28] try to point out how a certain disposition or cultural practice adds to the reproductive success either at the individual or the group level. An explanation on the individual level, for example, would stress that skillful artistic expression is a possibility for individuals to attract attention from the other sex and show off (an abundance of) reproductive resources. Standing out from the rest and attracting attention is also likely to enhance the individual's status within the group (Chance & Jolly, 1970).

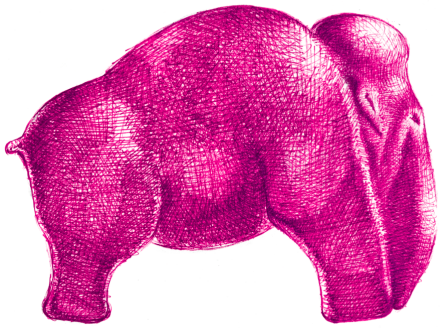


Figure 12: Ivory figurine of an infant mammoth (approx. 35,000 years old). Discovered in 2006 at the Vogelherd cave in Southern Germany. Drawing by the author.

However, according to Dissanayake (1998), the advantage of art-making lies mainly at the group level for it allows people to shape a strong sense of community beyond kinship ties: "Even though the arts allow individuals to display their reproductive resources, it is the arts' ability to hold social groups together by embodying and generating emotionally-felt meanings that has, I claim, been their ultimate evolutionary purpose" (p. 494). Findings from a recent study of hand stencils from different archaeological sites corroborate this hypothesis. The great variability of proportions and hand sizes suggests that early art-making was not exclusively in the hands of few particularly skilled individuals, but, to a certain extent, appears to have been a collective endeavor involving male and female individuals of all ages (Pettitt et al., 2014). Today, children's colorful handprints on nursery and classroom walls remind us that this ancient technique is still used to create a sense of togetherness and belonging. Likewise, companies' concerns with corporate design issues show a general awareness for the role of symbols and rituals in the formation of social identities.

Does this pattern of explanation also hold for the short-lived secessionist art movements with their carefully calculated acts of breaking taboos? After all, many artists who spearheaded European Modernism took great interest in prehistoric and tribal art.[29] However, this cannot disguise the fact that the agenda of a Picasso or Matisse was directly opposed to that of their premodern counterparts (Dissanayake, 1990). Instead of following the traditional ways, avant-garde artists joined forces against the normative past and those upholding its fixed criteria—the "Kitschiers" (Avenarius, 1920, p. 222). With novelty and change as the core values of Modern

[28] When it comes to evolutionary theorizing it is important to make a distinction between ultimate (or distal) and proximate explanations. This also has methodological implications: Proximate mechanisms can be observed directly, whereas the soundness of an ultimate argumentation must be inferred from mathematical models (Dutton, 2009).

[29] Gauguin and later Matisse traveled to Tahiti, in search for a truly archaic visual language; Münter and Kandinsky explored Bavarian folk art, Jawlensky's portraits owe much to Greco-Byzantine icons, and traditional African masks inspired Picasso's first Proto-Cubist works, including *Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon*.

art, the prehistoric was just one source of renewal among others, such as "the art of untrained peasants, of autodidact outsiders, of the insane, of mediums, of naive, of prisoners, of children, and of anonymous graffitists, as well as the lowly print iconography of popular culture" (Cardinal, 2004, p. 180). Moreover, style and formal experimentation became increasingly important to the point that content and faithful imitation were canceled altogether. In agreement with Benjamin (1927/2002) and others, Călinescu (1987) asserts that kitsch took over from premodern art once "[t]he enjoyable [was] deliberately excluded from the austere aesthetics of modernism" (p. 284). Adorno (1932/2002), for instance, accuses kitsch of preying on culturally "pre-established forms" (p. 501) and "second-hand experience" (p. 501), while Friedländer (1985/2007) even speaks of kitsch as a "run-down form of myth" (p. 55) and a distant "echo of sunken cultures" (p. 55) that continues to haunt today's ever more rational world. Accordingly, I think of modern-day kitsch as a "living fossil of premodern taste" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 18). Just like traditional art, it relies on a "reservoir of accumulated experience" (Greenberg, 1939, p. 40) and proves culturally successful because it helps establish and reinforce shared beliefs that "hold social groups together" (Dissanayake, 1998, p. 494).[30]

4.3 Contemporary Kitsch-Art

> *"Kitsch is art with a 100 per cent, absolute and instantaneous availability for consumption."*
>
> —Benjamin, 1927/2002, p. 395

By the end of the 1960s kitsch started shaking up the artworld as a playful element of Pop Art, while Modernism retired to the museum. In the postscript to his best-selling novel *The Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco (1980/1984) describes how the urge "to settle scores with the past" (p. 67) led the historic avant-garde into a dead end: Once poetry and painting had reached the blank page, the charred canvas respectively, and avant-garde music had progressed "from atonality to noise to absolute silence" (p. 67), there was no frontier left to conquer. Moreover, having "exhausted all its formal possibilities" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 277), a main goal of Modernism was still unattained: Namely, to bring the arts and everyday life back together. In fact, to most people the arts had never been more remote (Greenberg, 1939). Postmodernist[31] ideas emerged in response to this looming crisis of Modernism. They encompassed a willingness to resume dialogue with the past (including Modernism) and to fully revalue the enjoyable (especially kitsch) and thereby to reconcile high art with popular taste (Călinescu, 1987). Again, Komar and Melamid's *People's Choice* project makes a good example of this Postmodernist agenda with its irreverent tongue-in-cheek attitude:

> And now, I would say, conscious co-authorship is only fundamentally new direction in art since discovery of the abstract. Our interpretation of polls is our collaboration with various people of the world. It is collaboration with new dictator—Majority. [...] Recently we collaborated with an elephant, who, by the way, is abstract painter; and before that we worked with a realist dog. If modernism taps traditions of early civilization, why not go a step further and explore the prehuman (according to Darwin) animal past? (Komar, quoted from Wypijewski, 1999, p. 9)

Due to its backward orientation and "availability for consumption," (Benjamin, 1982/2002, p. 395), the aesthetic concept of kitsch quickly assumed a very prominent role in postmodern art. This interfusion of kitsch and art is embodied by the works of artist, model, and former Wall Street broker Jeff Koons. His 2013 *Balloon Venus* demonstrates how kitsch works as a perfect intermediary between the premodern (even the prehistoric!), the popular, and the commercial: Inspired by Neolithic female idols, Koons designed and commissioned five mirror-polished steel sculptures that look like twisted balloon figures along with a limited edition of miniature replica which served as packaging for champagne bottles. *Balloon Venus*

[30] Of course, this leaves the question unanswered what *avant-garde* art is for. For an evolutionary account of modern art see Junker (2015).
[31] Yet another art historical term that was originally a derogatory label.

also illustrates the context-sensitivity and self-awareness of postmodern aesthetics in that the viewer/consumer and his or her immediate surroundings are reflected by the object's shiny surface. In a way, Koon's works have fulfilled Modernism's promise of reuniting art and everyday life. "Today," former director of Tate Modern Chris Dercon remarked, "art is everywhere. Consumer goods like mobile phones, handbags, and cars are sold like art. [These things] are bought because they promise a special experience" (Sebastian & Dercon, 2014, p. 1, trans. S.O.). He continues to point out that contemporary art no longer intends to separate, shock, or polarize, but to provide guidance and relatedness: "in a world that is becoming more and more complex, which nobody can overview, people strive for a sense of belonging" (p. 1) and that before long "we will be searching for artworks which help us to remember. The old will become more important than the new" (p. 2). Without a clear-cut line separating them, kitsch and art have finally become moving targets. Depending on the time and context under consideration, aesthetic objects may take on different meanings and complementary evaluations:

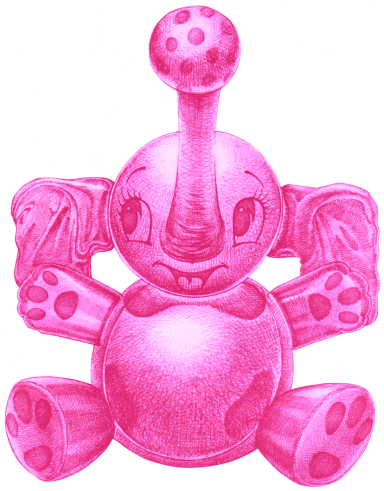


Figure 13: Koons (2003): *Elephant*. Mirror-polished steel. Drawing by the author.

> Whether a comic-style pin-up is perceived as garish kitsch or as an ironical artistic statement on 'Capitalist Realism' depends on the setting. This, again, has far-reaching implications for the empirical study of art perception. For the sake of standardization (as well as convenience), aesthetic research is mostly conducted in a lab setting [Carbon, 2020]. This procedure, of course, eliminates the effects of a museum context (Carbon, 2017). In the case of Pop Art such a disregard for situational aspects becomes a serious issue because artists aim for the friction that results from mundane objects (e.g., a bubblegum machine) in an art-related context. On a computer screen in a lab environment, such works will appear as plain kitsch since their aesthetically subversive effect only shows in a museum setting, where they appear strangely out of place. If art has become explicitly context-sensitive and socially reflective, shouldn't empirical aesthetics too become more responsive to situational aspects? (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, pp. 19–20)

Especially the ironical use of kitsch elements for artistic purposes has direct implications for the study of art perception (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c): How can empirical aesthetics deal with "Kitsch-Art" (Fuller, 1992), if it is unaware of the concept of kitsch? And, what kept us from dealing with these not so very recent developments in the first place?

5 Paradox #4: Disinterested Interest—Why Is Kitsch Ignored by Empirical Aesthetics?

In 2006 graffiti artist Banksy staged his art show *Barely Legal* in an old warehouse in downtown Los Angeles. The unusual venue was set up to look like an upper-class living room, with the artist's latest works in gilded, old-fashioned frames on a pink and gold wallpaper. An Indian elephant named Tai moved freely among these living room props. Tai was painted pink and gold to match the wallpaper.[32] The pink pachyderm, of course, became the star of art reviews and social media coverage, where discussion quickly centered on the question whether or not Banksy had violated animal welfare regulations. Intentionally or not, the elephant-in-residence draws the viewer's attention away from the artworks to a more serious issue many of us still prefer to ignore (animal welfare). In a very Postmodernist way, Banksy's art show also raises aesthetic problems that empirical research has so far dodged: The interaction of kitsch, art, and context. Why else should a street artist set up an exhibition of tacky oil paintings in a make-believe living room inside an industrial warehouse?

Although empirical aesthetics aims at a general understanding of what people like and why, surprisingly little attention has been paid to popular phenomena such as kitsch. Instead, research and theorizing is mainly dedicated to art perception with a strong emphasis on Western Modernism. This bias begs for explanation. Especially since empirical aesthetics was once established as a down-to-earth complement to highbrow aesthetics to bridge the gap between philosophical speculation and everyday experience (Fechner, 1866). Can we afford to exclude kitsch from our purview if we take the overall aim of our discipline seriously? Why is popular taste so very unpopular with aestheticians and what do we make of their strong proclivity to high art? These questions constitute the fourth kitsch-related paradox which has been addressed in two peer-reviewed publications—an article titled *Kitsch and Perception* (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, see cumulus A.4) and a commented translation of Fechner's (1866) treatise on the *Aesthetic Association Principle* [*Das Associationsprincip in der Aesthetik*] (Ortlieb et al., 2020, see cumulus A.1 & A.2)—by emphasizing the heuristic value of kitsch for empirical aesthetics and calling attention to a basic principle of Fechner's *Aesthetics from Below* [*Aesthetik von Unten*]. In a first step, I hope to show that today's most influential models of aesthetic liking still follow the line of highbrow aesthetics and how this precludes a comprehensive understanding not only of kitsch. In a second instance, I shall offer a tentative explanation of why aestheticians prefer to study art rather than kitsch, based on our functional model (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b).

5.1 On the Shoulders of Giants

> *"All our schemes of philosophical aesthetics appear to me as giants with feet of clay."*
>
> —Fechner, 1876, p. 4, trans. by S.O.[33]

The origins of empirical aesthetics go back to the very period when *kitsch* first came into use. Dissatisfied with the "fleeting and floating concepts" (Fechner, 1866, quoted from Ortlieb et al., 2020, p. 3) of philosophical aesthetics and its unchecked assertions, Gustav Theodor Fechner (1866; 1871; 1876) proposed an inductive approach to aesthetic problems. This *Aesthetics from Below* was not meant to replace philosophical aesthetics but to test its arguments empirically and to close the gulf between highbrowed speculation and everyday phenomena (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). In a remarkable yet widely unknown article about the *Aesthetic Association Principle* (AAP), Fechner (1866) challenged the highly influential Kantian idea of *disinterestedness*.[34] It stipulates that purely aesthetic judgements require a cool detached observer whose responses are based solely on an object's formal properties. In order to be purely aesthetic one's judgements

[32] For a virtual tour of Banksy's (2006) art show see: https://www.artrust.ch/banksy-barely-legal-among-irreverent-prints-and-painted-elephant/?lang=en

[33] Original version: "[S]o erscheinen mir alle unsre Systeme philosophischer Aesthetik Riesen mit thönernen Füssen" (Fechner, 1876, Vol. I, p. 4).

[34] According to Stolnitz (1961a; 1961b), it was Anthony Ashley Cooper the third Earl of Shaftesbury who introduced the idea of *disinterestedness* to aesthetics before it was "popularized" by Kant (1790/1951).

must not involve any private interest. As a proponent of associative memory, Fechner (1866) argues against this widely held idea that our sensory input always resonates with a network of personal recollections and cultural conventions and that any attempt to rid aesthetic evaluations of the observer's learning history is comparable to "stripping the flesh from the human body and taking the skeleton for its essential meaning" (Fechner, 1866, quoted from Ortlieb et al., 2020, p. 24). Based on a few everyday examples he makes a compelling case that associative factors are inseparable from direct ones and at least as important for aesthetic choices. Meanwhile, there is strong empirical support for Fechner's claim. Using different micro-genetic methods, studies on art perception (Augustin et al., 2008, 2011) and facial attractiveness (Carbon et al., 2018) show that content (or gender) is processed at an earlier stage than style (or attractiveness). In the light of these findings it seems that "our perceptual apparatus is itself governed by the popular principle of 'content over form'" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 16). This has far-reaching implications for it rules out the possibility of *purely* aesthetic judgments in a Kantian sense. At the same time, it makes kitsch a highly relevant research object for Fechner's *Aesthetics from Below*. What could possibly be more suitable for exploring both the role of content-related associations and the gap between highbrow aesthetics and everyday phenomena? And yet, compared to the vast body of research on art perception, empirical studies on kitsch are scarce (see for example Pelowski et al., 2020). As a result, today's most influential models of aesthetic liking are essentially models of art appreciation that cannot fully account for kitsch because they continue to privilege style at the expense of content-based object information and personal associations (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). The general *Model of Aesthetic Appreciation and Aesthetic Judgement* (Leder et al., 2004) excludes easy-to-process stimuli altogether by focusing on the "[c]ognitive challenges of both abstract art and other conceptual, complex and multidimensional stimuli" (p. 489), while the *Hedonic Fluency Model* (Reber et al., 2004) and the *Pleasure-Interest Model of Aesthetic Liking* (Graf & Landwehr, 2015) unanimously posit that beauty, pleasure, and interest "[lie] in the perceiver's processing experience" (Reber et al., 2004, p. 364) independently from any semantic content, let alone the viewer's associations (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). Although HFM and PIA account for the effortless recognizability and conventionality of kitsch, both models fail to see what makes popular aesthetics popular apart from the principle of immediacy (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c): Namely, the principle of content over form. After all, it is a subject matter with a strong emotional charge that distinguishes kitsch from other everyday things, say traffic signs, that are processed with equal ease (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c).

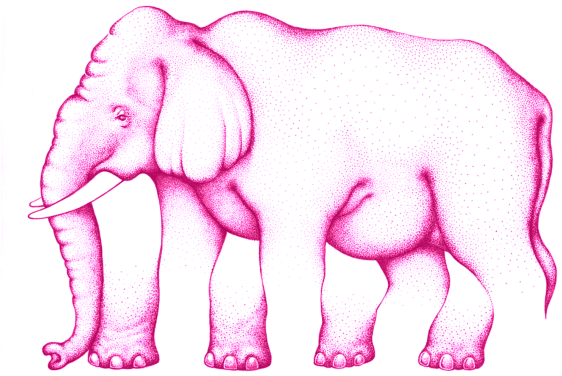


Figure 14: Shepard's (1990) *Impossible Elephant*. Original adapted by the author.

Where does this deeply rooted disregard for associations and semantic content come from? In the case of the PIA, "the influence of content-based object information on aesthetic preferences" (Graf & Landwehr, 2015, p. 406) is in fact ruled out with direct reference to Kant (1790/1951). Drawing on his concept of *disinterestedness*, Graf and Landwehr (2015) argue that "especially for stimuli with salient semantic content, an 'aesthetic' preference judgement may [...] be obscured by content-based stimulus information, making the preference judgement not exclusively aesthetic" (p. 406). What this integrative dual-process model takes for the common outline of aesthetic experience is really a line of demarcation between high art and the 'lowly' phenomena of popular taste that draw on a different set of rules (Fig. 14). Implicitly or explicitly, today's most prominent models still stand on the shoulders of those very same "giants with feet of clay" (Fechner, 1876, p. 4) that once gave reason to the establishment of an *Aesthetics from Below* (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). There are, I believe, at least two reasons for this misconception of Fechner's research program: Firstly, his seminal writings on aesthetics are still untranslated and therefore widely unknown (Ortlieb et al., 2020). Secondly, a disregard for content and the asso-

ciation principle is mainly attributable to an unbalanced preoccupation with art for art's sake (e.g., abstract painting); that is, with research objects that are not necessarily representative for what most people enjoy (Wypijewski, 1999) but that embody the ideas of disinterestedness or free beauty like no other (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). The former issue was addressed by providing a first full-text translation of Fechner's 1866 article on the *Aesthetic Association Principle* (Ortlieb et al., 2020). In the following, I shall briefly outline its main propositions and show that this basic principle readily applies to kitsch, before turning to the second issue which is of some theoretical relevance.

5.2 Article: Fechner's Aesthetic Association Principle

> *"By the association principle, I mean a principle, that is already known and recognized in psychology for its significance and its scope, but which is hitherto hardly appreciated in aesthetics."*
>
> —Fechner, 1876, p. 86, trans. by S.O.

Why is the sight of an orange more enjoyable than that of a perfectly round but otherwise identical wooden ball? What makes red cheeks more attractive than red noses? Why are medieval cathedrals more awe-inspiring than the largest of modern-day train stations? In his article on the *Aesthetic Association Principle* (AAP) Fechner (1866) raises these questions to show the importance of associations for aesthetic choices. If the more irregular orange is preferred to the perfect wooden sphere, attractiveness of the color red depends on its context, and sublimity of a large building is linked to its function, he argues, then aesthetic judgements cannot be based solely on an object's regularity, color, or proportion. In all three cases it is not "the excellence of the object" (Cooper, 1711, quoted from Stolnitz, 1961a, p. 132), but the observer's learned associations that make the difference. From this Fechner draws two conclusions. Firstly, that aesthetic judgements are "shaped by the observer's learning history (associative factors) rather than by an object's formal properties (direct factors)" (Ortlieb et al., 2020, p. 1), and secondly, that both sources of appreciation are inextricable because the appeal of an orange, for example, always

> lies in the totality of what it is and does, and especially in what it is and does to us personally. Since only shape and colour are immediately present to our senses, memory adds the rest, not as single details, but as an overall impression: It amalgamates with the sensual impression, thus enriching it, illustrating it, so to speak; we might briefly call this the mental colour adjoining to the sensory colour or the associated impression that unites with the direct one. (Fechner, 1866, quoted from Ortlieb, Kügel, & Carbon, 2020, p. 5)

How does Fechner's AAP relate to kitsch? For me, the AAP lies at the very heart of a backward-oriented aesthetics as is epitomized by kitsch (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). Typical kitsch objects, like keepsakes or souvenirs, tend to clutter up our homes and offices because they bring back good memories (Norman, 2004). They literally draw their "life-blood, so to speak, from [a] reservoir of accumulated experience" (Greenberg, 1939, p. 10). In other words, we cherish them primarily for the *mental color* they have acquired through previous exposure and evaluative conditioning. Thus, the AAP pinpoints what today's fluency-based and dual-process models are deliberately excluding: Readily accessible and emotionally rich associations. Apart from the AAP, Fechner's 1866 article mentions another basic principle that describes the sort of mutual amplification of associative and direct factors we expect to find in kitsch. This so-called *Princip der ästhetischen Hülfe* [sic] *oder Steigerung* [Aesthetic Principle of Help or Amplification] was later defined by Fechner (1876) as

> a conjuncture of multiple, alone rather ineffective but altogether consistent pleasure-related conditions [that] yields a hedonic result that is greater, often far greater, than

[34] Original text: "Unter Associationsprincip verstehe ich ein Princip [sic], dessen Wichtigkeit und Tragweite in der Psychologie längst bekannt und anerkannt, in der Aesthetik aber bisher im Ganzen wenig gewürdigt ist" (Fechner, 1876, p. 86).

> the sum of their individual effects; it is possibly through such a confluence that they exceed the hedonic threshold and yield aesthetic pleasure in the first place. (p. 51, trans. by S.O.)[35]

Obviously, the success formula for kitsch (see Chapter 2.4) also makes a textbook example of this principle for it neatly illustrates "how two rather insignificant variables—an immediately identifiable and perfectly conventional manner of representation—multiply the impact of an emotionally charged subject matter" (Ortlieb et al., 2020, p. 16). Like no other aesthetic concept, kitsch unites the principles of popular aesthetics—immediacy and primacy of content—with those of Fechner's *Aesthetics from Below*. At the same time, it is opposed to the idea of avant-garde art that has been shaped by an *Aesthetics from Above*. Both as a pars pro toto for popular taste and a borderline phenomenon of avant-garde art, the kitsch concept, I think, is of great heuristic value for empirical aesthetics (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). This brings us back to the initial question why kitsch has so far been ignored. Is it due to a general neglect of associations and semantic content? Or is the ignorance of Fechner's AAP and the inaccessibility of his seminal writings on aesthetics to blame? At least for the model by Leder and colleagues (2004), the HFM (Reber et al., 2004), and the PIA (Graf & Landwehr, 2015) the latter can be ruled out. In all three cases the first author is a native German speaker and Fechner's (1876) still untranslated *Vorschule der Aesthetik* [Propaedeutics of Aesthetics] is referenced.[36] In the following I shall propose an alternative explanation based on the PIA and the *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b).

5.3 Avant-Garde and Science—It's a Match!

> *"Pure science is more like art for art's sake than anything else."*
> —Martindale, 1990, p. 351

The French word *Impressioniste* was coined around the same time foundations for empirical aesthetics were laid. Very much like the German *Kitsch*, it served as a derogatory label when it first appeared on April 25th 1874 in a satirical art review by Louis Leroy.[37] According to Greenberg (1939), "[i]t was no accident that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically—and geographically, too—with the first bold development of scientific revolutionary thought in Europe" (p. 4). Although Komar and Melamid introduced market research methods to visual art (Wypijewski, 1999), their *Scientific Guide to Art* is certainly not the first example of art and science going hand in hand. With reference to Constable, who saw his paintings of the English countryside as experiments in the service of natural philosophy, Gombrich (1960) points out that

> [i]n the Western tradition, painting has indeed been pursued as a science. All the works of this tradition that we see displayed in our great collections apply discoveries that are the result of ceaseless experimentation. If this sounds a little paradoxical, it is only because much of the knowledge gained by these experiments in the past has become common property today. It can be taught and applied with the same ease with which we use the laws of the pendulum in a grandfather clock, though it needed a Galileo to discover and a Huygens to apply them. (p. 34)

Likewise, Constable's plein air approach to landscape painting once inspired the Barbizon painters and British impressionists. Yet this did not prevent his pictures of Suffolk's savannah-like landscape from becoming epitomes of *Merry Old England* that stir strong nostalgic feelings and serve

[35] Original text: "Aus dem widerspruchslosen Zusammentreffen von Lustbedingungen, die für sich wenig leisten, geht ein grösseres, oft viel grösseres Lustresultat hervor, als dem Lustwerthe [*sic*] der einzelnen Bedingungen für sich entspricht, ein grösseres, als dass es als Summe der Einzelwirkungen erklärt werden könnte; ja es kann selbst durch ein Zusammentreffen dieser Art ein positives Lustergebniss [*sic*] erzielt, die Schwelle der Lust überstiegen werden" (Fechner, 1876, p. 51).

[36] In the case of Leder et al. (2004) it seems that Fechner's (1876) *Vorschule der Aesthetik* has been confused with an essay titled *Zur experimentalen Aesthetik* [On experimental aesthetics] from 1871.

[37] Unlike with kitsch, etymology of the term *Impressioniste* is known. It was inspired by the title of Monet's painting *Impression, soleil levant* that was on display at an art show in 1874 which Leroy then called *Exposition des Impressionistes* (Wikimedia Foundation, 2022a).

as first-rate blueprints for kitsch. These parallel dynamics of artistic innovation and scientific discovery have been described not only in terms of habituation but also of intergenerational conflict. According to Deutsch (1997), there is

> [a] widely held stereotype of the scientific process [made popular by Thomas S. Kuhn] of the idealistic young innovator pitted against the old fogies of the scientific 'establishment'. The fogies, hidebound by the comfortable orthodoxy of which they have made themselves both defenders and prisoners, are enraged by any challenge to it. They behave irrationally. They refuse to listen to criticism, engage in argument or accept evidence, and they try to suppress the innovator's ideas. (p. 321)

One only has to substitute the "idealistic innovator" for the "young aspiring artist" and the "old fogies" for the well-established "Kitschiers" (Avenarius, 1920, p. 222) to end up at "the myth of a self-conscious and heroic avant-garde [struggeling] against the oppressive influence of tradition" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 95). Irrespective of whether Kuhn's (1962) account of the scientific process is valid or not, studies on personality traits of artists and scientists suggest that they share not only a high motivation to learn and explore, but also an ingrained aversion to authority. In his meta-analysis Feist (1998) draws a "clear portrait of the creative personality in science and art" (p. 299), according to which "[c]reative people [from both domains] are more autonomous, introverted, open to new experiences, norm-doubting, self-confident, self-accepting, driven, ambitious, dominant, hostile, and impulsive" (p. 299) than non-scientists and non-artists.[38] How might this overlap between the moods of scientific enquiry and artistic expression affect the research agenda of empirical aesthetics? According to the *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b), aesthetic choices are linked to notions of self-efficacy and autonomy via regulatory focus. Like the PIA, it further posits that people who are driven by curiosity and aspirations (promotion goals) will prefer difficult-to-process aesthetic objects over well-tried familiar ones. If empirical aesthetics, like other scientific disciplines, mainly attracts people with a promotion mindset, this would explain why research interest is focused on the "[c]ognitive challenges of both abstract art and other conceptual, complex and multidimensional stimuli" (Leder et al., 2004, p. 489) at the expense of something so seemingly simple and insignificant as kitsch (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). These speculations prompt a new research question: Can self-efficacy scales and MPZM scores possibly help us distinguish between colleagues who prefer to study the cognitive mastery of high art and those who take a hedonistic fluency approach? Anyhow, all of this hardly explains why everyone is readily submitting to the authority of 18$^{\text{th}}$ century aestheticians, whose unchecked premises gave reason to an *Aesthetics from Below* in the first place (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019a). Before discussing these issues at greater length, I shall return to kitsch and the roots of empirical aesthetics by summarizing the fourth peer-reviewed paper and a related conference contribution.

[38] The same variables also discriminate between more creative and less creative scientists (Feist, 1998).

5.4 Article: Back to the Roots—Towards a New Aesthetics from Below

Despite its prominent role in contemporary art and against Fechner's (1866, 1876) demand that an *Aesthetics from Below* should include the study of everyday phenomena, kitsch has garnered hardly any attention in empirical aesthetics. Up to now, this area of research has been mainly interested in art perception. As a result, general models of aesthetic liking either expel easy-to-process aesthetic objects from their purview (Leder et al., 2004) or fail to see the difference between garden gnomes and traffic cones by suggesting that "beauty [lies solely] in the perceiver's processing experience" (Reber et al., 2004, p. 364). These shortcomings of present-day theorizing in empirical aesthetics were indexed by a fourth peer-reviewed article titled *Kitsch and Perception* (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, see cumulus A.4). It was published in a journal specialized on *Art & Perception* and subject of a corresponding poster presentation at the *Visual Science of Art Conference* (VSAC) which took place in Leuven in 2019 (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019a, see cumulus A.7). In *Kitsch and Perception* I make a case that

> the study of kitsch is of considerable heuristic value for both empirical aesthetics and art perception. As a descriptive term, kitsch makes a perfect example of hedonic fluency. In fact, the frequently invoked opposition of kitsch and art reflects two types of aesthetic experience that can be reliably distinguished in terms of processing dynamics: a disfluent one that promises new insights but requires cognitive elaboration (art), and a fluent one that consists of an immediate, unreflective emotional response but leaves us with what we already know (kitsch). Yet as a derogatory word, kitsch draws our attention to a general disregard for effortless emotional gratification in modern Western aesthetics that can be traced back to eighteenth-century Rationalism. Despite all efforts of Pop Art to embrace kitsch and to question normative values in art, current models of aesthetic liking—including fluency-based ones—still adhere to an elitist notion of Modern art that privileges style over content and thereby excludes what is essential not only for popular taste and postmodern art but also for premodern artistic production: emotionally rich content. Revisiting Fechner's (1876) criticism of highbrow aesthetics we propose a new aesthetic from below (Aesthetik von Unten) that goes beyond processing characteristics by taking content- and context-related information into account. (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p.1)

Several thoughts from previous chapters have been first developed in this paper. They amount to the conclusion that much basic research and theorizing in empirical aesthetics have been dedicated to an art historical singularity that stands apart from what most people prefer to see in visual art (Wypijewski, 1999). In effect, the habitual application of avant-garde criteria to popular taste can be made responsible for the four kitsch-related paradoxes that form the starting point of this thesis. This said, I think it is time to summarize its main findings, to place them in a larger context, and to point out future directions for a *New Aesthetics from Below*.

6 General Discussion

This doctoral thesis has explored the psychological underpinnings of *kitsch* and clarified its relevance for empirical aesthetics. From a wealth of previous writings on kitsch I learned that kitsch is a rather recent appearance with a long history that is rejected for its vast popularity. Once scorned as a cultural "rear-guard" (Greenberg, 1939, p. 9), it is anything but a phase-out model. Upon entering art theory in the first half of the 20$^{\text{th}}$ century, *kitsch* has become a German loanword in many modern languages and a key concept of contemporary art. Despite its international career, the "problem of kitsch" (Broch, 1969, p. 49) is glaringly absent in empirical aesthetics. Entering this maze of contradictions, I asked myself: What is kitsch (for)? Why does it spawn so very different responses? And is there a perspective in empirical aesthetics broad enough to capture the pink elephant in the room? Before closing I would like to recap and discuss my answers to these questions in light of more recent findings and competing explanations.

What is kitsch? Following Kulka's (1996) definition I have argued that kitsch classification requires an instantly identifiable subject matter with a positive emotional charge that evokes only standard associations due to a highly conventional rendering. If we think of these three criteria as continuous variables they allow for different degrees of kitschiness (Kulka, 1996) and various operationalizations (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). Most importantly, it makes them sensitive to change; that is, to explicit and implicit learning. Today, reprints and digital reproductions of visual art are ubiquitous. While they enhance perceived value of everyday commodities (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008), overexposure to Van Gogh's sunflowers on coffee mugs and paper napkins will gradually turn them into prime kitsch motifs (Benjamin, 1982/2002). Yet, according to Kulka's definition, some visual artworks are more likely to suffer this fate than others: Figurative paintings more than abstract ones and works with a cheerful subject more than such with troubling content. Predictive validity of Kulka's criteria was recently tested by Maier, Ortlieb, and Carbon (2021) using the *Repeated Evaluation Technique* (RET; Carbon & Leder, 2005) which allows for a stepwise familiarization through repeated explicit elaboration and evaluation of novel stimuli, in this case widely unknown paintings by famous artists. Results show that initial ratings of conventionality and positive affect make the best predictors for subsequent kitsch judgements (Maier et al., 2021). In an everyday context familiarization occurs implicitly rather than explicitly. Most of the time we are too busy to pore over the sunflowers adorning our mouse pad. So how does *implicit* learning affect attitudes toward (kitsch) paintings? Previous studies examined whether implicit learning increases or decreases liking for canonical Impressionist artworks (Cutting, 2003) and saccharine landscapes by the self-designated *Painter of Light*$^{\text{TM}}$ Thomas Kinkade (Meskin et al., 2013). While Meskin et al. (2013) found that "mere exposure to bad art makes people like it less" (p. 140), Cutting's (2003) naturalistic experiment showed that liking of a particular Impressionist painting is positively related to the frequency of its appearance in textbooks on art history. Together, these studies strongly "suggest that exposure itself is sensitive to value" (Meskin et al., 2013, p. 140). How do these findings relate to kitsch? A first comparison of implicit associations and ratings suggests that implicit and explicit attitudes towards kitsch may dissociate (Reiter et al., 2015). Moderately high negative correlations between kitsch and liking ratings in the cross-cultural study also add to the impression of a rather ambivalent relationship (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017). Future studies on kitsch should thus include implicit behavioral measures in addition to self-reports (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). Since validity of implicit association tests is controversial (Azar, 2008), a speeded naming-task could be employed with latencies and name agreement as indicators for identifiability and conventionality (see for example Snodgrass & Vanderwart, 1980). In addition, valence and intensity of affective responses could be measured via facial expressions (see for example Weth et al., 2015).

The focus of this thesis was on *sweet* kitsch in the *visual* domain, especially painting and everyday objects. It remains unclear if Kulka's (1996) kitsch criteria also apply to schmaltzy music (muzak), daily soaps, gaudy fashion, neo-classicist architecture, or pulp literature. Despite its current limitation to the audio-visual domain, *kitsch* is frequently used to designate something overly *touching* (*anrührend*). It is also a *taste judgement* (*Geschmacksurteil*) and distinctions between *sweet*, *bittersweet*, and *sour* kitsch are made (Glaser, 1920; Giesz, 1975; Gelfert, 2000). Cross-modal correspondences aside, bittersweet and sour kitsch deserve closer examination for they challenge my basic assumption that only perfectly pleasant content will work for kitsch.

Indeed, mixed emotions such as nostalgia or the experience of *being moved* (Menninghaus et al., 2015) share close ties with kitsch although they are characterized by "the simultaneous expression of happiness and sadness" (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 305), or at least accompanied by "physiological markers of negative affect" (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017, p. 1229). Thus, our present definition still excludes a wide range of poignant kitsch themes like sad clowns, weeping children, orphans at their mother's grave or the *Unknown Woman of the Seine*. Even an extension to mixed emotions cannot explain the vast popularity of deeply disturbing images such as Munch's iconic work *The Scream* that inspired teen slasher movies and emoticons used to express intensive fear (e.g., 😱). Quite incidentally, the mortality salience study has raised the issue of cheap chills from horror films, ghost trains, and Halloween decoration (see Chapter 3.7). Regarding these questions our findings are still inconclusive: On the one hand, content with a positive valence makes a very good predictor for kitsch judgements (Maier et al., 2021). On the other hand, our cross-cultural study showed that kitsch can be perceived as downright threatening (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017). Extant kitsch typologies add further support to the idea that just about any subject will work for kitsch as long as it is emotionally charged (Glaser, 1920; Giesz, 1975; Gelfert, 2000). Given the importance of semantic content for its popular success, a canvas of kitsch along with standardized visual stimuli for different types of kitsch would be desirable (BaRoCK stimulus database, Ortlieb et al., 2022). Yet choice of content is not the only success factor for kitsch.

Why is kitsch so popular? With reference to the *Hedonic Fluency Model* (HFM; Reber et al., 2004), I have made a case that kitsch provides a pleasurable processing experience in addition to its emotionally rich subject matter (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). At the same time, identifiability and conventionality are necessary preconditions for the affect-laden content to take full effect. Kulka's (1996) kitsch criteria thus translate into a formula for success (see Chapter 2.4) uniting the two principles of popular taste—primacy of content and instant accessibility (Bourdieu, 1979/1984)—with Fechner's (1866) *Aesthetic Principle of Help or Amplification*. This formula for success can exert a very fruitful influence on various issues from basic research on aesthetic problems. As was pointed out before, it is still a moot question whether processing fluency is pleasurable per se or sensitive to value. Flashbacks related to traumatic events, for example, cast doubt on a general fluency-positivity link. Accordingly, the *Fluency Amplification Model* (FAM) by Albrecht and Carbon (2014) posits that processing fluency will amplify both positive and negative affect. A comparison of responses to sweet and sour kitsch might shed light on the intricate relationship between processing fluency and affect. Finally, kitsch draws our attention to an aspect of popular taste that is not equally valued in highbrow aesthetics and that current empirical research prefers to ignore: Namely, the role of content and the viewer's learning history.

Back to the roots. In the two preceding chapters I have made a case that kitsch connects us with the past in multiple ways. The mutually enhancing relationship between direct and associative factors, for example, recalls another long-forgotten principle of Fechner's *Aesthetics from Below* (Ortlieb et al., 2020). The *Aesthetic Association Principle* establishes close ties between kitsch and nostalgia (see Chapter 3.2). Apart from the rare cases in which processing ease and affect arise solely from an inborn releasing mechanism (e.g., baby scheme), kitsch borrows its emotional charge from the viewer's learning history. When Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) surveyed 82 families from Chicago (315 interviewees) about their most cherished material possessions, they found that "the bulk of significations carried by visual 'works of art' is not connected to aesthetic values and experiences but refers to the immediate life history of their owners: reminding them of relatives and friends or of past events" (p. 63).[39] Like travel souvenirs, these pictures serve as "aids to memory" (Norman, 2004, p. 47). In Fechner's words, they are treasured for their *mental* rather than their *sensory color* (Ortlieb et al., 2020). But kitsch reminds us not only of our own past or the origins of empirical aesthetics. It takes us even further back. Perhaps to the dawn of mankind when art-making was invented to create "intensely emotional and memorable experiences" (Dissanayake, 1990, p. 164) that hold social groups together. Nowadays, this is more the task of wedding planners, interior decorators, and

[39] The visual art category was the second most often mentioned class of objects (after furniture). It comprised "[a]ny two-dimensional representation other than a photograph [...] ranging from an original Picasso to the cheapest reproduction of the *Last Supper* [as well as] paintings made by children or other family members" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 63).

entertainers than artists (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2017). If this was the original purpose of the arts then modern-day kitsch can be regarded as "a living fossil of premodern taste" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c, p. 18) and a missing link to the Pleistocene knick-knacks from Swabian Jura (see Chapter 4.2). Can this bold claim be tested empirically? By the logic of Darwinian aesthetics, cross-cultural research is a viable way to disprove it (Dutton, 2009). For if kitsch is really of "vital significance" (Menninghaus, 2009, p. 39), some functional equivalent should be detectable across different cultures, past and present. This, of course, presupposes a thorough understanding of what kitsch does for us and why. Although our comparison of three contemporary European cultures revealed a positive link between self-transcendence and kitsch appreciation, it became equally evident that kitsch/kič was used mainly as a derogatory term (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017). From the viewpoint of evolutionary aesthetics this prompts another relevant question: What is wrong with something easily accessible and enjoyable that shores up communal feelings?

Why is kitsch a term of abuse? As values like personal "success and achievement, power, importance of the self and self-expression" (Dissanayake, 1990, p. 167) gradually gained importance in Western societies over the last five hundred years (Pauen & Welzer, 2016), the arts emancipated from their ritualistic context (Gombrich, 1960) to become a "private predilection, separated from primary lived experience" (Dissanayake, 1990, p. 183). As a result, modern art is no longer concerned with sugar-coating the traditional ways but with "criticism of tradition" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 3). Modern-day artists are expected to leave the beaten path and engage in ceaseless experimentation to find their unique artistic voice. Enlightenment-era concepts such as *disinterestedness* (Stolnitz, 1961a) and *free beauty* (Kant, 1790/1951) have prepared the ground for the autonomous artwork. Art for art's sake and the idea of art perception as a cool detached mode of cognition

> interfere with the immediacy of experience that urgently quickens the heart or tearducts. What moved traditional man is seen by his successor to be 'corny'. Standards of appreciation rise: one is suspicious of and learns to 'cut through' other similar 'old-fashioned' melodramatic emotional conventions in literature, drama, or cinema. (Dissanayake, 1990, pp. 182-183)

If this is true, today's art-educated viewers should experience two contradictory responses to kitsch. The *Pleasure-Interest Model of Aesthetic Liking* (PIA; Graf & Landwehr, 2015) claims just that: In the case of easy-to-process stimuli viewers who search for new and difficult aesthetic problems an initial gut-level response ("How cute!") is followed by a cognitively mediated one ("How corny!"). The latter is less favorable because the object fails to arouse lasting interest (Graf & Landwehr, 2015). A first comparison of IAT-measures and kitsch ratings suggests that neutral implicit and negative explicit attitudes toward kitsch may in fact coexist (Reiter et al., 2015). Another pioneering study by Pelowski et al. (2020) investigated how art expertise affects the micro-genetic time course of responses to *kitsch art*. Expert and novice viewers saw digital reproductions of landscape paintings by John Constable (figurative art) and Thomas Kinkade (kitsch art) as well as abstract paintings by Gerhard Richter (abstract art). Depending on the experimental condition, visual stimuli were presented for 100 ms, 500 ms, 6,000 ms, or 12,000 ms. While the latter two conditions (6,000 and 12,000 ms) allowed for conscious reflection and top-down modulation, the former ones only permitted the extraction of low-level features (100 ms), the identification of style and content respectively (500 ms). By comparing groups and exposure times, the authors hoped to find "a point of inflection—a 'kitsch switch'—whereby especially the experts come to dislike the kitsch art" (Pelowski et al., 2020, p. 1). And indeed, art experts "show[ed] lower liking ratings of kitsch paintings at 500 and 6,000 ms when compared to 100 ms [as well as] an opposite pattern of higher appraisals for abstract paintings at the same longer durations" (p. 1). This *kitsch switch* is well in line with the PIA's dual-process hierarchy. Its limitation to expert viewers also shows how individual differences in previous knowledge (i.e., culture capital) produce patterns of contradictory taste judgements that can be used to rate and pigeonhole people in status hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). But is taste really set like plaster? There is considerable indication that aesthetic judgements are instead constantly changing (Martindale, 1990; Carbon, 2011; Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). For instance: Under the impression of mortality concerns abstract paintings yield more negative reactions (Landau et al., 2006), while decorative objects are judged less kitschy (Ortlieb, Gebauer, & Carbon, 2016).

Figure 15: Reeder (1995): *Panel of Experts*. Acrylic on canvas. Own photo.

More generally, there is evidence that whenever "mood signals a safe environment, familiarity loses its glow" (de Vries et al., 2010, p. 325), while appreciation of cutting-edge design increases (Carbon et al., 2013). Studies on movie and music preferences further show that appreciation of horror films and mellow music underlie long-term age-related fluctuations (Blothner, 2004; Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2013). Altogether, these findings raise the question why novelty and familiarity are valued to different degrees in different contexts and at different times and stages of life.

In the mood for kitsch? In individualistic Western societies an increasing tension between innovation and tradition gave rise to the concepts of avant-garde art and kitsch that square with two opposing streams of research in empirical aesthetics (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b): One centering on novelty and arousal, the other on familiarity and processing ease (see Chapter 3.1). Both the PIA and the *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* champion a dual-process perspective to account for this divide. In addition, the latter includes content-based stimulus information and personal associations. Moreover, it assumes that changes in aesthetic liking are synchronized with interpersonal attraction and repulsion:

> Whenever we feel safe and self-sufficient, an appetence for arousal (curiosity) is likely to arise that increases our interest in unfamiliar conspecifics as well as innovative, cognitively challenging aesthetic stimuli (art). By contrast, when we feel vulnerable and dependent, a longing for safety and relatedness (nostalgia) attracts us not only to familiar and trustworthy individuals but also to conventional aesthetic stimuli charged with positive emotions (kitsch). (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 1)

The functional model further stipulates that self-efficacy expectations vary from context to context and that one's autonomy claim will differ accordingly. Since autonomy claim modulates needs for security and arousal these dynamics effect temporary changes in regulatory focus. Depending on one's current state the model either predicts an inclination for familiar easy-to-process aesthetic stimuli (*prevention focus*) or new and potentially insightful aesthetic problems (*promotion focus*).

Though it unites *Regulatory Focus Theory* (Higgins, 1998) with a systems theory of social motivation (Zurich Model; Bischof, 1975; 1993; 2001), the functional model itself does not qualify as a systems theory (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). So far it only specifies initial conditions for basic aesthetic choices. Without feedback loops it does not allow for a dynamic modeling of the aesthetic experience that follows and how it retro-acts on the viewer. It therefore remains unclear how the actual kitsch experience unfolds and how it affects the viewer's feeling of security or state of arousal (Is it calming down or cheering up? When and why do people experience guilty pleasure?). Besides, it does not provide for the possibility that curiosity (or nostalgia) may also be triggered by external stimulation, e.g. the unexpected encounter with an extraordinarily ambiguous (or highly familiar) aesthetic object (Muth & Carbon, 2022). And yet, the present model offers testable hypotheses, some of which were addressed in a correlative study and two experiments (see Chapters 3.5 to 3.7).

By and large, the correlative findings support the idea of a functional connection between social needs and aesthetic evaluations. Kitsch stimuli were indeed more popular with people who valued security over arousal (Vlasova et al., 2019). Moreover,

> individuals with little confidence in their own abilities, who are particularly intolerant of uncertainty and highly vigilant about threatening information (*sensitizers*) [rated] kitsch more likable than people who overestimate their abilities and habitually avoid or deny potentially threatening information to evade strong affect (*repressors*). (Fischer et al., 2019, p. 1)

Though the overall trends go into the predicted direction, they need to be qualified. For one, the obtained trends were curvi-linear rather than linear. Secondly, like in the case of our cross-cultural study (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017), results differed between men and women. Regarding the MPZM-scores, the big picture only holds true for female participants (Vlasova et al., 2019), while effects regarding anxiety-related coping-styles were more pronounced in the male subsample (Fischer et al., 2019). What do we make of these differences?

Gender differences. According to basic research on picture processing, women tend to respond more intensely to visual stimuli with troubling content than men (Bradley et al., 2001; Gard & Kring, 2007; Spalek et al., 2015). A corresponding pattern of gender-related differences is found in studies on art perception, where a preference for paintings with non-threatening content is more frequently observed in female than in male participants (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2010; Ortlieb, Fischer, & Carbon, 2016; Ortlieb et al., 2019). In our cross-cultural study, women also showed a stronger preference for familiar and non-threatening visual stimuli than men (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017). How do models of aesthetic liking account for such gender-related differences? Unlike Burke (1757/1990), whose notions of the sublime and beautiful are steeped in 18$^{\text{th}}$ century gender stereotypes (Freeman, 1995; Ortlieb, Fischer, & Carbon, 2016; Ortlieb et al., 2019), the authors of the HFM or the PIA do not touch upon this subject at all. From a dual-process perspective on aesthetics that excludes content-related stimulus information there is indeed no compelling reason to do so unless one assumes a functional relationship between aesthetic liking and social motivation—one of the broad themes in research on gender differences (Eagly & Wood, 1991; Feingold, 1994; Bischof-Köhler, 2006). According to Wiggins and Broughton (1985), masculinity and femininity scales are basically measures of dominance and nurturance. There is some indication that needs for safety and relatedness tend to be higher in females than in males, whereas the opposite seems to be the case for arousal appetence and autonomy claim (Gubler & Bischof, 1993). By the logic of our model, this has direct implications for aesthetic preferences: On average, individuals who identify with the female gender stereotype should be more susceptible to kitsch than people who describe themselves in accordance with the male stereotype (Ortlieb, Moosmann, et al., 2017). Is there any support for this claim? In their interview study of three generations from 82 US-families, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that nostalgic tendencies were indeed more pronounced in women of the parent generation than in men of the same age group:

> The female answer pattern is closer to that of the grandparents, whereas the male, resembles that of the children. A similar trend obtains for the meanings that the [most valued] objects evoke. Women give reasons referring to Memories, Associations, and Immediate Family significantly more often than men do. (p. 106)

A more recent study explored possible connections between gender roles and preferences for artworks with troubling content (Ortlieb, Moosmann, et al., 2017). Digital reproductions of thirty photo-realistic charcoal drawings by Robert Longo served as stimuli. Of these pictures, 15 showed threatening (e.g., sharks and guns), and 15 non-threatening motifs (e.g., children's faces and roses). A total of 70 participants (32 men and 38 women) rated each image in terms of threateningness, safety, and liking prior to answering the *Personal Attributes Questionnaire* (GEPAQ; Runge et al., 1981) which includes a bipolar scale for masculinity and femininity (M-F) as well as scales for a positive and negative attributes that are widely regarded as typically masculine (M+/M-) or feminine (F+/F-). Results showed that appreciation of artworks with troubling content was negatively correlated with scores on the bipolar GEPAQ-scale for masculinity and femininity (Ortlieb, Moosmann, et al., 2017). More specifically, appreciation of

threatening content tended to be higher among participants who identified with a positive male stereotype (M+) by describing themselves as highly *resilient*, *self-confident* or even *dominant*, while the opposite was the case for participants who described themselves as highly *vulnerable* and *dependent* in accordance with a negative female stereotype (F-).

It is a unique asset of the functional model that it touches upon the thorny subject of gender differences in aesthetic preferences (Ortlieb, Moosmann, et al., 2017; Ortlieb et al., 2019). So far this account is limited to a binary concept of gender. Hence, it fails to make clear predictions for individuals or traditional gender concepts that stand outside the Western dichotomy of male and female. Apart from this shortcoming, literature on gender differences in personality paints a different picture that seems to disprove our model's claims: Across different cultures women tend to score higher than men in openness to aesthetic experiences and feelings (Costa et al., 2001; Weisberg et al., 2011). This is backed by observations that women engage more often in art-related activities than men (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2010). Unfortunately, these interesting findings are confounded with a general problem of connectivity. In the validation process of the MPZM-scales Schönbrodt et al. (2009) found that the main variables of the Zurich Model have little in common with standard personality scales such as the Big Five. Since our functional model is widely based on the Zurich Model, its compatibility with trait constructs from personality research that figure prominently in empirical aesthetics (e.g., Openness) is still a moot question. Of course, this is a disadvantage for it "makes it difficult to relate findings on aesthetic preferences and personality to the model we have outlined" (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 15). Nevertheless, the functional model makes further testable predictions for individual and cultural differences that merit closer examination.

Art expertise. The role of art expertise deserves to be studied more closely. From our model's perspective, it should have a moderating effect on gender differences and intra-individual dynamics. I would expect that art expertise levels gender-related differences and that art experts respond more consistently than novices. In other words: Among novices both dynamics and gender differences should be more pronounced than among art experts. For if self-efficacy and autonomy claim are context-dependent, art expertise makes us more self-confident in an art-related setting. After all, experts can account for their evaluations based on well-tried aesthetic criteria and previous experience (Fig. 15). Consequently, their kitsch judgements should be more pronounced and more consistent than those of novices responding to aesthetic stimuli on the spur of the moment. Changes in context and regulatory focus are thus more likely to affect aesthetic evaluations of novices who, by the way, make the majority of individuals studied by empirical aesthetics. Based on a dual-process perspective, the PIA's distinction of pleasure-based and interest-related aesthetic judgements should apply to any viewer independently of his or her cultural background. In contrast, Dissanayake (1990) maintains that aesthetic *interest* is an invention of 18th century European philosophy and that art-educated Westerners stand apart from the rest of mankind what aesthetic sensibility is concerned. What was aesthetic appreciation like before "the appreciation of art has become a special mode of cognition" (p. 42)? This strongly suggests cultural differences apart from those within modern Western societies (Greenberg, 1939).

Cultural differences. If aesthetic liking is indeed related to the twin motives of autonomy and belonging, one would expect to find different preference patterns in highly individualistic societies and more traditional ones that place special emphasis on social cohesion. According to our model, *kitsch* is used to express an aversion to conventional harmony. Hence, one would expect people who value strong social bonds over individual autonomy to respond more favorably to kitsch stimuli. In Japan, for example, the derogatory word *kitsch* did not take root in everyday language. A recent cross-cultural study showed that visual stimuli from the *Bamberg Repository of Contemporary Kitsch* (BaRoCK) spawned more positive responses in psychology students from Japan compared to a German sample (Ortlieb et al., 2021). In its present form, our functional model does not account for such cultural differences. Unlike Nittono's (2016) two-layer model of *kawaii* (engl. cute, lovable, or adorable), it does not separate an immediate hard-wired response to cuteness from its evaluation on a cultural level.

Regulatory focus. Martindale's (1990) theory of artistic change is clearly inspired by a Modernist notion of art for it centers on the arousal appetence of the promotion focused individual. The exact opposite is the case with *Terror Management Theory* (TMT; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). Building on Dissanayake's (1990) premise that the arts advertise established cultural belief-systems that provide death-transcending meaning, TMT predicts that people will prefer unequivocal signs of their own cultural worldview over unfamiliar and ambiguous ones whenever mortality is salient (Landau et al., 2010). Research on TMT suggests that reminders of death amplify both positive and negative attitudes toward aesthetic objects. On the one hand, death awareness yields more negative reactions to abstract paintings that defy meaningful interpretation (Landau et al., 2006). On the other hand, it stimulates a taste for vintage products that establish a symbolic connection with a bygone era (Sarial-Abi et al., 2017). How do people respond to kitsch under the impression of mortality concerns? Does kitsch become more likable as an unequivocal sign of widely shared cultural beliefs or is it further devaluated? Though TMT is all about security and self-esteem, it fails to make clear predictions regarding kitsch. Two experiments were conducted to address this issue (see Chapter 3.7). In both cases only mortality salience had a detectable effect on aesthetic evaluations: Kitsch objects were rated less kitschy, but not more likable (Ortlieb, Gebauer, & Carbon, 2016). Based on the functional model, one would also expect to see some minor decrease for the other experimental conditions (car accident and dental pain). That lower kitsch ratings were obtained only for the mortality salience conditions is well in line with observations from other studies on TMT which show that "belief-supporting responses are *uniquely* correlated with reminders of death [and that] reminders of other negative events, such as social rejection, failing an exam, intense pain, or losing a limb in a car accident, do not produce the same effects as being reminded of one's own mortality" (Solomon et al., 2015, p. 14). However, this cannot disguise the fact that liking ratings were unaffected by mortality concerns and that this is equally inconsistent with both models. From a dual attitude perspective, one might argue that the observed "changes in kitsch judgements reflect the initial stage of an implicit adaptation process which precedes changes in acceptance and liking" (Ortlieb, Gebauer, & Carbon, 2016, p. 1). Especially since a recent multi-lab study failed to replicate the mortality salience effect (Klein et al., 2019), it seems prudent to wait for further experimental results before jumping to conclusions. A large body of research on nostalgia and nostalgic consumption could serve as a source of inspiration not only in the search for alternative experimental manipulations.

Nostalgia. Sedikides et al. (2008) define *nostalgia* as "a sentimental longing for one's past" (p. 305). Apart from being a prominent kitsch theme (Ortlieb et al., 2022), nostalgic feelings seem to be closely related to a need for affiliation. They are most often triggered by negative affect, especially loneliness (Wildschut et al., 2008). People who score high on nostalgic tendencies prefer social activities (Batcho, 1998) and song lyrics with other-directed themes (Batcho, 2007). Although nostalgia is typically described as a mixed emotion, it ultimately "generates positive affect, elevates self-esteem, fosters social connectedness, and alleviates existential threat" (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 307). From our model's viewpoint, nostalgia is a state of mind that should make people more susceptible to kitsch (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). In a series of experiments Loveland et al. (2010) found that preferences for nostalgic products increased after a need to belong had been activated. Existing studies on belongingness and nostalgia thus corroborate the idea of a functional connection between affiliative needs and aesthetic liking. Studies on nostalgia can stimulate future experimental research on the functional model by providing alternative methods to the mortality salience paradigm. For instance, they show how different levels of ostracism can be simulated with a computerized ball-tossing game called *Cyberball* (Williams & Jarvis, 2006) and how autobiographical information can be used to activate either interdependent or independent self-concepts (Derrick et al., 2009). These methods are better suited to test our model than the mortality-salience paradigm since they allow for manipulations into *two* directions. After all, it will be essential to show that increases and decreases in affiliative needs have complementary effects on aesthetic appreciation.

Future research should also include within-subject designs and the analysis of longitudinal data. For instance, an app-based diary study could be used to assess aesthetic choices, life events, and daily hassles over a period of several weeks or months. Resting on the Zurich Model, the functional model makes several testable predictions for individual and cultural differences

in aesthetic liking that merit closer examination. Apart from daily-diary studies and lab experiments, it would be instructive to look at changes in consumer behavior. According to the functional model, any major event of social significance that affects people's notion of security must surely impact sales figures of, say, garden gnomes and cuckoo clocks. During the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, most countries introduced restrictions of social contacts that constitute a natural experiment regarding our model's claims: In a highly uncertain and potentially threatening situation people were urged to avoid close contact with others. Did social distancing increase people's affiliative needs and their demand for kitsch? Unmet needs for attachment may have contributed to a sharp increase in pet ownership during the pandemic (Wrede, 2021). However, they did not produce a consistent pattern in terms of kitsch consumption: While the demand for garden gnomes surged as predicted (Hardy, 2022), cuckoo clock sales went down by over 50 percent (Der Spiegel, 2021). Future research might also consider theoretical sampling. In the case of our model, this starts with a balanced gender ratio. Besides, certain cultural concepts (e.g., romantic love) and life stages (e.g., puberty) also deserve closer attention due to their theoretical significance. Like nostalgia, romantic love is a major kitsch theme with a direct reference to social motivation. Unlike nostalgia, however, it seems to defy our model's basic dichotomy of intimacy and autonomy.

The 'problem' of romantic love. According to the Zurich Model, "attachment (both to the parents and to the adult partner) is assigned to the security system, [while] sexuality is strongly connected to the autonomy system. Therefore, both functions (and subjective feelings) should not be mixed up in a superordinate concept like 'love'" (Schönbrodt et al., 2009, p. 142). Nevertheless, popular culture is obsessed with the idea of romantic love for its sheer inexhaustibility regarding drama and affection (Dissanayake, 2015). From its earliest examples in 12th century courtly love literature to present-day telenovelas, stories of romantic love usually combine a longing for attachment with assertiveness as the lover's autonomy claim is expressed by a wished-for, but unattainable intimate partnership with the beloved (Reddy, 2012). With its functional separation of the arousal and the security system, the Zurich Model uncovers the underlying conflict that makes the concept of romantic love so rife with strong affect and hence so productive of sweet and bittersweet kitsch. With its exceptionally strong ties to attachment behavior, the kitsch theme of romantic love also draws our attention to a large body of research on intimate adult affiliation (love). According to Lee's (1977; 1988) color wheel theory of love, *Eros* (romantic love) is only one out of six basic love styles with many subtle shadings in between. More recent accounts claim that romantic love itself, like kitsch, may take on many different forms (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006). If aesthetic and affiliative choices are as closely aligned as our model claims, appreciation of kitsch should be lower in couples whose current love style emphasizes playfulness and arousal (*Ludus*) than in couples whose intimate relationship is mainly founded on security needs (*Pragma*). Though Csikszentmihalyi (1996) already disproved the "generally held notion that people who achieve creative eminence are unusually promiscuous and fickle in their human ties" (p. 192), it would be worthwhile to explore possible correspondences between aesthetic preferences, MPZM-scores, and attitudes toward love (Hendrick et al., 1998). However, before adolescents engage in their first romantic relationships the system of social distance regulation must undergo a fundamental shift in priorities (Bischof, 2001). From security appetence to arousal appetence.

When exotic becomes erotic. A young person's autonomy claim usually awakens together with sexual interest. Biologically, Bischof (2001) argues, this arrangement has proved adaptive because it reliably prevents incestuous relationships. From the perspective of our functional model, this makes young adolescents a highly interesting target group. For if social motivation and aesthetic liking are functionally connected, the sharp increase in appetence for arousal (aversion for familiarity) during puberty should affect affiliative and aesthetic choices in a likewise manner. And indeed,

> [puberty] is not only a stage of profound physical transformation, but also of social reorientation and aesthetic reevaluation: choice of music, clothing, and hairstyle are no longer aligned with their parents' aesthetic standards. Quite the contrary, as curiosity for the exciting outside world—especially peers and idols—intensifies, the familiar sphere of the parental home becomes increasingly 'dull,' 'stuffy,' and 'kitschy' (Stemmle, 1931; Dettmar & Küpper, 2007). (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b, p. 2)

Furthermore, the term kitsch arises repeatedly in the context of intergenerational conflict (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b). It was first used by young aspiring artists to make fun of their well-established predecessors (Avenarius, 1920) and in the Serbian subsample of our cross-cultural survey ambiguity of the parental image was positively correlated with kitsch ratings (Ortlieb, Stojilović, et al., 2017). Two large cross-sectional studies by Bonneville-Roussy et al. (2013) show that preferences for music that "is perceived as aggressive, tense, and antiestablishment [...] were highest among young adolescents and then declined through middle adulthood" (p. 714). Of course, this is only anecdotal evidence. Regarding nostalgia and nostalgic consumption a complementary increase should be observable from early adolescence to middle adulthood. Given their great theoretical significance future research should focus on the dynamics of aesthetic and affiliative choices in young adolescents and the role of intergenerational conflict. Other aspects of the family system like birth order and sibling rivalry might also merit closer examination.

Born rebels. Sulloway's (1996) family-niche model of personality contends that "birth-order is a fundamental influence on an individual's disposition to accept or reject authority, whether it be familial, educational, political, social, or scientific" (Feist, 2006, p. 164). By this account, firstborns and only children tend to be more self-confident and assertive but less openminded and creative than laterborns (Sulloway, 1996). Why not extend this conjecture to openness to aesthetics? If likeliness to embrace new ideas and to attain creative distinction increases with birth rank, one would surely expect to find younger siblings overrepresented among avant-garde artists and art aficionados, while smug firstborns and only children should make perfect "Kitschiers" (Avenarius, 1920, p. 222) and kitsch lovers. To test this hypothesis would be instructive for it goes directly against our functional model's claims. But before studying effects of intergenerational conflict or sibling rivalry, it must be clarified that self-efficacy, autonomy claim, and authority may arise from different sources.

Power, prestige, and achievement. According to philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1882/2001), it takes "individuals—powerful, influential, and without any sense of shame—who announce and tyrannically enforce [...] the judgment of their taste and disgust" (p. 56) to change common taste. This sums up a central statement of our model: Openness to new aesthetic experiences presupposes a strong sense of self-efficacy and autonomy. Self-confidence, however, does not necessarily imply the desire to exert social influence. Before we can put Sulloway's and Nietzsche's competing claims to a test our model needs some refinement. Above all, it must distinguish between three variables that are currently lumped together under the label of self-efficacy:

> The first component, the power motive, [...] is basically dealing with hierarchy and dominance issues. In contrast to this dominance hierarchy, the second component—the prestige motive—deals with a prestige hierarchy. [...] The third component of the autonomy system is the achievement motive. This is a specifically human motivation, and though it seems to be quite distinct from the basal autonomy claim in dominance hierarchies, both share the feelings of competence, autonomy, and self-efficacy and belong therefore to the autonomy system. (Schönbrodt et al., 2009, p. 142)

To unravel self-efficacy into these three components would improve the model's connectivity with theories that revolve around aesthetics and power relations (e.g., Burke, 1757/1990; Nietzsche, 1882/2001; Bourdieu, 1979/1984). Besides, some of the above questions could then be addressed empirically based on the corresponding MPZM-scales for power, prestige, and achievement (Schönbrodt et al., 2009). For instance: If masculinity scales are essentially measures of dominance (Wiggins & Broughton, 1985), the power motive is potentially a hidden variable behind gender differences in social motivation and aesthetic liking (Ortlieb et al., 2019). And regarding a shared aversion against authority among creative people from the arts and sciences (Feist, 1998), it might also help us understand aestheticians' lively interest in the subversive qualities of modern art. Most likely, all these issues are inseparable since the classical canon of aesthetics, on which much of today's theorizing is still based, has been shaped by male upper-class Europeans of the Enlightenment era (Freeman, 1995; Ortlieb, Fischer, & Carbon, 2016; Ortlieb et al., 2019). This brings us right back to the agenda of empirical aesthetics where highbrow doctrines continue to hold sway.

Towards a New Aesthetics from Below. The love affair between Modern art and science can be traced back to 18th century Rationalism, when artistic value was detached from semantic content and formal experimentation became an end in itself (Greenberg, 1939; Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Dissanayake, 1990). Contrary to Fechner's (1866) vision of an *Aesthetics from Below*, empirical aesthetics has readily adopted these highbrow ideas (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). As a result, even fluency-based models are imbued with a "refusal of the *facile* which is the basis of all 'pure' aesthetics" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 486). Regardless of findings which strongly suggest that content is processed prior to style (Augustin et al., 2008, 2011) and that personal associations may predict aesthetic liking very accurately (Janković, 2015), the principles of *style over content* and *disinterestedness* are still pervasive in empirical aesthetics (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). And not only there. Kulka (1996), who has provided us with the most useful definition, also excludes kitsch from the purview of aesthetics on the grounds that its effects are "totally parasitic" (p. 78) on the affective charge of its subject matter. At least he concedes that the study of kitsch is of some avail for aesthetics as a borderline phenomenon of art (Kulka, 1996). In empirical aesthetics a similar predilection for art perception has led to the curious situation that the most unpopular and austere notion of art—art for art's sake—serves as the touchstone for general theories of aesthetic liking, while tremendously popular phenomena such as kitsch are exiled into a kind of scientific no-man's land (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019c). Yet if empirical aesthetics is about what people like and why, I think it is high time to extend our scope to calendar art and personalized coffee mugs.

7 Conclusions and Future Directions

What is the bottom line of this study on kitsch? Does it leave us with what we already know? On the contrary, I think it has thoroughly shaken some certainties. Not so much in terms of kitsch, but with regard to some basic tenets of empirical aesthetics. As a prototype of popular taste, a playful element of contemporary art, and a possible relic of premodern aesthetic sensibility, the example of kitsch has revealed a blind spot of truly elephantine proportions in this area of research. At the same time, it has unearthed two long-forgotten principles of Fechner's (1866) *Aesthetics from Below* that can help us close this gap. As long as they refuse to take semantic content and personal associations into account, even fluency-based models of aesthetic liking are missing out what makes garden gnomes and cuckoo clocks special. This dependency of kitsch on certain themes and subjects with a strong affective charge reminds us that popular aesthetics and avant-garde art must not be judged by the same criteria and that the four kitsch paradoxes result from the misleading attempt to do so. To account for these differences the *Functional Model of Kitsch and Art* (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b) unites a dual-process perspective on aesthetics with content-related stimulus information and social distance regulation. Apart from turning empirical aesthetics from its head back onto its feet, both the aesthetic concept of kitsch and the functional model can be of considerable heuristic value for a *New Aesthetics from Below*: Like few other aesthetic concepts, kitsch qualifies for the study of art expertise, dual attitudes, and cognitive dissonance. Apart from sweet kitsch in the visual domain, its bittersweet, sour, literary, and musical forms deserve closer examination. In tandem with the functional model, the aesthetic concept of kitsch invites not only a more dynamic view on aesthetics. It also stimulates a variety of research questions concerning habitual coping behavior, love styles, and value orientations. Though it needs some further refinement, the model is unique in that it allows for testable deductions about age, gender, and culture differences in aesthetic liking. Finally, it might even shed light on the question why art attracts more research interest than kitsch.

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A.1 Fechner (1866): The Aesthetic Association Principle

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Fechner (1866): The Aesthetic Association Principle—A Commented Translation

Stefan A. Ortlieb
Department of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg; Bamberg Graduate School of Affective and Cognitive Sciences; Research Group EPÆG (Ergonomie, Psychologische Ästhetik, Gestalt), Bamberg, Germany

Werner A. Kügel
Nürnberg, Germany

Claus-Christian Carbon
Department of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg; Bamberg Graduate School of Affective and Cognitive Sciences; Research Group EPÆG (Ergonomie, Psychologische Ästhetik, Gestalt), Bamberg, Germany

Abstract
Most of the groundbreaking works of Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887), who paved the way for modern experimental psychology, psychophysics, and empirical aesthetics, are so far only available in German. With the first full text translation of Fechner's article on *The Aesthetic Association Principle* (*Das Associationsprincip in der Aesthetik*), we want to fill in one of the blank spots in the reception of his Aesthetics from Below (Aesthetik von Unten). In his 1866 article, Fechner devises a fundamental principle that accounts for the role of associations in the formation of aesthetic preferences. Based on concrete everyday examples and thought experiments, he demonstrates how aesthetic choices are largely shaped by the observer's learning history (associative factors) rather than by an object's formal properties (direct factors). Fechner's Aesthetic Association Principle has lost nothing of its initial relevance as the role of content and personal meaning is still grossly underrated in theory and practice of empirical aesthetics today.

Corresponding author:
Stefan A. Ortlieb, Department of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg, Markusplatz 3, D-96047 Bamberg, Bavaria, Germany.
Email: stefan.ortlieb@uni-bamberg.de

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Introductory Notes on Fechner's Aesthetic Association Principle

> By the association principle, I mean a principle, that is already known and recognized in psychology for its significance and its scope, but which is hitherto hardly appreciated in aesthetics. (Fechner, 1876, quoted from Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019, p. 14)

Philosopher and physicist Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887) is famous for pioneering psychophysics and experimental aesthetics, although much of his influential work is still untranslated and therefore inaccessible to many scholars from both disciplines (Scheerer, 1987). On occasion of the Fechner Year 1987, Scheerer showed that this lack of English translations has led to some serious misconceptions and blind spots in the reception of Fechner's psychophysics. While the *Elements of Psychophysics* (Fechner, 1860/1966) is at least partly available in English, *none* of Fechner's equally groundbreaking works on aesthetics have so far been translated into English.[1] This is perhaps one of the reasons why his Aesthetics from Below (Aesthetik von Unten) is still widely mistaken for an application of psychophysics, rather than a full-fledged research programme in its own right. It, of course, entails the application of certain psychophysical elements like the threshold concept (Aesthetische Schwelle), the method of choice (Methode der Wahl), the method of production (Methode der Herstellung), and the method of use (Methode der Verwendung) to aesthetic problems such as Zeising's (1856) golden ratio hypothesis. Yet already in Fechner's early writings on aesthetics, one encounters a principle which has no direct counterpart among the elements of psychophysics: The Aesthetic Association Principle. By providing the first English translation of Fechner's (1866) article on *The Aesthetic Association Principle* (*Das Associationsprincip in der Aesthetik*), we hope to raise awareness for an essential aspect of his Aesthetics from Below that has been overlooked: namely, the eminent role of personal recollection, Zeitgeist, and cultural background in the formation of aesthetic experiences. We decided to translate Fechner's 1866 article because it offers a comprehensive summary of his thoughts on this important matter to him: Based on a public lecture at the Leipziger Kunstverein of the same year, the text was first published in the Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst and later incorporated into the first volume of his *Propaedeutics of Aesthetics* (*Vorschule der Aesthetik*).[2]

Why do people prefer the sight of an orange—after all, an unevenly surfaced and imperfectly shaped object—to that of a perfectly round varnished wooden ball of the same size and colour? Why are red cheeks and lips more attractive than red noses and hands? If the aesthetic appeal of an artwork lies mainly in its formal aspects, should we not value an equally colourful but perfectly symmetrical carpet pattern over Rafael's Sistine Madonna? It takes but a few casual examples and simple thought experiments for Fechner to demonstrate that aesthetic choices are largely shaped by the observer's learning history (associative factors) rather than by an object's size, shape and colour (direct factors). Moreover, since formal properties, such as the colour red, may themselves be evocative of strong associations, both direct and associative factors must be regarded as inextricably intertwined. According to Fechner, it takes an inductive approach to fully grasp the importance of the association

principle for aesthetics, which is easily overlooked by the Aesthetics from Above with its "more or less fleeting or floating concepts, that do not capture the individual with the appropriate precision due to their generality" (p. 8). Nevertheless, 150 years after these ideas were first published, they seem to have lost nothing of their relevance as the role of content is still underestimated by today's paramount theories of empirical aesthetics (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019). Apart from being highly topical, Fechner's piercing and evocative line of thoughts impresses with its unsurpassed *Prägnanz*.

Editorial Conventions

Fechner's original style of writing is not always easy to read, let alone to translate—beside the fact that his works were mostly published in the German Fraktur typeface which is difficult to read even for German readers of the 21st century. For the sake of conceptual clarity and legibility, we chose a mode of translation that is true to Fechner's ideas and the overall tone of the text but does not always follow his rather laborious diction. Special attention was paid to a consistent use of terminology. The German "Anschauung", for example, may translate as "basic sensation", "perception" or even "strong opinion", depending on the degree of cognitive elaboration suggested by the context; and when Fechner used the word "Gestalt" he would not have the core concept of Gestalt psychology in mind, which was not yet established at the time, but its meaning in everyday language that translates as "figure" or "shape". Complete author names and terms of conceptual importance that defy direct translation are given in square brackets: "dependent beauty [*anhängende Schönheit*]" (p. 9). Moreover, page breaks of the original publication are marked in the text by vertical lines with suspended page numbers indicating the beginning of the first complete sentence on a new page. The only footnote from the original publication—a comment by the journal's editor—is the only one marked with an asterisk, while the translators' explanatory notes are consecutively numbered. All references and figures have been added by the translators and were not included in the original article. Note: For the interested reader, we provide a digitally remastered facsimile of the original German publication along with the translation.

Fechner (1866): The Aesthetic Association Principle*—The Translation[3]

Aesthetics, like many other fields of enquiry, can be treated in two fundamentally different ways, which I will distinguish in the following simply as the Aesthetics from Above [*Aesthetik von Oben*] and the Aesthetics from Below [*Aesthetik von Unten*]. The former works deductively (from general terms to individual ones), the latter inductively (the other way around). The Aesthetics from Above establishes a framework of ideas made up from topmost-ranking aspects, subordinating aesthetic experience to this framework.|[180] The Aesthetics from Below devises aesthetics entirely from empirical data based on aesthetic experience. The Aesthetics from Above is principally and ultimately concerned with concepts and ideas of beauty, art, style, their position within the overall system of most general concepts, their relationship with truth, with goodness, with the divine—particularly with divine ideas and divine creativity. From the pure heights of these general ideas, one then descends to the level of simple empirical singularities, of specific beauty bound by time and space, evaluating every individual phenomenon with respect to the general. The Aesthetics from Below sets out from singular experiences of what pleases and displeases. From there, it builds up all concepts and laws that have their place in aesthetics, attempting to develop them with regard to the laws of what is and what ought to be—and to these laws pleasure must always be subordinated. By

generalizing more and more, we will arrive at a system of the most general concepts and laws. Whereas the Aesthetics from Above focuses on concepts and ideas, with all explanations being merely based on subordinations to categories of concepts or ideas; the Aesthetics from Below focuses on empirical laws, and all explanations are mainly based on subordinations to such.

Each of the two ways has its advantages and disadvantages. Right from the beginning, the Aesthetics from Above provides us with the goal, that the Aesthetics from Below ultimately hopes to attain, namely, the most general view. However, starting from the highest aspect makes it difficult to clarify the causes of pleasure and displeasure in particular cases. Albeit this should also be of our concern, the Aesthetics from Above only offers more or less fleeting or floating concepts that do not capture the individual with the appropriate precision due to their generality. Moreover, this way presupposes a correct starting point only a perfect philosophical or theological system can provide, both of which we still do not have. There is only a great number of attempts at such systems, and accordingly many attempts at tuning aesthetics to these systems, all of them hardly convincing, merely pandering to the urge of having ideas of the highest order and perpetuating this urge. In contrast, the Aesthetics from Below provides clear guidance with regard to the causes of pleasure and displeasure in each individual and concrete case but has difficulties to reach general aspects and ideas; one easily gets stuck halfway, so to speak. Nevertheless, by starting from scratch the Aesthetics from Below does not presuppose anything disputable. It is in this way that we may slowly but surely increase our knowledge about aesthetics.

In short, the relationship between the Aesthetics from Above and the Aesthetics from Below resembles the one between natural philosophy and physics. Just as natural philosophy was there before physics, the Aesthetics from Above preceded the Aesthetics from Below and, up to now, the former remains the beaten path, while the latter has not yet been pursued with determination, consistency, and method. Just like physics will never render natural philosophy obsolete, the Aesthetics from Below will never replace the Aesthetics from Above. Yet I think we are well advised to take the path from below to establish a solid basis for the otherwise unfounded and speculative assumptions of the Aesthetics from Above.

Alas, no more generalities about the two ways. It was only to say as much as to show that the principle to be addressed is both a matter and a test of the Aesthetics from Below. This will also explain why the Aesthetics from Below has received so little attention in the field of aesthetics so far.|[181] According to the nature of the Aesthetics from Below, it cannot take general aspects as its starting point; thus I will start with the simplest possible examples that allow for the explanation and verification of what I call the Aesthetic Association Principle.

I do not present something entirely new; who could possibly claim novelty in such matters! In psychology, above all, the importance of the association principle has been known and recognised for a long time; even if this is not the case in aesthetics, this principle has not failed to receive some acclaim even there. Occasionally, it is applied by today's scientifically oriented aesthetics, yet without any notion of its fundamental and far-reaching importance. It was even misinterpreted by [Immanuel] Kant[4] in his doctrine of dependent beauty [*anhängende Schönheit*]. Among the more recent scholars, only [Hans Christian] Ørsted[5] has paid more attention to it—comprehensible since he came to aesthetics as an observer—but of course without promoting this principle to its most developed state or to delve into its specifications; and who among the paramount aestheticians attends to Ørsted? Among the older especially Home [David Hume?][6] should be mentioned. But let us start with examples!

The most beautiful of all fruits,—or, if one finds the term beauty too exalted—the most pleasurable is probably the orange. In former times, this was even more the case than today,

where it is publicly displayed on sales counters everywhere and to be found on almost every lunch table for dessert: Because every stimulus is dulled by its frequency.[7] But I still lively recall, which, so to speak, romantic charm the sight of this fruit used to have for me and even today one is unlikely to prefer any other with respect to its appearance.

So, what does the pleasure of its appearance consist of? Naturally, everyone immediately thinks of its pure golden colour and its perfectly round shape. And certainly, much lies herein; and maybe one thinks that all its beauty is encompassed herein. Yes, where else should it be? If readers were to ask this, it proves that they are not aware of my principle. For should anything else come to their mind, it would certainly fall under the principle. One may thus think for a moment whether the appeal of this fruit's appearance truly lies entirely in its beautiful golden colour and perfect roundness!

I say no; for why is it that a yellow varnished wooden ball is not as pleasing as an orange, if we know that it is a ball of wood, not an orange. Indeed, although the orange has a rough skin and roughness is generally less appreciated than smoothness as can be shown by comparing different wooden balls—we still prefer the rough orange to the varnished wooden ball.

This judgement cannot be derived from a favourable form and colour alone, as both objects are about the same regarding both dimensions, so, if at all, the wooden ball should be preferred. A preference for the orange can only be due to the fact that we identify it as an orange, not as a ball of wood, and thereby add the meaning of an orange to its mere shape and colour. Of course, the meaning of an orange is also partly in its shape and colour but not exclusively. It rather lies in the totality of what it is and does, and especially in what it is and does to us personally. Since only shape and colour are immediately present to our senses, memory adds the rest, not as single details, but as an overall impression: It amalgamates with the sensual impression, thus enriching it, illustrating it, so to speak; we might briefly call this the mental colour adjoining to the sensory colour or the associated impression that unites with the direct one.|[182] This is the reason why the orange appears more beautiful than the yellow ball of wood.

Does someone who perceives an orange, merely see a round yellow patch? With the physical eye, yes; mentally, however, we see an object of delightful smell, refreshing taste, grown on a beautiful tree, in a beautiful country, under a warm sky; we see, so to speak, the whole of Italy along with it, the country, which has always attracted our romantic longing; the mental colour is composed of all these recollections, by which the sensual one is glazed and thus embellished; whereas someone perceiving a yellow wooden ball will only sense dry wood behind the round yellow patch that has been shaped in a turner's workshop and coloured by a varnisher. In both cases, the impression resulting from memory is immediately associated with sensation, completely merged with it, determining its character so essentially, as if it were part of the pure sensation itself. Only through such comparisons we realise that this is not the case.

Another example:

Why do we find a red cheek on a juvenile face so much more attractive than a pale one? Is it the beauty, the delight of the colour red itself? Undeniably, this has a part in it. A fresh red pleases the eye more than grey or colour errors. We can prove this even by experience. The Englishman [William] Cheselden[8] did surgery on a person born blind, who had never seen colours and who therefore had not yet acquired any colour-related associations. He declared that scarlet red was the most beautiful of all colours; among the others, he liked the liveliest best, whereas black evoked much discomfort. The savages, who paint their body, prefer to paint it with red colour. The earliest idols out of wood and clay were painted red. So, should we not recognise the natural appeal of the red colour as the simple cause for our pleasure in red cheeks? Again, I ask, why do we not find the same fresh red quite as appealing on the

nose and hand as on the cheek? We even dislike it. In the case of nose and hand, the pleasurable impression of the red is obviously outperformed by an element of displeasure. What is the reason for this? It is not difficult to find. The red cheek speaks of health, joy, flourishing life; the red nose reminds us of drunkenness and copper-induced chronical disease [*Kupferkrankheit*], the red hand of washing, scrubbing, mashing; these are things we neither wish to have nor to do. And we also do not wish to be reminded of these things.

Conversely, if a red nose and a pale cheek had always been a sign of good health and temperance, the pale nose and the red cheek would appear as signs for the opposite and the direction of our attraction would also be reversed. North American and Polish women prefer a pale cheek to a red one, and, if necessary, try to obtain a pale one even at the expense of their health by drinking vinegar or by other means. So, is it because they value paleness itself over redness? Certainly not, but because they are accustomed to interpret a pale cheek as a sign of refined constitution, higher education, and social position, while the red one only indicates peasant health, they prefer the first over the latter. It is for the same reason that the Chinese find crippled feet appealing when they belong to their women but evaluate the most natural-beautiful ones vulgar and ungainly. They also depict their deities with big bellies since they are used to seeing big bellies on their most distinguished imperial officials who are above earthly needs and toils that usually stand in the way of big bellies.|[183]

Once I heard a woman say, one could only reliably judge the beauty of a human foot, if it was shod. If sincerity had not been among this woman's virtues, she most likely would have hesitated to make this statement, as it might appear bizarre to most people. Yet there is some truth in it. When we learn about the meaning of the human foot, it will be hidden by a shoe in almost every case; and hence, we are truly familiar only with the foot inside of a shoe. Our own foot, albeit not always the prettiest, is almost the only one we ever see naked and the feet of statues usually count among their least noted features. Thus, criteria for beautiful feet are less frequently applied to a naked foot than to a shod one; and, while judgement of the former presupposes a certain amount of art expertise, judgement of elegance and daintiness in the case of the latter only requires common social experience.

Not lesser than in the visual domain, the principle is relevant for all other sensory modalities.

A blind woman, who could only acquire shape through the haptic sense, was asked, why the arm of a particular person appealed to her so much. Neither did she feel the gentle pull, the beautiful fullness, nor the elastic swelling of the arm. Actually, it was because she felt that the arm was healthy, lively, and light-weighted. Although she could not feel this directly, she associated it with what she experienced. I do not believe, however, that the direct impression, in which one was inclined to find the sole cause of her appreciation, was really without effect; yet the associated impression was more vividly brought to her attention. In ourselves, the normally sighted, it is the opposite. We believe that we are able to read the entire beauty *off* a beautiful arm, without suspecting that we read most of it *into* the same.

A woman who loved her man very much, said to him: I am so delighted that you have such a pretty name. The name was not very pretty, but she loved the man, that is why she liked the name. I myself remember that when I was a child, I liked the name Kunigunde very much, until I came in contact with a girl of that name with a disagreeable appearance and character. Soon thereafter, the name became disagreeable for me; and as I have not met a particularly amiable Kunigunde since then, this impression has prevailed.[9]

Estate managers usually love the smell of dung because it reminds them of fertility.

Examples of that kind could be extended endlessly.

However, I hear a voice calling down to me from above: What are all these examples good for? What do we gain for the sake of understanding aesthetics, what is gained at all?

The orange, the cheek, the nose, the hand, the foot, and so on, are dependent parts of nature and the human body; any aesthetics, however, that does not think low of itself, will go for the whole and account for the parts only as such.

Well then, let us consider the significance of the principle for the beauty of a whole landscape, the whole human figure, a whole work of art, and we will find it not diminished but, on the contrary, extended and increased in the way that the whole surpasses the parts. Using the simplest examples is not only the easiest way to explain the principle, but on our way from below, we also cannot take the direction that appears as the only one possible for the way from above. With a caveat to ascend further in the future, we therefore summarise the principle's main aspects based on the previous examples.|[184]

Every object we deal with is mentally represented by the resulting impact of our remembering, that is, of anything we have experienced externally or internally, heard, read, thought, learned with regard to this object, and even related objects. This resultant is linked directly to the sight of the object, just as the idea of it is tied to the word that designates it. In fact, shape and colour are, so to speak, nothing but visible words, which immediately and involuntarily bring the whole meaning of an object to our attention; yet, we have to learn this visible language first, to understand it, just like the language of words. When we perceive a table, basically, we only see a rectangular patch; but within this rectangular patch, we perceive everything a table is needed for; this is what actually makes the rectangular patch a table. We perceive a house, but this means everything along with the house, that a house is good for and what takes place in a house; that is what turns the patch into a house. We do not perceive it with the physical eye, but with a mental eye. We hereby do not recall every detail separately that contributes to this impression; how could this be possible, as everything attempts to enter consciousness at the same time. Thereby, everything blends into the intuitive and coherent percept, which we have called the mental colour—a term which is telling in more than one respect. No matter how many different colours we mix, the mixture will always appear as a single colour that changes according to its coloured components, and, if it is transparently applied to a solid coloured background, the two colours together result in a coherent percept. And this percept again directly corresponds to the combination of the two coloured components. Thus, from all the different kinds of remembering, which are linked to an object's appearance, there results a coherent percept that varies according to the different ingredients in one's memory, and which also blends into a coherent percept with the physical object's direct sight. So even in the case of a nearly identical sensory input, a completely different overall impression may arise if it is glazed with different mental colours, only a slight difference in its sensual quality is needed to convey these different links. An orange, a yellow wooden ball, a brass ball, a golden ball, the moon. All of them appear as round yellow patches, and yet what different impressions they convey! We perceive the golden ball with a kind of deep Californian[10] respect, we imagine entire palaces, chariots and horses, liveried servants and magnificent travels; the wooden ball appears to be for rolling only, but what high ideality belongs to the moon! It is only through this, that anything authentic, the real diamond, the real gold, the real tenuous lace, the real song of the nightingale, gains its tremendously advantageous impression over any kind of imitation, even if it is of most deceiving quality.

According to the premise, that it is essential for our pleasure or displeasure *what* we remember at the moment of remembering or perceiving a certain object, the remembering as such adds a momentum of pleasure or displeasure to the aesthetic impression of an object that may be in accord or discord with other events of remembering and perceiving of the object. This principle will create the most manifold aesthetic conditions which would be worthwhile to examine in examples, but this would lead too far here. The strongest and

the most frequent impacts which we receive from an object, in relation to an object and relative to an object, are the ones that leave memories which are the most dominant for subsequent associated impressions.|[185]

Particular remembering is, of course, relatively weak with respect to what it effects as recall; but through accumulation of many such events of remembering and their impact on a single direct impression, their cumulative impact will surpass the effect of the direct impression the more easily, the richer in content they are.

How rich and interesting the remembering of an orange is compared to its mere shape and colour!

An everyday example can teach us, how overpowering an impression resulting from accumulated past experiences may become compared to the sensory, direct impression. Holding one's finger up in front of the eyes at twice the distance, it appears just as large as before, although its image in the eye is only half the size, and it can only appear half as large to a freshly operated blind person. Resulting from our entire life's experience, the knowledge that it has the same size at any distance, overpowers the sensory input so completely, that we think to perceive its constant size at every distance. Obviously, our pleasure in regarding objects is far too easily mistaken for the effect of their sensual appearance, whereas this pleasure, in fact, draws on previous experience. Yet it is our mind that adds previously acquired experience to our senses.

I have so far emphasised that the different components blend in the overall aesthetic impression. Yet, for the sake of understanding aesthetics, we have to analyse them in order to account for the formation of the overall impression. We need to ask, what belongs to the direct impression, what is due to associations, and what do the former or latter contribute to it. Such an analysis can never be exhaustive as we cannot calculate the contribution of our remembering to every single associative impression, in fact our associations are a kind of echo of our entire life, with different weightings of its various moments. If we hit a taut fabric in some spot—our imagination is comparable to such a fabric—the whole fabric will vibrate, but especially those parts that are closest to the spot we have hit or that are connected with it by the strongest threads. However, an impression will always hit our mental fabric simultaneously in more than one spot. Even if all our mental properties resonate with every single impression, we are still able to examine the predominant aspects of each impression. Such considerations are alien to today's standard theories of aesthetics as they prefer to ignore the question altogether.

Aesthetics would be well advised to examine the composition of an overall impression. Although the overall percept cannot be described, we may be able to characterise the combination of its various components. Who could possibly define the percept of an orange, a gold ball or a wooden ball? It can, however, be described through the associations which have merged to shape it.

Not only through those that have merged into it, but also through those that may arise from it, which constitutes a new, important aspect. Indeed, any association that has contributed to a mental impression may come to the foreground again; it only takes external or internal occasions for this to happen. This is why, after obtaining an overall percept, the subject matter may be examined more closely in different, yet interrelated directions, forming a second main component of an object's aesthetic effect, that does not arise solely from its coherent overall percept.|[186] It is like the seed that produces a plant that resembles the one from which it came. At the same time, this result of remembering is the fountain from which phantasy draws; and since beauty has in our times been explained entirely with recourse to phantasy, this is an invitation to examine this source more closely than hitherto.

By emphasizing the mental colour of things, one should not overdo it, though this might be tempting, after one has come to understand its importance. Just imagine an orange of a grey inconspicuous colour instead of a beautiful golden yellow with a skewed and crippled form instead of a perfectly round one, no memory attached to it will ever render it beautiful or pleasant. A vanilla bean evokes similar rememberings as an orange but who would therefore find it good-looking! Yet again we should not underestimate the power of associated impressions. The comparison between the orange and the wooden ball indicates this. Neither the direct nor the associated impression accomplish anything by themselves, but conjointly they accomplish much, together they add up to more than a mere additional product of their pleasures. Here again, the very general and far-reaching principle of Aesthetic Amplification[11] takes effect—yet another principle that is not recognised by the Aesthetics from Above. Although it is very important to explain how the direct sensory input and the associated impression interact to form a coherent percept, we cannot go into further details at this point.

These are the most general aspects of the principle, which can be clarified by the simplest examples, and they remain equally valid when we now apply it to examples on a higher level.

Let us try to account for the percept the sight of a landscape evokes! There is something unspeakable in it, something that cannot be described exhaustively. How can the nature and the causes of this impression be explained? To show the different explanations given by the Aesthetics from Above versus the Aesthetics from Below, I will contrast both approaches by taking an explanation from one of today's most valued textbooks on aesthetics by [Moriz] Carrière.[12] The first is the most far-reaching explanation; it is linked to the highest of idealist aspects, while our explanation is found in closest proximity and linked to the lowest ones.

Carrière says (p. 243):

> The essence of nature itself corresponds to beauty; for beauty appears to the mind as a manifest representation of ideal content and mental regularities. This is what delights us so deeply, when our mind meets some affinity with our soul in the external and physical world. First and foremost, however, one's individual life is the purpose of life in general, every being is there for its own end and not created to please us with its appearance; it is a favour of fate, if the totality of the universe presents the reciprocity of things, the how and why of their mutual relations in a way that we may perceive and grasp the inner essence from the surface as it appears from our limited point of view, and how the forms of things answer not only to the universe's ultimate purpose, but also to the conditions and demands of our individuality. Indeed, we may praise therein the benevolence and magnificence of the world's ultimate cause, when substances, that appear indifferent to the life of the organism, namely of the plants, or that are exhaled by them, delight us with their pleasant smell or radiant colour like etheric oils or pigments, etc..|[187]

And in order to show how the individual is accounted for by this general consideration, Carrière informs us about the plant as an element of the landscape (p. 258):

> The potencies of the inorganic nature are focussed in the plant, in that an individual idea comes into effect as a body-forming life force [*leibgestaltende Lebenskraft*] actively reproducing the organism over and over again, that is connected with the earth by its roots, yet rises into air and light spreading its branches and leaves sideways. The plant illustrates the concept of organic design, which we have claimed for beauty earlier: the diversity of leaves and branches emanates from a unity and is manifestly supported by it, and the interaction of the individual figures forms a harmonious whole.

Admittedly, our perspective from below does not come up to this grandiose vision. Let us rather stick to what we can do better and consider the following simple example.

To the eye of the blind-born person who has just successfully undergone surgery and who looks outside for the first time, the entire nature initially appears as a marbled page because the patient is not yet able to perceive and simultaneously grasp the meaning of the perceived. When gazing into the distance, there are meadows, fields, woods, mountains and lakes, but these meadows, fields, woods, mountains and lakes cannot be deciphered; there are only green, yellow, light, dark patches to be seen. Only the feeling of a far-reaching gaze, the sensual stimulus or, going slightly beyond the sensory input, the sensation of light and darkness, colour contrast, variation, and change determine the impression which can be received from the landscape. But is that really all information we can retrieve from a perceived landscape? We, too, see all that; it certainly adds considerably to the impression a landscape makes, the mood it evokes; yet in the distant woods, which is but a green patch to the unexperienced eye, we also perceive something vividly thriving and growing, that provides shade, coolness, wherein the hare, the deer run, the hunter walks, the birds sing, that is haunted by some fairy tale, although we do not really hear or see any of this. In the lake, that is just a blank or a blue patch to the patient, we know, waves go, skies are reflected, fish play, ships cruise, and so on. Associations arise from all of these things that thrive and grow and undulate. With our physical eye, we do not see the woods and the lake any different than the freshly operated blind person and the new-born child: green and blank or blue patches; but everything we have ever heard, seen, read, experienced, thought with regard to woods and lakes, like anything that may serve as a comparison, contributes to the associations these objects bestow upon us. This turns the sight of them into something unspeakably more meaningful, rich, lively, emotionally deep and more productive for the imagination, than for the person who has not seen, heard, thought about them. And the way it is with woods and lakes, it is with every element of a landscape, meadow, field, mountain and house. Everything is linked to our remembering and to notions of comparison, whereby these objects become meaningful to us, and likewise their combination acquires meaning. The sum of these memories and associations now merges with the sensory foundation and its internal relations to generate the general percept of the landscape; with every detail of the landscape opening a different field of memories and associations; and whatever enters into it might as well emerge from it.|[188]

This said, it is easily understood, where the unspeakable, inexhaustible, inexplicable of a landscape's impression comes from. Who could possibly pursue, exhaust and clarify all the ideas that have contributed to it? In this respect, every single object is inexhaustible; the landscape, so to speak, provides us with an inexhaustible variety of inexhaustible objects with infinitely intertwining fields of associations. Yet, even here we are able to identify its predominant elements and thus to characterise, clarify and explain the impression at least to a certain degree. For example:

Everybody will have noticed, what effect, what meaning an otherwise insignificant scenery receives from a properly placed house, a castle and a little village; one might think of the castle of Wernigerode (see Figure 1), the village of Gernrode at the foot of the Stubenberg (see Figure 2) and the houses down in Wilhelmsthal (see Figure 3).[13] To imagine the scenery of these places without their man-made elements is to rob them of their point. To a certain extent, the delight of this composition of architecture and nature can be gained from the combination, change and opposition of its different shapes and colours; alas, how very little would this signify without any reference to the meaning attached to this combination, this change, this opposition! The main effect arises from the remembering of the human condition, the relationship of human and nature, which appears partly as a domination of nature,

partly as an opposition to nature, partly as an interaction and life with and within nature, which joins and enriches the direct impression.

One must not say, although it has been said to me: All of this would also be present in our imagination without the sight of the building in nature, apart from the scenic impression; hence, this impression cannot be based on such associations.—But, while it takes deliberate effort to imagine all of the details separately, successively, incompletely and without any connecting, unifying tie, they are immediately bestowed upon us at the sight of the building in nature as part of the overall impression. These are obviously two completely different things that may result in very different impressions.

To this effect, I would like to give an example from my own experience, where all of this occurred to me:

During my last holidays, my wife and I spent several weeks in a forester's lodge about fifteen minutes from the city of Lauterberg in the Harz mountains. On the opposite side of our dwelling, there was a green hillside, which we often climbed, and from where we overlooked a vast forested and mountainous scenery of rather indefinite forms. Except for the lodge in the foreground, there were no other human dwellings to be seen anywhere; only in the distance a single red roof protruding from the monotony of the ramps of the greenwoods. Yet this roof brought a very peculiar effect into the otherwise plain scenery. It was simply the punchline of the entire landscape. And I said to myself: What if one made a red spot of the exact same measurements onto a green wall, would it look just as idyllic, sentimental, romantic, fabulous as the red roof in the forest landscape? Certainly not. And could the red spot on the green wall even evoke the same lively associations of man's living and moving, the sorrows and joys of forest solitude, just like the red roof in the woods does?|[189]

Yet again, I have to mention an objection someone expressed regarding this example, someone who was educated in the new school of aesthetics and would not tolerate the introduction of a new godhead for which he took the Association Principle.

Everything that remembering has added to the impression of the red roof and the green woods, he argued, everything that came into play only through secondary associations, does not belong to the aesthetic impression of the landscape at all, but has to be separated from it in order to be purely aesthetic. For the mere scenic impression, the artist is interested in the, so to speak, musical relations of colour and shape. And these relations affect us directly through the eye and we complete the truly visible, for instance the roof as a part of the house and the green forest representing the woods, by our imagination. Only what is immediately visible of the house and the woods, and thus interacts with other visual relations, is of importance for their scenic impression.

However, this objection is based on the delusion that the mere visual properties of a house and a forest are much more than just meaningless lines filled with colour whose interactions with other visual relations are also without meaning. Only the expedience of the house for living and the tree's inherent potential for growth and what is attached to these two features brings content, life and depth into the impression of their visible aspects; and to subtract it would be like stripping the flesh from the human body and taking the skeleton for its essential meaning. How might this objection account for the scenic impression of a ruin? Should this impression rather be dependent on the contrast between its grey shapelessness and the colours and lines of its surroundings; or rather on what is now the ruin as a focal point of memories in the vivid present; it would otherwise take but the grey rugged rock without a ruin on top to make the same impression. How could we possibly speak of a landscape's romantic, idyllic, historical character if the higher artistic significance of the contrasting, harmonic and rhythmic relations of the colours and forms were not provided

Figure 1 The city and castle of Wernigerode seen against the backdrop of the Harz mountains. Photo by Barbara Ortlieb (2019).

by the meaning these visible relations have acquired over a person's lifetime. As far as these features are concerned, they only gain higher landscape-related significance as part of such higher level relations; as bearers of higher level aspects their impact is then, of course, intensified in accordance with the Amplification Principle. But let us postpone the dispute of this matter for now and mention some other experiences instead.

Nowadays, many castles and monasteries on hills and mountains serve as madhouses and prisons; once we learn about this, it seems as if the charm they bestow upon the landscape is put out by a splurge of cold water.[14]

Today's railway buildings count among the greatest achievements of contemporary architecture. Such grandiose and characteristic structures of the purest architectural symmetry can be seen in many places! Moreover, they can show the perfect functionality, and who would deny the importance of functionality for the aesthetics of architecture, which is basically also conveyed by association? Yet the impression of these buildings is never delightful to the ultimate degree and falls short of the highest esteem; they never grant the joyful impression of a palace nor the sublimity of a temple.|[190] Why? Because we identify them as theatres of a displeasing hustle and bustle.

Let us go even higher and beyond landscape and architecture! We recognise the human figure[15] [*Gestalt*] as the most beautiful work of creation; the highest works of fine art are dedicated to it or use it as their elements. Doubtless, there is much in the flowing of shapes, the mirror-symmetry, maybe the simple proportions, as some claim, or certain rhythmical relations as others have it, or the golden section as [Adolf] Zeising[16] asserts, and certainly also something instinct-driven that is appealing about the individual figure, apart from any meaning related to it; besides, the painting as a whole also comprises the aspects of grouping and colour treatment in which harmonic and disharmonic relations in themselves may also bear a part. However, all this is but the lowest foundation for the human figure as an

Figure 2 Village of Gernrode at the foot of the Stubenberg. Photo by Barbara Ortlieb (2019).

expression of functionality for the affairs and joys of life and the higher expressions of the soul and its movements which we find entirely within a single figure and which are ultimately surpassed by the more general and higher human relations, yes, even relations transcending the human sphere, we find in the painting as a whole. All of this, however, bears on the perceived constellations of shape and colour only through the meaning they have acquired due to our previous experiences; all of this is a matter of the associated, not the direct impression. One must not despise these basic foundations of human beauty, just as one must not disregard metre, rhythm and rhyme in poetry; but we must not value them too high either; and who can search for the highest beauty in metre, rhythm and rhyme of a poem, if their violation spoils the entire beauty of a poem just as much as a perfect flow can lift it up? We have here yet another example of the Aesthetic Amplification Principle whereby the product of lower and higher factors, which rest upon the former, may result in a higher aesthetic pleasure than the sum of aesthetic pleasure which lies in every single one of the lower and higher elements. In this regard, there is no difference between the beauty of a poem and that of the human body.

Many aesthetic theories acknowledge how a building's functionality contributes to its beauty just as the mental expression adds to the beauty of a human being. These theories approve of the Association Principle, albeit it is not explicitly credited and its most important aspects are not recognised. Often the mental expression is identified with the direct impression as a predefined or automatically emerging appendage of shape. Often the impact of association is confounded with direct impression; and its essential contribution to higher aesthetic impressions is often, as in one of the previous examples, fundamentally misunderstood, even denied; equally often beauty is also entirely attributed to functionality and meaning without any good reason. Much could be said about all this, but on the whole, we have promised to refrain from treading the path which we do not deem the best. We therefore close as we began: with some general reflections.

Figure 3 Castle and park of Wilhelmsthal in the Thuringian Forest near the city of Eisenach. Photo by Barbara Ortlieb (2019).

Should the appeal of things be based mainly on remembering pleasant things, some things must be pleasurable *per se*. It is one of the main tasks of the Aesthetics from Below to detect these sources of inherent delight and appeal as well as the laws of their interplay and possibly to identify a general source, a general law of how pleasure and displeasure come to pass, which is a hitherto unsolved problem like the problem of a universal law of energy in physics.[17] However, we did not attempt to solve such general problems. We only meant to show that association is one of the most important among the secondary sources of appeal in that it absorbs the more direct ones and blends them.|[191]

One must not mistake the direct sources of pleasure for the purely sensory ones alone, although all of the purely sensory are direct ones. Conversely, higher aesthetic impressions are not limited to the field of association: Perception of symmetry, colour relations, relations of tones, goes beyond the purely sensory domain without therefore being a matter of association.[18] All higher aesthetic impressions are attached to contexts and interrelations that can be internal as well as external to the object. Here the internal, there the external or associative ones play the predominant role.

In the visual modality, there is no aesthetic impression of considerable height which does not involve the Association Principle. Kaleidoscopic figures and fireworks are the highest the visual domain brings about without it. The experience of poetry also culminates in the associative factor, for the meaning of a poem is linked to the words, whereas meter, rhythm, rhyme only gain significance by merging into them. In music, however, association only plays a supporting role. The higher impression of music lies mainly in the pursuit of its internal relations and whatever else is linked to the musical impression is associated to it by coincidence.[19] Striving for the establishment of consistent principles, the overall impression of painting has also been frequently linked to internal relations like the ones found in music; but in this respect, painting is more akin to poetry than to music, although they are not in every respect comparable. It would be of some interest to examine the partly analogous and

partly differing role of the Association Principle in the different arts more closely; yet again, we have to remember the limits that are imposed upon us here.

For two reasons, beauty itself does not become a matter of pure chance just because it is largely based on incidental associations. First, around every object a certain circle of associations necessarily arises from innate dispositions and the relationships among people and things that are based on them; second, among those which vary according to different conditions in time and space, only a particular form is particularly benign for mankind and this is the one that is linked to the concept of true beauty. This, of course, necessarily follows from our principle and it can be easily held against the idea of absolute beauty some people have, that beauty of the human figure cannot be of the highest visual beauty everywhere. If there are creatures on other planetary spheres that are organised and built differently from humans on account of other cosmic conditions, the highest beauty will be attributed to those creatures with the most valued meaning attached to them.

For humans, beauty is essentially based on associations that relate life's basic sensory sensations to things of higher value and meaning; this is why beauty powerfully affects all higher cultural relations of mankind just as much as beauty is in a way their product and thereby gains a high significance that goes far beyond immediate pleasure.

Translated from the German of Fechner (1866) by S. A. Ortlieb, W. A. Kügel and CCC.

Note to the Original Paper

* In the original article, the title is accompanied by the following editorial note: "Thus far, the program of our journal did not include aesthetic treatises; yet we believe that it is in the very interest of the readers if we admit this original attempt 'to introduce a new god to aesthetics', especially since it was already well received as a public lecture".

Notes

1. Apart from the first volume of the *Elements of Psychophysics* (Fechner, 1860/1966), there are only two other English translations: Fechner's (1836/1906) popular booklet *On Life After Death* and a compilation of his philosophical writings entitled *Religion of a Scientist* (Fechner, 1946).
2. The German "Vorschule" literally translates to "preschool". From Fechner's (1876) introductory remarks on the title, we conclude that he used it in the sense of "propaedeutics" like other authors before him (e.g., Paul, 1804). Thus, "Vorschule" refers to an introductory course offering the basic knowledge and skills needed to conduct studies in a particular field, in this case (empirical) aesthetics.
3. Original publication: Fechner, G. T. (1866). Das Associationsprincip in der Aesthetik. *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst, 1*(1), 179–191. Page breaks of the original article are indicated by short vertical lines with suspended page numbers. They mark the beginning of the first complete sentence on a new page.
4. Philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) whose 1790 *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*) proved tremendously influential in Western aesthetics. Fechner (1876) and later Bourdieu (1979) held the Kantian ideal of *free beauty* (*freie Schönheit*) responsible for a highbrow aesthetics that values style over content and looks down on popular taste. Ortlieb and Carbon (2019) have made a case that, against Fechner's original intentions, a highbrowed disregard for content-related associations and everyday phenomena is still present in today's paramount models of empirical aesthetics, including fluency-based ones.

5. In 1796, physicist and chemist Hans Christian Ørsted (1777–1851), who later became famous for his discovery of electromagnetism, authored an award-winning essay in aesthetics about the "boundaries between poetic and prosaic expression" (Ørsted, quoted by Christensen, 2013, p. 48). His *Dissertation on the Structure of the Elementary Metaphysics of External Nature* (Ørsted, 1799), however, was based mainly on the works of Kant (Wilson, 2008).
6. By the name "Home", Fechner most likely refers to philosopher David Hume (1711–1769; born David Home—sic!) whose ideas about aesthetics proved just as influential (*Of Tragedy*; *Of the Standard of Taste*, both published in 1757) as his radical take on the problem of induction. Especially, Hume's (1757a,1757b) much-quoted claim that "[b]eauty is no quality in things themselves [but] exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and [that] each mind perceives a different beauty" (p. 136) is widely agreed with the ideas Fechner develops in the present text about the Aesthetic Association Principle.
7. On the whole, Fechner takes a very differentiated look at the role of familiarity in aesthetics: Although he rejects the idea of a monotonously increasing relationship between familiarity and liking (see Zajonc, 1968), his many examples, especially the below passage on remembering, indicate, that he is perfectly aware of the fact that familiarity, that is, previous exposure, is crucial for the establishment of context- and content-related associations. Fechner even accounts for the exceptions (preparedness; Seligman, 1971): things that make a strong first impression which we are today inclined to identify as phenomena like the baby scheme or images of snakes and spiders that reliably trigger affective responses without or with only very little previous experience (see Hoehl et al., 2017).
8. William Cheselden (1688–1752) was an anatomy teacher and surgeon who performed one of the first known cases of full recovery from blindness—a 13-year-old boy—in 1728. Although the patient gained sight after removing the opaque lenses caused by a congenital cataract, he encountered severe problems even with simple visual perception tasks (Gregory & Wallace, 1963).
9. By contrast, in the two translators from the University of Bamberg, the name Kunigunde evokes mainly positive associations since the city of Bamberg was an important residence and burial site of the Holy Roman empress and Catholic saint Kunigunde of Luxembourg (c. 975–1040). Apparently, associations are shaped by one's previous experience. With the Aesthetic Association Principle a high degree of subjectivity comes into play, which is possibly one of the reasons why experimental aesthetics is so reluctant to admit its great importance for aesthetic experience.
10. Perhaps an allusion to the Californian gold rush which came to an end only 10 years before the article was published. Fechner could therefore assume that gold and California (still nicknamed "The Golden State") were strongly linked in the minds of his readers.
11. Fechner's (1876) Aesthetic Principle of Help and Amplification (Princip der ästhetischen Hülfe und Steigerung—*sic*!) postulates that "a conjuncture of multiple, alone rather ineffective but altogether consistent pleasure-related conditions yields a hedonic result that is greater, often far greater, than the sum of their individual effects; it is possibly through such a confluence that they exceed the hedonic threshold and yield aesthetic pleasure in the first place" (p. 51, transl. by S. Ortlieb). The success formula for kitsch, proposed by Ortlieb and Carbon (2019), makes as good example for this principle in that it shows how two rather insignificant variables—an immediately identifiable and perfectly conventional manner of representation—multiply the impact of an emotionally charged subject matter.
12. Moriz Philip Carrière (1817–1895) was a writer and philosopher. Fechner is quoting the first volume of Carrière's (1859) *Aesthetics: The Idea of Beauty and its Realisation in Life and Art* (*Aesthetik: Die Idee des Schönen und Ihre Verwirklichung im Leben und in der Kunst*).
13. The city of Wernigerode and the village of Gernrode are both located in Saxony-Anhalt on the northern edge of the Harz mountains, while Wilhelmsthal refers to a secluded castle situated in the Thuringian Forest near the city of Eisenach. All three points of Fechner's interest make popular postcard motives although visitors, including the first translator and his wife, tend to agree that it is not so much the topography of these places, but the castles of Wernigerode and Wilhelmsthal, respectively, the Romanesque Saint Cyriacus Church of Gernrode, that make them truly picturesque.

14. This could be a hint at the cold-water cures for certain mental illnesses in 19th-century psychiatric institutions.
15. Although Fechner uses the term "Gestalt" in this context, it is rather improbable that he is referring to the core concept of Gestalt psychology which was only fully developed decades later. Most certainly, he had the colloquial German word "Gestalt" in mind which closely corresponds to the English "figure" or "shape".
16. Adolf Zeising (1810–1876) claimed that the golden section is a universal principle, discernible not only in the arts (harmony in music, painting, sculpture, and architecture), but in almost every animate (proportions in plants, animals, and humans; *Neue Lehre von den Proportionen des menschlichen Körpers*, Zeising, 1854) or inanimate natural phenomenon (geometry of crystals and chemicals; *Das Normalverhältniss der chemischen und morphologischen Proportionen*, Zeising, 1856). Although Fechner (1865,1871) did not share this universal claim, he recognised the relevance of the golden ratio for aesthetics and conducted several groundbreaking albeit inconclusive experiments on Zeising's golden section hypothesis with regard to aesthetic choices (*Ueber die Fragen des goldenen Schnittes; Zur experimentalen Aesthetik*).
17. Written only shortly after Darwin's (1859) *On the Origin of Species*, this passage seems to anticipate a basic idea of Darwinian aesthetics, namely, to identify universal aesthetic preferences that strongly suggest ancient psychological adaptations (Dutton, 2009).
18. Interestingly, Fechner is speculating about a low-level preformation of basic sensations that already affects aesthetic choices prior to content-related interpretation. This idea is strikingly similar to the concept of a "good Gestalt" that was developed decades later by Gestalt psychology.
19. Fechner seems to adhere to a rather narrow understanding of music in the sense of absolute music, which does not include the possibility of program music, where music is used to illustrate or highlight certain historical events—Wellington's Victory by Beethoven—or impressions of nature—Beethoven's 1808 symphony No. 6 (Pastoral). In these cases, it seems that music is very well capable of conveying clear-cut impressions of a battle or a thunderstorm. Fechner's notion is also challenged by the music drama of his contemporary, the composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883), who made elaborate use of short signature sequences to identify different characters, ideas, objects or places of his music dramas. Through this technique of leitmotifs—Wagner himself spoke of "Gefühlswegweiser" (signposts of emotion)—he was able to create a complex musical commentary to the plot, guiding the listener's memories and associations. Today, this narrative use of musical themes and leitmotifs is an important feature of film scores.

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ORCID iD

Claus-Christian Carbon https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3446-9347

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A.2 Supplement to Ortlieb, Kügel, and Carbon (2020)

Das Associationsprincip in der Aesthetik.*)

Von

G. Th. Fechner.

Die Aesthetik läßt sich, wie so manche andere Lehren, auf zwei grundverschiedene Weisen behandeln, welche ich kurz als eine Behandlung von Oben herab und von Unten herauf unterscheiden will. Man behandelt sie von Oben herab, indem man von allgemeinsten Ideen und Begriffen ausgehend zum Einzelnen absteigt, von Unten herauf, indem man vom Einzelnen zum Allgemeinen aufsteigt. Dort ordnet man das ästhetische Erfahrungsgebiet einem von obersten Gesichtspunkten aus konstruirten ideellen Rahmen nur

*) Obwohl wir ästhetischen Abhandlungen in dem Programm unserer Zeitschrift keinen Raum geboten haben, glauben wir doch diesen originellen Versuch „eine neue Gottheit in die Aesthetik einzuführen" im Interesse der Leser bereitwillig Raum bieten zu sollen, um so mehr als derselbe bereits in Form einer populären Vorlesung sich des Beifalls zu erfreuen hatte. A. d. H.

ein und unter; hier baut man die ganze Aesthetik auf Grund ästhetischer Erfahrungen von unten an auf. Dort handelt es sich in erster und zugleich höchster Instanz um die Begriffe und Ideen der Schönheit, der Kunst, des Stils, um ihre Stellung im Gesammtsystem allgemeinster Begriffe, ihre Beziehung zum Wahren, zum Guten, zum Göttlichen, insbesondere zu den göttlichen Ideen und der göttlichen Schöpferthätigkeit. Aus der reinen Höhe dieser Allgemeinheiten steigt man dann in das irdisch-empirische Gebiet des einzelnen, des zeitlich und örtlich Schönen herab, und mißt alles Einzelne am Maßstabe des Allgemeinen. Hier geht man von Erfahrungen über das, was gefällt und mißfällt, aus, stützt hierauf alle Begriffe und Gesetze, die in der Aesthetik Platz zu greifen haben, sucht sie unter Mitrücksicht auf die Gesetze des Seins und Sollens, denen die des Gefallens immer untergeordnet bleiben müssen, mehr und mehr zu verallgemeinern und dadurch zu einem System allgemeinster Begriffe und Gesetze zu gelangen. Dort liegt das Hauptgewicht überhaupt auf Begriffen und Ideen, und alle Erklärungen beruhen nur in Unterordnungen unter begriffliche und ideelle Kategorien; hier liegt das Hauptgewicht auf erfahrungsmäßigen Gesetzen, und die Erklärungen beruhen in der Hauptsache auf der Unterordnung unter solche.

Jeder von beiden Wegen hat seine Vortheile und seine Nachtheile. Der erste giebt uns von vorn herein das Ziel, dem man auf dem zweiten erst zustreben muß, den allgemeinsten Blick, die höchsten Gesichtspunkte; aber man gelangt auf ihm schwer zu einer klaren Orientirung über die Gründe des Gefallens und Mißfallens im Einzelnen, um die es uns doch auch zu thun sein muß; es bleibt mehr oder weniger bei unbestimmt schwebenden, in ihrer Allgemeinheit das Einzelne nicht leicht scharf treffenden Begriffen. Dazu setzt dieser Weg, um richtig zu führen, einen richtigen Ausgang voraus, den man im Grunde nur in einem vollendeten philosophischen und selbst theologischen System finden kann, was wir beides noch nicht haben. Nur viele Versuche derselben haben wir, und so haben wir auch viele Versuche, die Aesthetik damit in Beziehung zu setzen, die alle noch viel zu wünschen übrig lassen, aber doch dem Bedürfniß allgemeinster und höchster Gesichtspunkte entgegenkommen, und, wenn sie dasselbe nicht vollständig befriedigen, doch beschäftigen und wach erhalten. Der zweite Weg gewährt hingegen eine klare Orientirung über die Gründe des Gefallens und Mißfallens im Einzelnen und Nächsten; aber man gelangt auf ihm schwer zu allgemeinsten Gesichtspunkten und Ideen; man bleibt so zu sagen, leicht auf halbem Wege stecken. Er setzt nichts Bestreitbares voraus, fängt aber auch so zu sagen mit nichts an; man schreitet auf ihm sicher in der ästhetischen Erkenntniß vor, aber nur, indem man langsam vorschreitet.

Kurz der erste Weg verhält sich zum zweiten, wie sich die Naturphilosophie zur Physik verhält. Wie nun die Naturphilosophie früher dagewesen ist als die Physik, so ist der erste Weg in der Aesthetik früher dagewesen als der zweite, und selbst jetzt noch der fast allein betretene; wenigstens wurde der zweite niemals mit Entschiedenheit, Konsequenz und Methode verfolgt. Nun wird die Physik niemals eine Naturphilosophie und der zweite Weg in der Aesthetik niemals den ersten überflüssig machen; es würde aber meines Erachtens gut sein, wenn man auf diesem zweiten Wege, dem Wege von Unten, dem ersten, dem Wege von Oben, mehr entgegenkäme, als seither der Fall, um einen festen und sichern Boden als Unterbau für die sonst nur zu schwankende und haltlose Höhe des ersten zu gewinnen.

Genug der Allgemeinheiten über beide Wege. Es galt nur, so viel hier darüber zu sagen, um das Princip, von dem die Rede sein soll, als eine Sache zugleich und Probe des zweiten Weges hinzustellen, und damit zu erklären, warum es in der seitherigen

Aesthetik so wenig Beachtung gefunden hat, — es liegt eben nicht auf ihrem Wege, — endlich auch, um damit den im Folgenden einzuschlagenden Gang der Betrachtung zu motiviren. Nach der Natur des zweiten Weges kann derselbe nicht mit allgemeinen Gesichtspunkten anheben; also werde ich vielmehr mit den einfachst-möglichen Beispielen beginnen, an denen sich das von mir sogenannte ästhetische Associationsprincip zugleich erläutern und bewähren läßt.

Damit behaupte ich nicht, etwas absolut Neues vorzutragen; wer könnte das überhaupt in solchen Dingen! Zuvörderst ist das Associationsprincip nach seiner Wichtigkeit in der Psychologie längst bekannt und anerkannt; und wenn dieß in der Aesthetik keineswegs entsprechend der Fall ist, so hat es doch nicht verfehlen können, sich auch hier irgendwie geltend zu machen. Gelegentlich wird es ja wohl auch in der heutigen Fach-Aesthetik zur Erklärung zugezogen, nur ohne Ahnung seiner principiellen weittragenden Wichtigkeit, die sogar von Kant in seiner Lehre von der anhängenden Schönheit geradezu mißkannt ist. Von Neueren wüßte ich überhaupt nur etwa Oersted zu nennen, der ihm etwas größere Beachtung geschenkt — erklärlich, weil er als Beobachter zur Aesthetik gekommen, — ohne freilich dem Princip zu seinem ganzen Recht zu helfen oder in seine Bestimmungen genauer einzugehen; und wer von den tonangebenden Aesthetikern kümmert sich um Oersted? Von Aelteren möchte insbesondere Home anzuführen sein. Doch beginnen wir mit den Beispielen!

Unter allen Früchten vielleicht die schönste, oder, wenn man den Ausdruck schön zu viel findet, für das Auge reizendste dürfte die Orange oder Apfelsine sein. Früher war dieß sogar noch mehr als jetzt der Fall, wo sie sich auf allen öffentlichen Verkaufstischen ausgelegt, bei fast jeder Mittagstafel zum Dessert findet: denn jeder Reiz stumpft sich durch seine Häufigkeit ab. Ich erinnere mich aber wohl, welchen so zu sagen romantischen Reiz der Anblick dieser Frucht früher für mich hatte und noch jetzt dürfte man ihr keine im Aussehen vorziehen.

Worin nun liegt das Reizende ihres Aussehens? Natürlich denkt jeder zunächst an ihre schöne reine Goldfarbe und reine Rundung. Und gewiß liegt viel hierin; vielleicht meint man sogar, daß Alles hierin liege. Ja, worin sollte es denn sonst liegen? Aber, wenn der Leser so fragte, so wäre dieß ein Beweis, daß ihm mein Princip nicht präsent ist, oder sollte ihm noch etwas beifallen, so würde es sicher unter das Princip treten. Also möge man einen Moment überlegen, ob wirklich der ganze Reiz des Aussehens dieser Frucht in ihrer schönen Goldfarbe und reinen Rundung begründet ist!

Ich sage nein; denn warum gefiele uns nicht sonst eine gelb überfirnißte Holzkugel ebenso gut wie die Orange, wenn wir wissen, daß sie vielmehr eine Holzkugel als eine Orange ist. Ja, trotzdem, daß die Orange eine rauhe Schale hat und Rauhigkeit im Allgemeinen minder gut gefällt als Glätte, wie sich beim Vergleich verschiedener Holzkugeln selbst beweist, so gefällt uns doch die rauhe Orange besser als die lackirte Holzkugel.

Das kann nicht in einem Vorzuge der Wohlgefälligkeit der Form und Farbe an sich selber liegen; in dieser Hinsicht sind sich beide Gegenstände gleich, oder kann die Holzkugel selbst den Vorzug haben. Der Vorzug der Orange kann nur darin liegen, daß wir eben eine Orange, aber keine Holzkugel in ihr sehen, daß wir die Bedeutung der Orange an ihre Form und Farbe knüpfen. Die Bedeutung der Orange aber liegt freilich zum Theil selbst mit in Form und Farbe, doch keineswegs allein, vielmehr in der Gesammtheit dessen, was sie ist und wirkt, insbesondere in Beziehung auf uns selbst ist und wirkt. Wennschon nun dem Sinn unmittelbar nur Form und Farbe präsent ist, so fügt die Erinnerung das Uebrige, nicht einzeln, aber in einem Gesammt-Eindrucke hinzu, trägt es in den sinn-

lichen Eindruck hinein, bereichert ihn damit, malt ihn so zu sagen damit aus; wir mögen das kurz die geistige Farbe nennen, die zur sinnlichen hinzutritt oder den associirten Eindruck, der sich mit dem direkten verbindet. Und darin liegt es, daß uns die Orange schöner als die gelbe Holzkugel erscheint.

In der That, sieht denn der, der eine Orange sieht, blos einen runden gelben Fleck in ihr? Mit dem sinnlichen Auge, ja; geistig aber sieht er ein Ding von reizendem Geruch, erquickendem Geschmack, an einem schönen Baume, in einem schönen Lande, unter einem warmen Himmel gewachsen in ihr; er sieht so zu sagen ganz Italien mit in ihr, das Land, wohin uns von jeher eine romantische Sehnsucht zog; aus der Erinnerung an all das setzt sich die geistige Farbe zusammen, womit die sinnliche verschönernd lasirt ist; indeß der, der eine gelbe Holzkugel sieht, eben blos trocknes Holz hinter dem runden gelben Flecke sieht, das in der Drechslerwerkstatt gedreht und vom Lackirer angestrichen ist. Beidesfalls associirt sich der aus der Erinnerung resultirende Eindruck so unmittelbar an die Anschauung, verschmilzt so vollständig damit, bestimmt so wesentlich den Charakter derselben mit, als wenn er ein Bestandtheil der Anschauung selbst wäre. Daher wir freilich leicht geneigt sein können, ihn mit als eine Sache derselben selbst zu rechnen, und nur durch Vergleiche, wie wir einen solchen eben anstellten, dahinter kommen können, daß er es nicht ist.

Ein anderes Beispiel:

Warum gefällt uns eine rothe Wange an einem jugendlichen Gesichte so viel besser als eine blasse? Ist es die Schönheit, der Reiz des Roth an sich? Unstreitig hat das Antheil daran. Ein frisches Roth erfreut das Auge mehr als Grau oder Mißfarbe. Man kann es sogar durch Erfahrung beweisen. Der Engländer Cheſſelden operirte einen Blindgebornen, der nie Farben gesehen hatte und bei dem sich also auch an Farben noch nichts associiren konnte. Dieser erklärte von vorn herein Scharlach für die schönste aller Farben; unter den übrigen gefielen ihm die buntesten am besten, wogegen Schwarz ihm großes Unbehagen erregte. Die Wilden, die ihren Körper bemalen, bemalen ihn am liebsten mit rother Farbe. Die frühesten Götterbilder aus Holz und Thon waren roth angemalt. Haben wir also nicht in dem natürlichen Reiz der rothen Farbe den einfachen Grund des Wohlgefallens an der rothen Wange? Aber, frage ich wieder, warum gefällt uns dann ein gleich frisches Roth an Nase und Hand nicht ebenso gut wie an der Wange? Es mißfällt uns vielmehr. Der wohlgefällige Eindruck des Roth muß also bei der Nase und Hand durch ein mißfälliges Element überboten werden. Worin kann das liegen? Es ist nicht schwer zu finden. Die rothe Wange bedeutet uns Gesundheit, Freude, blühendes Leben; die rothe Nase erinnert an Trunk und Kupferkrankheit, die rothe Hand an Waschen, Scheuern, Manschen; das sind Dinge, die wir nicht haben, noch treiben möchten. Wir möchten auch nicht daran erinnert sein.

Wäre umgekehrt von jeher die rothe Nase und blasse Wange als Zeichen der Gesundheit und Mäßigkeit, die blasse Nase und rothe Wange als Zeichen des Gegentheils erschienen, so würde auch die Richtung unseres Gefallens daran sich umkehren. Die Nordamerikanerinnen und Polinnen ziehen wirklich eine blasse Wange einer rothen vor, und suchen sich nöthigenfalls die blasse sogar auf Kosten ihrer Gesundheit durch Essigtrinken oder andere Mittel zu verschaffen. Meint man nun wohl, weil ihnen Bläße an sich besser gefällt als Röthe? Gewiß nicht, sondern weil sie sich gewöhnt haben, in der blassen Wange das Zeichen einer feinen Konstitution, höhern Bildung und Lebensstellung, in der rothen das einer blos bäuerlichen Gesundheit zu sehen, und ersteres letzterem vorziehen. Aus gleichem Grunde erscheinen den Chinesen verkrüppelte Füße an ihren Damen wohlgefällig,

die schönsten natürlichen bäuerlich plump, und geben sie ihren Götzen dicke Bäuche, weil sie gewohnt sind, die vornehmsten Würdenträger ihres Reiches mit dicken Bäuchen zu sehen, und die Vorstellung einer gewissen Erhabenheit über irdische Noth und Arbeit, welche es freilich zu dicken Bäuchen nicht kommen läßt, daran knüpfen.

Ich hörte einmal eine Dame sagen, man könne die Schönheit eines menschlichen Fußes doch eigentlich nur recht beurtheilen, wenn er beschuht sei. Gehörte nicht zu den Tugenden dieser Dame eine besondere Aufrichtigkeit, würde sie sich wahrscheinlich gescheut haben, diesen Ausspruch zu thun, so curios mag er den Meisten scheinen. Doch hat er etwas sehr Wahres. Wir lernen die Bedeutung des menschlichen Fußes fast nur kennen, während ihn der Schuh verbirgt; und sind nur über die Bedeutung des beschuhten Fußes recht orientirt. Nackt sehen wir ja fast nur den eigenen Fuß, der nicht immer der schönste ist, und den Fuß von Statuen, nach dem wir bei einer Statue am letzten zu sehen pflegen; also sind uns die Beziehungen des Fußes, die unser Gefallen daran mitbestimmen, beim nackten Fuße nicht ebenso geläufig wie beim beschuhten; und, während zur Beurtheilung der Schönheit des erstern eine gewisse Kunsterfahrung gehört, bedarf es zur Beurtheilung der Eleganz und Zierlichkeit des letztern nur der gewöhnlichen gesellschaftlichen Erfahrung.

Nicht minder als durch das Gebiet des Sichtbaren greift das Princip durch alle übrigen Sinnesgebiete durch.

Eine Blinde, welche sich der Formen nur durch den Tastsinn bemächtigen konnte, wurde gefragt, weßhalb ihr der Arm einer gewissen Person so wohl gefiele. Man rathet etwa: sie antwortete, weil sie den sanften Zug, die schöne Fülle, die elastische Schwellung der Formen des Armes fühle. Nichts von alledem; sondern weil sie fühle, daß der Arm gesund, rege und leicht sei. Das konnte sie aber nicht unmittelbar fühlen, sondern nur an das Gefühlte associiren. Nun glaube ich nicht, daß der direkte Eindruck, in dem man den alleinigen Grund ihres Wohlgefallens suchen mochte, wirklich ohne Antheil daran war; aber man sieht doch, daß der associative Eindruck ihr noch lebendiger zum Bewußtsein kam. Bei uns Sehenden ist es umgekehrt. Wir meinen, einem schönen Arme seine ganze Schönheit gleichsam abzusehen, ohne zu ahnen, daß wir das Meiste davon hinzusehen.

Eine Frau, die ihren Mann sehr liebte, sagte zu ihm: wie freue ich mich, daß du einen so hübschen Namen hast. Der Name war nicht sehr hübsch, aber sie liebte den Mann, darum gefiel ihr der Name. Ich selbst erinnere mich, daß mir als Kind der Name Kunigunde sehr wohlgefiel, bis ich ein Mädchen von fatalem Aussehen und Charakter mit diesem Namen kennen lernte, alsbald ward mir der Name fatal; und da mir seitdem keine besonders liebenswürdige Kunigunde begegnet ist, so ist der Eindruck geblieben.

Oekonomen pflegen den Geruch des Düngers wegen der Erinnerung an die Fruchtbarkeit, die er bringt, zu lieben.

Und was ließe sich nicht noch Alles in dieser Richtung anführen.

Aber, so höre ich mir von Oben herab zurufen: wozu dieser ganze Aufwand von Beispielen? was ist damit für die Aesthetik gewonnen, und überhaupt zu gewinnen? die Orange, die Wange, die Nase, die Hand, der Fuß u. s. w. sind unselbständige Theile der Natur und des Menschenkörpers; eine Aesthetik aber, die sich nicht niedrig halten will, geht vor Allem auf das Ganze, und zieht die Theile blos als solche in Betracht.

Wohl, so fassen wir die Bedeutung des Principes weiterhin auch für die Schönheit einer ganzen Landschaft, der ganzen Menschengestalt, eines ganzen Kunstwerkes in das Auge, und wir werden sie nicht geringer als für die Theile, sondern in demselben Verhältnisse erweitert und gesteigert wiederfinden, als das Ganze die Theile übersteigt. Es läßt sich nur das Princip am einfachsten an den einfachsten Beispielen erläutern, und wir

können auf unserem Wege von Unten nicht in der Richtung gehen, die für den Weg von Oben als der allein mögliche erscheint. Vorbehaltlich also, künftig höher aufzusteigen, fassen wir erst auf Grund der bisherigen Beispiele die Hauptgesichtspunkte des Princips wie folgt zusammen.

Jedes Ding, mit dem wir umgehen, ist für uns geistig charakterisirt durch eine Resultante von Erinnerungen an Alles, was wir je bezüglich dieses Dinges und selbst verwandter Dinge äußerlich und innerlich erfahren, gehört, gelesen, gedacht, gelernt haben. Diese Resultante von Erinnerungen knüpft sich ebenso unmittelbar an den Anblick des Dinges, wie die Vorstellung desselben an das Wort, womit es bezeichnet wird. In Form und Farbe des Dinges sind so zu sagen nichts als sichtbare Worte, welche uns die ganze Bedeutung des Dinges unwillkürlich vergegenwärtigen; wir müssen freilich diese sichtbare Sprache ebenso gut erst gelernt haben, um sie zu verstehen, wie die Sprache der Worte. Wir sehen einen Tisch, im Grunde nur einen viereckigen Fleck; aber in dem viereckigen Flecke Alles, wozu ein Tisch gebraucht wird; das macht den viereckigen Fleck erst zu einem Tische. Wir sehen ein Haus, aber in dem Hause alles mit, wozu ein Haus dient, was in einem Hause vorgeht; das macht erst den Fleck zu einem Hause. Wir sehen es nicht mit dem sinnlichen, aber mit einem geistigen Auge. Wir erinnern uns dabei nicht alles dessen einzeln, was zu dem Eindrucke beiträgt; wie wäre das möglich, wenn Alles zugleich Anspruch macht, in's Bewußtsein zu treten. Vielmehr, indem es das will, verschmilzt es zu dem einheitlichen gefühlsmäßigen Eindrucke, den wir die geistige Farbe nannten, ein Ausdruck, der in mehr als einer Hinsicht sehr bezeichnend ist. Mischen wir noch so viel verschiedenartige Farben zusammen, und das Gemisch macht doch immer wieder nur den einigen Eindruck einer Farbe, die sich aber nach den Farbebestandtheilen ändert, und, auf einen kompakten Farbengrund lasirend aufgetragen, abermals mit ihm einen einigen Eindruck giebt, der sich nach der Zusammensetzung von beiden richtet. So resultirt aus allen verschiedenartigen Erinnerungen, die sich an den Anblick eines Dinges knüpfen, doch immer nur ein einiger Eindruck, der aber nach der Zusammensetzung aus verschiedenen Erinnerungs-Ingredienzien verschieden ausfällt und mit dem direkten Eindruck des Anblicks auch wieder zu einem einigen Eindrucke verschmilzt. Nun kann selbst bei fast gleichem sinnlichen Eindrucke doch ein ganz verschiedener Totaleindruck durch die Ausmalung mit verschiedener geistiger Farbe entstehen, wobei ein kleiner sinnlicher Unterschied nur nöthig ist, die verschiedene Anknüpfung zu vermitteln. Eine Orange, gelbe Holzkugel, Messingkugel, Goldkugel, der Mond, alles für den Sinn nur runde, gelbe, nicht sehr verschieden aussehende Flecke, und doch wie verschieden der Eindruck, den sie machen! Vor der Goldkugel stehen wir mit einer Art kalifornischer Hochachtung, ganze Paläste, Kutsch' und Pferde, Bediente in Livree, schöne Reisen scheinen sich daraus zu entwickeln; die Holzkugel scheint nur zum Kollern da; und welch' hohe Idealität steckt in dem Monde! Nur dadurch auch gewinnt alles Aechte, der ächte Diamant, das ächte Gold, die ächten Spitzen, der ächte Nachtigallengesang, den ungeheuren Vortheil des Eindruckes vor allem noch so täuschend Nachgemachten.

Nach Maßgabe nun, als uns das gefällt oder mißfällt, woran wir uns bei einer Sache erinnern, trägt auch die Erinnerung ein Moment des Gefallens oder Mißfallens zum ästhetischen Eindrucke der Sache bei, was mit anderen Momenten der Erinnerung und dem direkten Eindrucke der Sache in Einstimmung oder Konflikt treten kann. Daraus gehen die mannigfachsten ästhetischen Verhältnisse hervor, die es interessant wäre, in Beispielen zu verfolgen; aber es würde für jetzt zu weit führen. Die stärksten und häufigsten Einwirkungen, die wir von einer Sache, in Verbindung mit einer Sache und vergleichs-

weise mit einer Sache erfahren, hinterlassen natürlich auch Erinnerungen, die am kräftigsten bestimmend in den associirten Eindruck eingreifen.

Erinnerungen sind einzeln genommen freilich immer verhältnißmäßig schwach gegen das, an was sie erinnern; aber indem viele Erinnerungen mit einem direkten Eindrucke zusammentreffen, kann ihre verschmolzene Wirkung die des direkten Eindruckes um so leichter überbieten, je inhaltreicher sie zugleich sind.

An was Alles erinnert nicht die Orange und wie interessant ist das, woran sie erinnert, gegen ihre bloße Form und Farbe!

Wie weit das Uebergewicht eines aus vergangenen Erfahrungen resultirenden, im Geiste gesammelten Eindruckes über den gegenwärtigen, den direkten Eindruck gehen kann, davon vermag uns ein alltägliches Beispiel zu belehren. Hält man einen Finger in doppelte Entfernung vor die Augen, so meint man, ihn noch genau ebenso groß zu sehen; und doch ist sein Bild in den Augen nur halb so groß, und kann er einem frisch operirten Blinden nur halb so groß erscheinen. Das aus unserer ganzen Lebenserfahrung fließende Wissen, daß er in jeder Entfernung gleich groß bleibt, übertäubt die sinnliche Erscheinung seiner Ungleichheit so ganz, daß wir ihn selbst mit den Augen in jeder Entfernung gleich zu sehen glauben. Ist dann zu verwundern, wenn wir auch die aus frühern Erfahrungen resultirende Wohlgefälligkeit vieler Dinge für Sache ihrer sinnlichen Erscheinung halten, die vielmehr Sache unserer geistigen Zuthat ist?

Habe ich bisher Gewicht darauf gelegt, daß im ästhetischen Totaleindrucke sich dessen verschiedene Elemente nicht scheiden, so muß doch die Aesthetik, um klare Rechenschaft von seinem Zustandekommen zu geben, solche scheiden, muß fragen: was ist Sache des direkten Eindruckes, was hängt an den Associationen, und was tragen diese oder jene dazu bei. Erschöpfend zwar kann eine solche Analyse niemals sein, weil im Allgemeinen unzählige Erinnerungen zu jedem associirten Eindrucke beitragen, ja streng genommen zu jedem der gesammte Erinnerungsnachklang unseres Lebens, nur mit einem anderen Gewichte seiner verschiedenen Momente. Schlagen wir einen Punkt eines gespannten Gewebes irgendwo an, — unser gesammter Vorstellungszusammenhang aber ist einem solchen Gewebe vergleichbar — so zittert das ganze Gewebe, nur die Punkte am stärksten, die dem angeschlagenen Punkte zunächst liegen und durch die stärksten Fäden damit zusammenhängen. Jede Anschauung aber schlägt sogar mehr als einen Punkt unseres geistigen Gewebes zugleich an. Doch kann man sich, unter Anerkennung dieses Zusammenwirkens unseres ganzen geistigen Besitzthums zu jedem Eindruck, die Aufgabe stellen, die Hauptmomente zu finden, die vorwiegend den Eindruck bestimmen. In unserer heutigen Aesthetik freilich findet man diese Aufgabe nicht erfüllt, weil nicht einmal den Gesichtspunkt derselben gestellt.

Um so mehr aber hat die Aesthetik Anlaß, auf die Komposition des Totaleindruckes aus seinen Elementen einzugehen, als einheitliche Eindrücke sich überhaupt nicht beschreiben, aber doch nach ihrer Zusammensetzung aus verschiedenen Komponenten charakterisiren lassen, wozu sich der Anlaß oft genug bietet. Wer will den Eindruck, den eine Orange, eine Goldkugel, eine Holzkugel macht, beschreiben? Dagegen läßt sich derselbe wohl durch die Vorstellungen, die sich dazu verschmolzen haben, charakterisiren.

Nicht blos aber durch die, die sich darin verschmolzen haben, sondern auch durch die, die wieder daraus hervortreten können, was einen neuen, wichtigen Gesichtspunkt darbietet. In der That können alle Vorstellungen, die zum geistigen Eindrucke beigetragen haben, auch unter Umständen wieder daraus hervortreten; es bedarf nur besonderer äußerer oder innerer Anlässe dazu. Das begründet die Möglichkeit, sich nach gewonnenem Totaleindruck eingehend nach verschiedenen, doch unter sich zusammenhängenden Richtungen mit dem Gegen-

stande zu beschäftigen, was einen zweiten Haupttheil der ästhetischen Wirkung der Gegenstände bildet, die ja nicht blos in ihrem einheitlichen Totaleindrucke ruht. Dieser ist so zu sagen nur das Saamenkorn, aus dem eine ähnliche Pflanze sich zu entfalten vermag, als die, aus der es entstand. Zugleich ist jene Resultante von Erinnerungen der Quell, aus dem die Phantasie schöpft; und da neuerdings so häufig die ganze Schönheit durch Bezugnahme auf die Phantasie erklärt wird, so sollte hierin eine Aufforderung liegen, diesen Quell genauer zu untersuchen, als ich finde, daß es seither geschehen ist.

Indessen, so viel auf die geistige Farbe der Dinge zu geben, so ist doch nicht zu viel darauf zu geben, wozu man leicht verführt sein könnte, nachdem man einmal ihre Wichtigkeit erkannt hat. Denken wir uns an der Orange statt der schönen goldgelben eine graue unscheinbare Farbe, statt der reinen Rundung eine schiefe krüppeliche Form, so werden alle angeknüpften Erinnerungen sie nicht schön, nicht wohlgefällig erscheinen lassen. Eine Vanilleschote kann ähnliche Erinnerungen wecken, wie die Orange, und wer möchte sie schön aussehend finden! Aber deshalb darf man auch wieder nicht zu wenig auf den associirten Eindruck geben. Der Vergleich der Orange mit der Holzkugel verwehrt es. Weder der direkte noch der associirte Eindruck leisten viel für sich, aber sie leisten viel im Zusammenhange, geben zusammen ein höheres als blos additionelles Produkt des Wohlgefallens. Hier tritt wieder ein sehr allgemeines und weitgreifendes ästhetisches Princip, ich nenne es das der ästhetischen Steigerung, in Kraft, wovon man in der heutigen Aesthetik von Oben nichts erfährt. So wichtig es aber für die Beurtheilung der Weise ist, wie der direkte und associirte Eindruck im Totaleindrucke zusammenwirken, ist es doch für jetzt nicht möglich, in's Weitere darüber einzugehen.

Dies die allgemeinsten, schon an den einfachsten Beispielen erläuterbaren Gesichtspunkte des Principes, die nicht minder gültig bleiben, wenn wir uns nun zu Beispielen von höherer Stufe erheben.

Versuchen wir uns Rechenschaft von dem Eindrucke zu geben, den der Blick in eine Landschaft auf uns macht! Es ist etwas Unsagbares darin, etwas, was sich durch keine Beschreibung erschöpfen läßt. Wie wird man sich die Natur und die Gründe des Eindruckes erklären können? Um ein Beispiel der verschiedenen Weise zu geben, wie die Aesthetik von Oben und die Aesthetik von Unten überhaupt in ihren Erklärungen vorgehen, stelle ich eine Erklärung davon nach beiden einander gegenüber, die eine, im ersten Wege, geschöpft aus einem der geschätztesten neueren Lehrbücher der Aesthetik, dem von Carriere, die andere so, wie sie sich im zweiten Wege auf Grund unseres Principes ergiebt. Jenes die fernstliegende, an die höchsten idealsten Gesichtspunkte anknüpfende Erklärung, dieses die nächstliegende, an die untersten Gesichtspunkte anknüpfende Erklärung.

„Das Wesen der Natur — sagt Carriere (I. 243) — entspricht an sich der Schönheit; denn sie ist Erscheinung für den Geist, welchem sie in sinnfälligen Formen idealen Gehalt darstellt und geistige Gesetze veranschaulicht, und gerade das erfreut uns so innig, wenn in dem Aeußerlichen und Materiellen ein verwandtes Seelenvolles dem Gemüth entgegenkommt. Doch ist überall zunächst das eigene Leben des Lebens Zweck, jedes Wesen ist um seiner selbst willen da und nicht deswegen geschaffen, daß seine Gestalt uns ergötze; es ist eine Gunst des Schicksals, wenn in der Totalität des Universums das Wechselverhältniß der Dinge, die Art und Weise, wie sie für einander sind, uns für unseren Standpunkt gerade so sich darstellt, daß wir auf der sich uns bietenden Oberfläche doch das innere Wesen wahrnehmen und erkennen, wie die Formen der Dinge nicht blos den Zwecken des Alls entsprechen, sondern auch den Bedingungen und Forderungen unserer Persönlichkeit gemäß sind. Ja wir mögen ganz besonders die Güte und Herrlichkeit des Urgrundes

der Welt darin preisen, wenn Stoffe, die für das Leben des Organismus, namentlich der Pflanzen, gleichgültig erscheinen oder von ihm ausgeschieden werden, als ätherische Oele oder Pigmente durch Wohlgeruch oder Farbenglanz uns erquicken" u. s. w.

Und um auch zu zeigen, wie die Betrachtung des Einzelnen in diese allgemeine Betrachtung hineintritt, so wird (S. 258) von der Pflanze als Element der Landschaft gesagt:

„Die Potenzen der unorganischen Natur finden in der Pflanze einen Mittelpunkt des Zusammentreffens, indem hier eine individuelle Idee als leibgestaltende Lebenskraft auftritt und in der stets erneuten Bildung eines Organismus sich bethätigt, der durch die Wurzeln mit der Erde zusammenhängt, aber in Luft und Licht emporstrebt und mit Zweigen und Blättern nach der Seite sich ausbreitet. Die Pflanze veranschaulicht den Begriff des organischen Gestaltens, welchen wir früher für die Schönheit forderten, die Mannigfaltigkeit der Blätter und Zweige geht aus der Einheit hervor und wird sichtbar von ihr getragen, und die Wechselwirkung der einzelnen Gestalten schließt sich zu einem harmonischen Ganzen zusammen."

Gegen diesen Schwung der Betrachtung hat nun freilich unsere Betrachtung von Unten nichts Entsprechendes einzusetzen. Nehmen wir die folgende so simpel, wie sie sich giebt.

Dem Auge des Blindgeborenen, der nach glücklicher Operation das erste Mal in's Freie sieht, erscheint die ganze Natur nur erst als ein marmorirtes Blatt, denn er vermag noch nicht, in dem Gesehenen dessen Bedeutung mit zu sehen. Er sieht hinein in's Weite: da sind Wiesen, Felder, Wälder, Berge, Seen; er sieht nichts von Wiesen, Feldern, Wäldern, Bergen, Seen; er sieht nur grüne, gelbe, helle, dunkle Flecke. Nur das Gefühl des weittragenden Blickes, der sinnliche oder wenig über den sinnlichen hinaussteigende Reiz des Hellen und Dunklen, des Farbenkontrastes, der Mannigfaltigkeit, des Wechsels bestimmen den Eindruck, den er von der Landschaft hat. Aber ist das auch Alles, was wir von der Landschaft haben? Wir haben das Alles auch, es trägt bei zu dem Eindrucke, den die Landschaft auf uns macht, der Stimmung, die sie uns erweckt, sogar nicht wenig dazu bei; aber wir sehen zugleich im fernen Walde, der für das unerfahrene Auge nur ein grüner Fleck ist, etwas, was lebendig in sich treibt und wächst, was Schatten, Kühlung giebt, worin der Hase, das Reh laufen, der Jäger geht, die Vögel singen, manch' Märchen spukt, auch wenn wir nichts wirklich davon sehen und hören. Im See, worin Jener nur einen blanken oder blauen Fleck erkennt, wissen wir, gehen die Wellen, spiegelt sich der Himmel, spielen die Fische, fahren die Schiffe u. s. w. Vorstellungen von Allem, was sonst treibt und wächst und wogt, klingen mit dabei an. Im Grunde sehen auch wir mit leiblichem Auge von Wald und See nicht mehr als der frisch operirte Blinde und das neugeborene Kind, das ist grüne und blanke oder blaue Flecke; Alles aber, was wir je von Wald und See gesehen, gehört, gelesen, erfahren, gedacht haben, wie Alles, womit sie einen Vergleichspunkt bieten, trägt zu dem Eindrucke bei, den diese Gegenstände auf uns machen, und macht ihren Anblick dadurch zu etwas unsäglich Bedeutenderem, Reicherem, Lebendigerem, für das Gefühl Vertiefterem, für die Phantasie Produktiverem, als für den, der nichts davon gesehen, gehört, gedacht hat. Und wie es mit Wald und See ist, ist es mit allen Elementen der Landschaft, Wiese, Feld, Berg, Haus. An Alles knüpfen sich Erinnerungen, Vergleichs-Vorstellungen, wodurch diese Gegenstände eine gewisse Bedeutung für uns erlangen, und auch ihre Zusammenstellung gewinnt für uns eine solche auf demselben Wege. Die Gesammtheit dieser Erinnerungen und Vorstellungen nun macht sich in Verschmelzung mit der sinnlichen Unterlage und den ihr

immanenten Verhältnissen als Gesammteindruck der Landschaft geltend; jede Einzelnheit der Landschaft spielt von einer anderen Seite mit einem anderen Kreise von Erinnerungen und Vorstellungen hinein, und was so hineinspielt, kann auch wieder herausspielen.

Hiernach versteht sich leicht, worin das Unsagbare, Unerschöpfliche, Unklärbare liegt, was dem landschaftlichen Eindrucke zukommt. Wer will alle Vorstellungen verfolgen, erschöpfen, klären, die dazu beigetragen haben? Schon dem einzelnen Gegenstande kommt eine gewisse Unerschöpflichkeit in dieser Hinsicht zu; die Landschaft bietet uns so zu sagen eine Unerschöpflichkeit solcher unerschöpflicher Gegenstände dar, die mit ihren Associationskreisen sich ineinander unbestimmt verzweigen. Doch können wir auch hier Hauptelemente in Betracht ziehen und den Eindruck dadurch wenigstens bis zu gewissen Grenzen charakterisiren, klären und erklären. Zum Beispiel:

Es wird wohl Jedem aufgefallen sein, welchen Reiz, welche Bedeutung eine sonst unbedeutende Gegend oft durch ein am rechten Flecke stehendes Haus, ein Schloß, ein Dörfchen erhalten kann; man denke z. B. an das Schloß in Wernigerode, das Dorf Gernrode am Fuße des Stubenberges, die Häuser unten in Wilhelmsthal. Das Menschenwerk aus den Landschaften dieser Oertlichkeiten wegdenken, heißt ihnen die Pointe nehmen. Nun kann man wohl etwas von dem Reize dieser Komposition aus Architektur und Natur in der Verbindung, dem Wechsel und Gegensatz ihrer verschiedenartigen Formen und Farben finden; aber wie wenig würde das ohne Rücksicht auf die angeknüpfte Bedeutung dieser Verbindung, dieses Wechsels, dieses Gegensatzes sagen! Die Hauptsache liegt darin, daß die Erinnerung an das Menschliche, die Beziehung des Menschen zur Natur, die sich theils als eine Herrschaft über die Natur, theils als ein Gegensatz gegen die Natur, theils als ein Verkehr und Leben mit und in der Natur geltend macht, bereichernd zum direkten Eindruck hinzutritt.

Nun darf man nicht sagen, obwohl man es zu mir gesagt hat: alles das ließe sich auch ohne die Anschauung des Bauwerkes in der Natur durch bloße Vorführung in der Vorstellung haben; doch würde man damit den landschaftlichen Eindruck des Bauwerkes in der Natur nicht haben; also kann er nicht auf solchen Associationen ruhen. — Aber, was man sich einzeln, nach einander, unvollständig, mit der Mühe der Ueberlegung, ohne wesentlich verknüpfendes Band vorführen möchte, wird uns mit einem Schlage in einem Gesammteindrucke durch die Anschauung des Bauwerkes in der Natur, als wie ein Bestandtheil dieser Anschauung selbst, geschenkt. Das ist doch etwas sehr Anderes, als jene Vorführung, und daran kann auch ein sehr anderer Eindruck hängen.

Ich will hierzu eines kleinen Beispiels eigener Erfahrung gedenken, wo mir das Alles recht lebhaft entgegentrat.

In den vorigen Ferien brachte ich mit meiner Frau einige Wochen in einem Försterhause, eine Viertelstunde von Lauterberg im Harze, zu. Unserer Wohnung gegenüber war ein grüner Abhang, den wir oft erstiegen, und von wo wir die Aussicht über eine weite waldige Berglandschaft von wenig entwickelten Formen hatten. Außer dem Försterhause im Vordergrunde waren nirgends menschliche Wohnungen zu sehen; nur in der Ferne ragte aus der Monotonie des an den Bergen lehnansteigenden grünen Waldes ein einziges rothes Dach hervor. Dieses aber brachte einen ganz eigenen Reiz in die sonst einfachen Stimmungsverhältnisse der Aussicht. Es war eben die Pointe der ganzen Landschaft. Und ich sagte mir: wie, wenn man ein ganz eben solches rothes Fleckchen auf eine grüne Wand machte, würde es auch eben so idyllisch, sentimental, romantisch, märchenhaft aussehen, wie das rothe Dach in der Wald-Landschaft? Gewiß nicht. Aber könnte mir das rothe Fleckchen auf der grünen Wand auch wohl ebenso das Leben und Weben des Menschen mit

seinen Leiden und Freuden in einer einsamen Waldnatur auf einmal vergegenwärtigen, wie das rothe Dach im Walde?

Doch wieder eines Einwurfes habe ich zu gedenken, den mir Jemand bei Gelegenheit dieses Beispiels machte, Jemand, der, in der Schule der neueren Aesthetik erzogen, die Einführung einer neuen Gottheit in sie, wofür er das Associationsprincip hielt, nicht dulden wollte.

All' das, sagte er, was die Erinnerung zum Eindrucke des rothen Daches und grünen Waldes hinzubrachte, was sich von Nebenvorstellungen anknüpfte, gehört gar nicht zum Wesen des ästhetischen, des wahrhaft landschaftlichen Eindruckes und wäre erst abzusondern, um ihn rein zu haben. Denn der reine landschaftliche Eindruck, um dessen Hervorrufung es insbesondere dem Künstler zu thun ist, ruht doch nur in den eigenen so zu sagen musikalischen Verhältnissen der Form und Farbe, die durch das Auge direkt in uns eingehen, und womit wir das wirklich Sichtbare, wie das Dach zum Hause, die grüne Waldfläche zum Walde in der Vorstellung ergänzen. Nur was Haus und Wald nach ihrem eigenen sichtbaren Wesen sind und wie sie damit in die übrigen Verhältnisse der Sichtbarkeit eingreifen, kommt für ihren landschaftlichen Eindruck in Betracht.

Aber diesem Einwurfe liegt die Täuschung zu Grunde, daß Haus und Wald ihrem ganzen eigenen sichtbaren Wesen nach erheblich mehr als bedeutungslose und bedeutungslos in die Verhältnisse der Sichtbarkeit eingreifende, mit Farben ausgefüllte, Lineamente sind. Erst die Brauchbarkeit des Hauses zum Wohnen, erst das Vermögen des Baumes zum Wachsen, und was an beidem hängt, bringt Inhalt, Leben, Tiefe in den Eindruck dessen, was wir davon sehen; und das davon absondern, ist so gut, als ob man vom Menschen das lebendige Fleisch absonderte, um seine wesentliche Bedeutung im bloßen Skelett zu suchen. Wie mag der Einwurf mit dem landschaftlichen Eindruck einer Ruine zurecht kommen? Sollte dieser vielmehr von dem Gegensatze ihrer grauen Formlosigkeit gegen die Farben und Linien der Umgebung abhängen, als davon, daß die Ruine wie ein Brennpunkt von Erinnerungen in der lebendigen Gegenwart wirkt, so bedürfte es für den grauen zerklüfteten Felsen nicht erst der darauf stehenden Ruine, um denselben Eindruck zu machen. Und wie kann von einem romantischen, idyllischen, historischen Charakter der Landschaft überhaupt noch die Rede sein, wenn nicht das, was die Verhältnisse der Sichtbarkeit für das ganze Leben des Menschen bedeuten, ihnen erst die höhere malerische Bedeutung über den immerhin anzuerkennenden gegensätzlichen, harmonischen und rhythmischen Verhältnissen der Farben und Formen verliehe. So weit diese in Betracht kommen, gewinnen sie selbst erst durch Aufnahme in jene höheren Beziehungen höhere landschaftliche Bedeutung, und sind dann freilich nach dem Steigerungsprincipe als Träger des Höheren auch mit höherem Werthe als für sich zu veranschlagen. Doch, streiten wir uns lieber ein anderes mal darüber weiter, um noch an einige andere Erfahrungen zu erinnern.

Viele Schlösser und Klöster auf Hügeln und Bergen sind jetzt zu Irrenhäusern und Zuchthäusern eingerichtet; so wie wir dies erfahren, ist es, als ob der Reiz, den sie der Landschaft verliehen, mit kaltem Wasser ausgelöscht würde.

Man darf wohl sagen, daß jetzt zu den großartigsten Leistungen in der Baukunst die Eisenbahngebäude gehören. Welch' grandiose, charakteristische, in den reinsten Formen architektonischen Ebenmaßes gehaltene Werke dieser Art sieht man nicht nur an einem, sondern an vielen Orten! Dazu können sie die vollendetste Zweckmäßigkeit zeigen, und wer kennt nicht die große Rolle, welche die Zweckmäßigkeit, im Grunde auch nur durch Association, in der Aesthetik der Baukunst spielt? Doch mangelt dem Eindrucke dieser Gebäude immer etwas an der vollen Befriedigung und letzten Höhe; doch gewähren sie nie den erfreuenden Ein

druck eines Palastes oder den erhabenen eines Tempels. Warum? weil wir in ihnen den Schauplatz eines Trubels und geschäftsmäßigen Treibens sehen, das uns mißfällt.

Gehen wir über die Landschaft und die Architektur noch höher hinauf! Als das schönste Werk der Schöpfung gilt uns die menschliche Gestalt; die höchsten Werke der bildenden Kunst haben sie zum Gegenstande oder Elemente. Nun liegt unstreitig in dem Flusse der Formen, der zweiseitigen Symmetrie, vielleicht den einfachen Proportionen, wie manche wollen, oder gewissen rhythmischen Verhältnissen, wie Andre wollen, oder dem goldnen Schnitt, wie Zeising will, auch wohl in etwas Instinktivem Viel, was uns schon bei der einzelnen Gestalt, abgesehen von aller angeknüpften Bedeutung, gefallen kann; wozu beim ganzen Gemälde noch die Verhältnisse der Gruppirung und Farbengebung treten, in denen sich wohl auch etwas von harmonischen und disharmonischen Beziehungen an sich geltend machen kann. Aber alles das ist doch nur die niedere Unterlage für den sich anknüpfenden Ausdruck der Tauglichkeit der Menschengestalt zu den Geschäften und Freuden des Lebens und den noch höheren Ausdruck der Seele und der Seelenbewegungen, was Alles wir schon in der einzelnen Gestalt finden können, endlich für die allgemeineren und höheren menschlichen, ja über das Menschliche hinausreichenden Beziehungen, die wir im ganzen Gemälde finden können. Alles das aber tragen wir erst in die gesehenen Formen- und Farbenzusammenstellungen hinein, nach Erfahrungen über die Bedeutung derselben, die wir gemacht haben; alles das ist Sache des associirten, nicht des direkten Eindruckes. Nun soll man jene niedere Unterlage der Menschenschönheit so wenig verachten, als Versmaß, Rhythmus, Reim in dem Gedichte; aber auch nicht höher und in keinem andern Sinne achten; und wer kann die höchste Schönheit eines Gedichtes in Versmaß, Rhythmus, Reim suchen, wenn schon eine Verletzung davon die ganze Schönheit des Gedichtes eben so schänden, wie ihr reiner Fluß sie hoch heben kann? Wir haben hier eben wieder ein Beispiel der Wirkung des ästhetischen Steigerungsprincips, wonach das Niedere und das darauf gebaute Höhere ein größeres und höheres Produkt des Wohlgefallens geben können, als der Summe des Wohlgefallens am Niederen und Höheren für sich entspricht. Nicht anders aber mit der Schönheit des Menschen, als des Gedichtes.

Der Beitrag, den die Zweckmäßigkeit eines Bauwerkes zur Schönheit des Bauwerkes, der geistige Ausdruck zur Schönheit eines Menschen zu geben vermag, ist in jeder Aesthetik anerkannt; und damit indirekt auch die Leistung des Associationsprincipes anerkannt, nur damit nicht auch das Princip als Grund dieser Leistung anerkannt, noch die wesentlichen Gesichtspunkte dieses Principes damit erkannt. Oft wird der geistige Ausdruck als ein den Formen fertig anhängender oder von selbst sich daraus ergebender gefaßt, oft zum direkten Eindrucke geschlagen, was Sache der Association, oft, wie wir vorhin ein Beispiel hatten, deren wesentlicher Antheil am höheren ästhetischen Eindrucke ganz verkannt, ja geleugnet, oft auch untriftig die Schönheit allein in Zweck und Bedeutung gelegt. Viel ließe sich über alles dieß sagen, doch haben wir uns im Ganzen beschränkt, die Wege nicht zu gehen, die wir nicht für die besten halten, und schließen mit einigen allgemeinen Betrachtungen, wie wir begonnen.

Von vorn herein versteht sich, daß, wenn das Wohlgefallen an den Dingen wesentlich mit auf der Erinnerung an Wohlgefälliges beruht, es auch an sich Wohlgefälliges geben muß; und die Hauptaufgabe der Aesthetik von Unten beruht darin, die an sich bestehenden Quellen der Lust, des Wohlgefallens, wie die Gesetze ihres Zusammenwirkens festzustellen, und wo möglich zu einer allgemeinsten Quelle, einem allgemeinsten Gesetze, wie Lust und Unlust entstehen, aufzusteigen, bis jetzt freilich ein ebenso ungelöstes Problem, wie das Problem eines allgemeinsten Kraftgesetzes in der Physik. Auch haben wir uns hier keine

so allgemeine Aufgabe gestellt, sondern eben blos die, zu zeigen, daß unter den verschiedenen Quellen des Wohlgefallens die immerhin sekundär zu nennende der Association eine der wichtigsten Rollen spielt, dadurch spielt, daß sie Zuflüsse aus allen Quellen, die ursprünglicher als sie sind, in sich aufnimmt und in sich verschmilzt.

Man hat die direkten Quellen der Lust, des Wohlgefallens nicht schlechthin mit sinnlichen zu verwechseln, obwohl alle rein sinnlichen zu den direkten gehören, und hat die höheren ästhetischen Eindrücke nicht allein im Gebiete der Association zu suchen. Die Auffassung der Symmetrie, der Farbenverhältnisse, der Tonverhältnisse übersteigt das rein sinnliche Gebiet, ohne deßhalb eine Sache der Association zu sein. Alle höheren ästhetischen Eindrücke hängen überhaupt an Zusammenhängen und Beziehungen, die nun aber eben sowohl innere als äußere des Gegenstandes sein können. Hier spielen die inneren, dort die äußeren oder associativen die Hauptrolle.

Im Reiche des Sichtbaren kommt überhaupt kein ästhetischer Eindruck von einiger Höhe ohne das Associationsprincip zu Stande. Das Höchste, wozu es dieses Reich abgesehen davon bringt, ist die kaleidoskopische Figur und das Feuerwerk. Auch die Poesie gipfelt im associativen Faktor, denn der Sinn des Gedichtes ist nur angeknüpft an die Worte, und Versmaß, Rhythmus, Reim gewinnen erhebliche Bedeutung nur nach Maßgabe, als sie hierin eingehen. Hingegen spielt die Association in der Musik blos die Nebenrolle. Der höhere Eindruck der Musik beruht wesentlich auf einem Verfolgen ihrer inneren Beziehungen, und so viel sich daran anknüpfen kann, es ist dem eigentlichen musikalischen Eindrucke zufällig. Im Streben, einheitliche Principien aufzustellen, hat man mehrfach den Haupteindruck des Gemäldes in demselben Sinne von seinen inneren Beziehungen abhängig gemacht, wie den der Musik; aber die Malerei ist in dieser Beziehung verwandter mit der Poesie als der Musik, wenn schon nicht in jeder Hinsicht damit vergleichbar. Es würde von Interesse sein, diese theils analoge theils verschiedene Rolle des Associationsprincipes in den verschiedenen Künsten eingehender zu betrachten; doch immer von Neuem haben wir uns der Beschränkung zu erinnern, die uns hier auferlegt ist.

Meint man, die Schönheit werde dadurch, daß sie großentheils auf Associationen ruht, nach deren Zufälligkeit selbst eine Sache der Zufälligkeit, so ist das aus doppeltem Gesichtspunkte nicht triftig. Einmal, sofern sich nach den angeborenen und auf deren Grund entwickelten Bezugsverhältnissen der Menschen und Dinge ein gewisser Kreis von Associationen um jedes Ding nothwendig entwickelt; zweitens, weil unter denen, die sich nach zeitlichen und örtlichen Umständen verschieden gestalten, doch nur eine gewisse Gestaltung die günstigst mögliche für die Menschheit ist, und daran hat sich der Begriff der wahren Schönheit zu halten. Das freilich folgt nothwendig aus dem Principe und wird sich dem Begriffe einer absoluten Schönheit gegenüber, den Manche haben, unschwer vertreten lassen, daß die Schönheit der menschlichen Gestalt nicht überall die höchste sichtbare Schönheit sein kann. Giebt es anders auf andern Weltkörpern Geschöpfe, die, den andern kosmischen Verhältnissen angemessen, anders als die Menschen organisirt und gebaut sind, so wird dort als höchste Schönheit die der Geschöpfe gelten, an die sich dort die werthvollste Bedeutung knüpft.

Dadurch, daß die Schönheit für den Menschen wesentlich mit auf Associationen dessen, was für ihn höhere und werthvolle Bedeutung hat, an die sinnliche Unterlage seines Lebens beruht, greift sie mächtig in die gesammten höheren Kulturverhältnisse der Menschheit ein, wie sie in gewissem Sinne erst daraus geboren wird, und gewinnt damit eine, über das unmittelbare Gefallen an ihr weit und hoch hinausreichende Bedeutung.

A.3 A Functional Model of Kitsch and Art

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A Functional Model of Kitsch and Art: Linking Aesthetic Appreciation to the Dynamics of Social Motivation

Stefan A. Ortlieb[1,2,3]* *and Claus-Christian Carbon*[1,2,3]

[1] Department of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg, Bamberg, Germany, [2] Bamberg Graduate School of Affective and Cognitive Sciences (BaGrACS), Bamberg, Germany, [3] Forschungsgruppe EPÆG (Ergonomics, Psychological Æsthetics, Gestalt), Bamberg, Germany

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***Correspondence:**
Stefan A. Ortlieb
stefan.ortlieb@uni-bamberg.de

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With the advent of modernity, change and novelty have become the core values of artistic production. At the same time the derogatory term "kitsch" was coined to contrast truly ground-breaking artistic achievements. In this article, we argue that kitsch and avant-garde art ideally represent two complementary types of aesthetic experience: a fluent one that allows for immediate emotional gratification (kitsch) and a disfluent one that requires cognitive elaboration (art). We make a case that preferences for the one or the other are dynamically related to a set of conflicting needs which constitute the basic dilemma of human attachment behavior: needs for safety and intimacy versus needs for arousal and autonomy. Based on the *Zurich Model of Social Motivation* we hypothesize that social distance regulation and aesthetic liking are synchronized via notions of self-efficacy and autonomy: Whenever we feel safe and self-sufficient, an appetence for arousal (curiosity) is likely to arise that increases our interest in unfamiliar conspecifics as well as in innovative, cognitively challenging aesthetic stimuli (art). By contrast, when we feel vulnerable and dependent, a longing for safety and relatedness (nostalgia) attracts us not only to familiar and trustworthy individuals but also to conventional aesthetic stimuli charged with positive emotions (kitsch). This theoretical framework offers an integrative perspective on dynamics of aesthetic liking in that it unites a wide variety of phenomena from anthropology, developmental, and cognitive psychology with concepts and findings from art history, sociology of art, and empirical aesthetics.

Keywords: empirical aesthetics, dynamics of appreciation, art perception, kitsch, autonomy, security, arousal, Zurich Model of Social Motivation

INTRODUCTION

In aesthetics, there is nothing more persistent than change (Martindale, 1990; Carbon, 2011). Art historians have defined different epochs to account for major changes in style and content on a cultural level. For centuries, such discontinuities in the arts as well as in fashion have coincided with fundamental changes in society: A new political order seems to call for new aesthetic

conventions.[1] With the onset of modernity, however, innovation itself has become the touchstone of artistic production in the Western world obliging artists to "criticism of tradition" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 3). Artists who aspire a particularly advanced position in this rebellion against well-tried aesthetic conventions are identified with a term from French military jargon (Călinescu, 1987): the *avant-garde*. The derogatory label *kitsch* has emerged along with the idea of avant-garde art[2] (Greenberg, 1939). In art criticism, it has been used to contrast unique and progressive artistic achievements with the outdated, overly simplistic and consoling commodities of popular culture (Greenberg, 1939; Simon-Schäfer, 1980; Kulka, 1996).

On an individual level, similar changes in aesthetic liking can be observed in the context of intergenerational conflict: Puberty is not only a stage of profound physical transformation, but also of social reorientation and aesthetic reevaluation. As a young person's claim for autonomy awakens, a shift in aesthetic preferences takes place: For instance, choice of music, clothing, and hairstyle are no longer aligned with their parents' aesthetic standards. Quite the contrary, as curiosity for the exciting outside world—especially peers and idols—intensifies, the familiar sphere of the parental home becomes increasingly "dull," "stuffy," and "kitschy" (Stemmle, 1931; Dettmar and Küpper, 2007). Avenarius (1920) reported a similar conflict among artists of the early 20th century when a young generation of artists tried to distinguish themselves from their well-established predecessors by scorning them as "Kitschiers" (p. 222). Again, the term kitsch appears as a symptom of conflict between tradition and innovation.

Recent findings from social psychology and empirical aesthetics provide additional indication for a dynamic interrelation of aesthetic appreciation and social motivation on a situational level: Landau et al. (2006), for instance, observed that mortality concerns diminished liking of Modern art among individuals with a high personal need for structure. In two studies using the mortality salience paradigm there was preliminary evidence for a complementary effect regarding kitsch: Decorative everyday objects were perceived as less kitschy after *in sensu* exposure to existential threats (Raab et al., 2015; Ortlieb et al., 2016a).

By looking at these dynamic phenomena on a cultural, an individual, and a situational level, it seems that the term kitsch tends to resurface in the context of social conflict between the old and the new, and that "[n]o matter how we scorn it, kitsch is an integral part of the human condition" (Kundera, 1984/1999, p. 256). The aim of this paper is to present a functional model that accounts for these dynamics by mapping aesthetic preference for novelty (or familiarity), complexity (or simplicity), and ambiguity (or determinacy), to universal human needs for autonomy, security[3], and arousal. Before we devise our model, we briefly touch upon three important questions regarding kitsch (and its relation to art):

(1) What do we mean by kitsch?
(2) Why is kitsch aesthetically pleasing?
(3) If it is pleasurable, why is kitsch considered worthless?

These preliminary considerations will set the stage for a model linking appreciation of kitsch and art to the dynamics of social distance regulation (Bischof, 1975, 1993, 2001) and regulatory focus[4] (Higgins, 1998). In a stepwise approach, each variable of our model is introduced separately before we elaborate on their dynamic interplay. Finally, implications and limitations of the model are discussed with regard to basic (e.g., art perception) and applied research (e.g., product design) on dynamics of aesthetic liking.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY KITSCH?

The word "kitsch" and the corresponding aesthetic concept have emerged quite recently (Călinescu, 1987). With some certainty, it can be traced back to the late 1860s when it came into use among artists and art dealers from Munich as a derogatory label for "cheap artistic stuff" (p. 234). To the present day, the origins of the word kitsch remain unclear and have inspired numerous etymological theories (Kluge and Seebold, 2011).[5] Best (1985) claimed that it derives from Swabian dialect where the verb "Kitschen" originally referred to petty trading, while the noun "Kitsch" was used to designate crude wooden objects, scrap wood, or flotsam. For two reasons, this etymological theory seems rather compelling: Firstly, it allocates the origins of the word kitsch to a local dialect from southern Germany which is where it first came into use in its modern sense. Secondly, it accounts for two socio-economic developments of the 19th century that have prepared the ground for kitsch as a mass phenomenon: According to Greenberg (1939), kitsch is a product of industrialization and universal literacy. With increasing literacy a new market for expendable literature emerged. This demand for affordable reading material was met mainly by haberdashers roaming the land with crates full of mass-produced paperbacks. Furthermore, the indignant reactions of contemporary writers and literature critics to this "reading frenzy" anticipated some of the main tropes of the later kitsch discourse in that pulp literature was scorned as schematic and overly sentimental (Schöberl, 1984; Niehaus, 2002; Dettmar and Küpper, 2007).

Unlike other labels of bad taste, the German word kitsch was adopted by most modern languages (see Ortlieb et al., 2017)

[1] In France and England for instance, particular styles are identified with the reigns of certain monarchs (e.g., "Louis-XVI," "Empire," "Georgian," etc.). With the breakdown of monarchies in Russia and Germany, revolutionary art movements (e.g., Cubo-Futurism, Suprematism, Dadaism) flourished before they were silenced by totalitarian art doctrines in the early 1930s.

[2] Meanwhile, the term "avant-garde" is used as a label for an epoch in art history. In the following, it refers to a socio-critical concept of art, which is not limited to a certain period.

[3] In this article the following distinction between "security" and "safety" is made: While safety merely indicates the absence of potentially harmful stimuli, security refers to the unique combination of intimacy and safety that is conveyed by familiar and trustworthy others.

[4] *Regulatory Focus Theory* by Higgins (1998) proposes a basic distinction between two motivational orientations: A *prevention focus* that motivates us to anticipate and avoid potential threats and a *promotion focus* that draws our attention towards opportunities for growth and achievement.

[5] For a comprehensive overview of etymological hypotheses see Călinescu (1987).

and has entered new contexts of use. Meanwhile, it may refer to "virtually anything subject to judgments of taste" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 235): from painting, sculpture, and literature to music, cinema, and TV programs, not to forget architecture, interior decoration, and furnishing. Out of its many contexts of usage, art theory is the most important one (Simon-Schäfer, 1980). The term kitsch has served many authors as a counter-concept to applied art (Pazaurek, 1912/2012), avant-garde art (Greenberg, 1939), or art proper (Simon-Schäfer, 1980). In his essay on *Kitsch and Art* philosopher Tomaš Kulka also dealt with kitsch as a borderline phenomenon of art (Kulka, 1996). Yet, to him the "aesthetic inadequacy" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 236) of kitsch was not self-evident. Instead, he derived three conditions for the application of the kitsch concept from its preferred subjects and stylistic devices in the visual domain. The following kitsch definition is based on these criteria.

According to Kulka (1996), the kitsch concept only applies if the following three conditions are met: First and foremost, kitsch requires content "charged with stock emotions [that] spontaneously triggers an unreflective emotional response" (p. 26). Secondly, this subject matter must be "instantly and effortlessly identifiable" (p. 33), and thirdly, its rendering must not substantially enrich the spectators' "associations relating to the depicted objects or themes" (p. 37). The first condition suggests that some themes and subjects are more prone to kitsch classification than others. For instance, themes like mothers with babies, turtling doves, or embracing couples are quite typical for kitsch (Kulka, 1996). Universal themes of human existence with a positive emotional valence such as love, birth, childhood, family, or friendship seem particularly evocative of kitsch simply because they represent the "lowest common denominators of experience" (Greenberg, 1939, p. 45). Apart from eliciting feelings of tenderness and affection, they are easily accessible as they are based on common life experience. However, it is important to stress, that kitsch only draws on themes and subjects with a positive emotional valence. For some deeper reason—which we are about to explore in the course of this investigation—it avoids all the unpleasant and troubling aspects of the human condition such as death, illness, loss, and separation. This limitation in terms of emotional valence allows for us to discriminate between an unclouded positive response to kitsch and the multifaceted experience of "being moved" (Menninghaus et al., 2015), that typically involves mixed emotions (Weth et al., 2015) along with indicators for negative affect on a physiological level (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017). Hence, we suggest to modify Kulka's first precondition as follows: Above all, "kitsch requires a subject matter with a *positive* emotional charge" (Ortlieb and Carbon, 2018, p. 6). The subject *First Kiss* (**Figure 1A**), for example, seems particularly promising with regard to affective impact since it borrows on several highly emotional themes including first love, friendship, childhood innocence, and, of course, nostalgia. Upon closer examination, **Figure 1A** also shows how certain stylistic devices are used to increase both likeliness and intensity of a strong emotional response: In order to raise the chance of stimulating personal recollections in the perceiver, the two children are not portrayed as individuals; instead, their features are schematized toward a

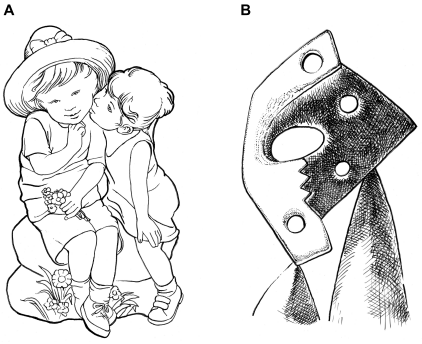

FIGURE 1 | (A) *First Kiss* as a typical kitsch subject versus **(B)** *The Kiss* by Picasso (1928). Abstracted drawings by the first author.

textbook example of the so-called "baby scheme" (Lorenz, 1943) comprising "a head large in relation to the body, eyes set low in the head, a large protruding forehead, round protruding cheeks, a plump rounded body shape, short thick extremities, soft body surface, and clumsy behavior" (Morreall and Loy, 1989, p. 68). Findings from evolutionary aesthetics illuminate why this scheme of "cuteness" is so closely associated with kitsch: Apart from attracting the beholder's attention (Brosch et al., 2007), it reliably triggers a positive emotional response that inhibits aggression and promotes caretaking behavior (Alley, 1983; Zebrowitz, 1997; Glocker et al., 2008). The underlying innate releasing mechanism also responds to childlike characteristics in young animals from other species, which is certainly one of the reasons why fluffy kittens and clumsy puppies make first rate kitsch subjects. In kitsch, infantile features are typically exaggerated (e.g., very large head with big round eyes) to make its bearers even more salient and adorable (peak shift principle; Ramachandran and Hirstein, 1999).[6]

Logically, a subject or theme has to be "instantly and effortlessly identifiable" (Kulka, 1996, p. 33) in order to elicit an automatic emotional response that is not deeply reflected. For the sake of immediate recognition, kitsch producers are well-advised to adhere to faithful imitation and to respect representational conventions (**Figure 1A**). A Cubist rendering, for example, will not work for kitsch as it impairs identifiability of the depicted subject matter (Muth et al., 2013). For example, Picasso's rather unusual interpretation of *The Kiss* from 1928 fails to trigger an immediate heartwarming response despite its emotionally charged content (**Figure 1B**). This work from the artist's Surrealist period shows that identifiability of the depicted subject matter was of little concern to him. On the contrary, Picasso deliberately complicated object recognition by

[6]The present article is mainly concerned with the psychological effects of kitsch. For a more detailed analysis of kitsch-related stimulus properties see Ortlieb and Carbon (2018).

transforming the romantic scene into what looks like a pile of bulky, perforated slabs of stone, while the maker of *First Kiss* (**Figure 1A**) chose a realistic display to ensure immediate identifiability.

However, another Surrealist painting from 1928 titled *The Lovers* (**Figure 2A**) by René Magritte suggests that at least one more precondition is needed to reliably distinguish between kitsch and art. Although it deals with a positive emotional subject which is perfectly identifiable due to a realistic display, Magritte's painting does not strike us as particularly kitschy. From the moment we lay eyes on it, we ask ourselves with puzzlement: Why are the lovers' faces veiled? With this conspicuous detail the artist deliberately provokes conscious reasoning at the expense of an unreflective emotional response. Yet, the resulting train of thought may yield new interpretations (e.g., "By hiding the couple's faces, the artist reveals the spectator's voyeurism"). What do Picasso's *Kiss* and Magritte's *Lovers* have in common that is essentially absent in kitsch? From a modernist standpoint, art is valued for its ability to question our view upon the world (Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell, 2008; Muth et al., 2015; Muth and Carbon, 2016). Indeed, the two artworks stand out from kitsch in that they challenge the habitual way of dealing with the depicted subject matter. Instead of following well-tried representational conventions, both Picasso and Magritte are testing the limits of artistic expression. Conversely, Kulka (1996) claimed that kitsch classification implies a manner of representation, which "does not substantially enrich our associations relating to the depicted subject matter" (p. 37). Alike Greenberg (1939) and many others, he arrived at the conclusion that kitsch meets a reassuring function, which is directly opposed to the intentions of the avant-garde: While art questions our basic sentiments and beliefs, kitsch comes to support and to protect them (Kulka, 1996).

Despite its conservative function, kitsch proves remarkably versatile. Greenberg (1939) described the paradoxical nature of kitsch—both static and dynamic—by stating that "[k]itsch changes according to style, but remains always the same" (p. 40). Novelty is an ephemeral property and artistic innovations are subject to adaptation on a cultural level. As society's frame of reference shifts over time, even highly controversial artworks may gradually become clichés of high art and finally lend themselves to commercial exploitation. Today, museum shops sell coffee mugs, T-shirts, and pillow cases imprinted with reproductions of *The Kiss*/*Lovers* by Gustav Klimt (**Figure 2B**). Albeit the artist once spearheaded the Vienna Secession movement, innovativeness of his work has diminished and it has become particularly prone to kitsch classification: Apart from its abstract ornamental motifs, the highly emotional subject of this work is perfectly identifiable. It certainly adds to the plausibility of Kulka's (1996) definition that commercial exploitation mainly affects figurative art, but not Cubist or non-representational artworks that lack an identifiable subject altogether. A corresponding habituation effect should also be discernible on an individual level. Since Kulka's kitsch criteria are dynamically related to a person's previous experience with a particular subject and its representational conventions, his definition can account for the variability that lies in the eye of the beholder: For example, some jolly little plastic figure with a beard and a pointed hat is certain to enrich someone's associations who is unfamiliar with the concept of a garden gnome (e.g., children or foreigners). Yet, as novelty of the standard garden gnome decreases, it will gradually become prone to kitsch classification.

To summarize: By drawing on Kulka's three conditions we can account for both the static and the volatile aspects of kitsch. As the "rear-guard" (Greenberg, 1939, p. 39) of cultural change kitsch readily appropriates new patterns after they have proved culturally successful. Nevertheless, it always stays the same with regard to its conservative function. Thus, Kulka's (1996) definition allows us to take an interactionist perspective on kitsch (and art) as it groups "different objects [. . .] together not because of their inherent similarities but because they fulfill a certain social function in a given society" (p. 6). But still a profound ambivalence toward kitsch remains unexplained: On the one hand "kitsch" is a term of abuse, on the other hand, it proves commercially successful.

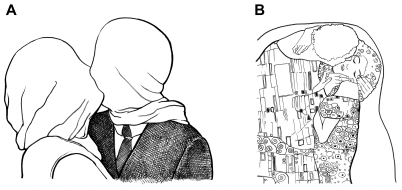

FIGURE 2 | (A) *The Lovers* by Magritte (1928) and **(B)** *The Kiss/Lovers* by Klimt (1908). Abstracted drawings by the first author.

WHY IS KITSCH AESTHETICALLY PLEASING?

In *Changing Art, Changing Man* Mandel (1967) compared art galleries and museums to fitness studios of the mind where people enjoy exercising their spiritual abilities on works of art. By way of analogy, he suggested that Modern art is valued mainly for its capacity to transform the way we see the world. There is considerable empirical evidence that curiosity and exploration are in fact what motivates museum visitors to engage with art: Attending a show of contemporary art, people are "[e]xpecting the unexpected" (Muth et al., 2017a) and intrigued especially by works of art that promise new insights (Muth et al., 2015). When Berlyne (1971) formulated the basic propositions of *new experimental aesthetics* he had a similar notion of art in mind, according to which, *collative variables*[7] such as novelty, surprise, complexity, indeterminacy, and ambiguity form not only the "essential ingredients of art [but] of whatever else is aesthetically

[7] Although Berlyne (1971) spoke of object properties, *collative variables* clearly lie in the eye of the beholder as judgments of novelty and complexity will always depend on one's previous experience. Only in the rare case of truly groundbreaking artworks (e.g., Picasso's *Desmoiselles d'Avignon*), a painting or a sculpture may be 'objectively' innovative with regard to the entire art world.

pleasing" (p. viii). Yet, this assumption cannot account for the popular success of kitsch. What is it then that makes kitsch aesthetically pleasing?

In popular aesthetics form is subordinated to content (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). First and foremost, works of popular taste need a theme or a subject matter that "easily triggers a personal reflection or affiliation from spectators" (Hanquinet et al., 2014, p. 113). For the sake of immediate accessibility, its producers prefer well-tried manners of representation (e.g., conventional realism and the classical ideals of beauty and harmony) over daring stylistic innovations (e.g., Cubism; see Muth et al., 2013). As a result, everybody can easily relate to such works based on his or her common life experience. Obviously, kitsch makes a perfect example of popular taste in that it combines meaningful content with immediacy of a positive affective response. In **Figure 1A**, for instance, formal aspects are clearly subordinated to content as stylistic devices are either used to facilitate identifiability (i.e., faithful imitation) or to amplify the emotional impact (e.g., baby scheme) of a proper amalgam of emotionally rich content (e.g., first love).

The popular principle of 'content over form' led Kulka (1996) to believe that the mass appeal of kitsch must be determined solely by content-related associations: "People are attracted to kitsch because they like its subject matter" (p. 28). Are content-independent properties of kitsch really without any bearing on its hedonic value? After all, there is strong empirical evidence that any aspect of a stimulus array that helps the perceiver to process it more efficiently will also increase aesthetic liking. For example, it has been shown that people tend to prefer familiar over unfamiliar (Zajonc, 1968), clear-cut over indeterminate (Reber et al., 1998), and prototypical over unconventional stimuli (Rhodes and Tremewan, 1996; Halberstadt, 2006; Khalil and McBeath, 2006). From this body of research the authors of the *Hedonic Fluency Model* (HFM; Reber et al., 2004) concluded that liking is a monotonically increasing function of processing speed: "The more fluently the perceiver can process an object, the more positive is his or her aesthetic response" (p. 366).[8] Fluent processing is hereby conceived as an inherently pleasant experience (Reber et al., 2004) spilling over onto the stimulus itself (Winkielman and Cacioppo, 2001). Besides, Reber et al. (2004) distinguished *perceptual fluency*, that refers to "the ease of identifying the physical identity of the stimulus" (p. 367), from *conceptual fluency*, which is defined as the "ease of mental operations concerned with stimulus meaning and its relation to semantic knowledge structures" (p. 367). In terms of processing ease, we expect kitsch to excel on a perceptual and a conceptual level: According to Kulka's (1996) definition, kitsch classification directly implies effortless identifiability and standard associations with regard to the depicted subject matter.

[8]Recurrent nightmares and intrusive images in patients with post-traumatic stress disorder cast serious doubt on a general fluency-positivity link. Alternatively, the *Fluency Amplification Model* by Albrecht and Carbon (2014) postulates that processing fluency does not necessarily amplify positivity of a stimulus, but the intensity of its initial valence. According to Albrecht and Carbon, the fluency-positivity link only applies to stimuli with a positive valence; in the case of aversive stimuli, fluency increases negativity. Regarding kitsch, this particular limitation of the HFM is not an issue, since kitsch classification presupposes content with a positive valence (Ortlieb and Carbon, 2018).

Altogether, we hypothesize that the aesthetic appeal of kitsch consists of (A) emotionally rich content with a positive valence in combination with the inherently rewarding experience of (B) perceptual (effortless identifiability), and (C) conceptual fluency (standard associations). Jointly, these three components offer a reasonable explanation for its great popularity: Kitsch is liked simply because it provides instant and effortless emotional gratification (see Benjamin, 1982/2002; Călinescu, 1987; Kulka, 1996; Menninghaus, 2009; Ortlieb and Carbon, 2018). When we talk about kitsch and art it seems that we are dealing with two different kinds of aesthetic appreciation that can be reliably separated in terms of processing dynamics (Graf and Landwehr, 2015) and the role of positive content-related associations (Ortlieb and Carbon, 2018): a fluent one, consisting of a spontaneous, inherently pleasurable affective response and general accessibility (kitsch); and a disfluent one, that may yield new insights but requires previous knowledge and cognitive elaboration (art; Belke et al., 2015).

WHY IS KITSCH CONSIDERED WORTHLESS?

If kitsch is perfectly agreeable, why is it a derogatory term in the first place? With his *Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* sociologist Pierre Bourdieu raised awareness for "a fundamental refusal of the *facile*" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 486) in Western aesthetics. This general aversion is directed against anything that appears "easy in the sense of simple, and therefore shallow, and 'cheap,' because it is easily decoded and culturally 'undemanding'" (p. 486). Furthermore, he observed that whatever "offers pleasures that are too immediately accessible [is contrasted with] the deferred pleasures of legitimate art" (p. 486). Although Bourdieu did not mention kitsch explicitly, it makes a truly paradigmatic example of his claims: On the one hand, it is liked inter alia because it is easy on the mind; on the other hand, it is used derogatorily by art-educated people in contrast to high art.

Highbrow aesthetics is directly opposed to popular taste in that it "privileges form over matter and the principle of distance and detachment in the appreciation of art" (Hanquinet et al., 2014, p. 113). An artwork is seen as autonomous in that it reflects the artist's idiosyncratic message without making any concessions to common understanding. These characteristics of highbrow aesthetics are discernible in Picasso's *Kiss* (**Figure 1B**): Apparently, the artist is more interested in formal experimentation than in the emotional content of his work. At the expense of identifiability and immediacy of effect, he seeks for hitherto unprecedented means to express himself. Bourdieu et al. (1969/1991) argued that highbrow aesthetics "cannot be appreciated immediately without any cultural resources" (Hanquinet et al., 2014, p. 113). In order to apprehend and value high art, the perceiver has to acquire *culture capital* (e.g., art expertise), "a resource which is unevenly socially distributed" (p. 113). Therefore, Bourdieu's "distinction between popular aesthetic and highbrow aesthetic is [. . .] one between the initiated and outsiders, between the few that master

the aesthetic codes and are able to decipher them and the many others who belong to the profane world" (p. 113). Since aesthetic ideas have been shaped in a social process, they bear the mark of relationships of power and domination (Hanquinet et al., 2014). From this premise, Bourdieu (1979/1984) concluded that a "refusal of the *facile*" (S. 486) is maintained, because popular taste does not allow for distinction in terms of culture capital. In other words, social inequality could neither be secured nor 'legitimized' based on popular aesthetics.

Consequently, the doctrine of Socialist Realism of the former Soviet Union obliged artists to refrain from abstraction and formal experimentation (formalism) in favor of a realistic representation of themes from everyday life. In a classless society, art should be intelligible for everyone. According to the composer György Ligeti, this culture policy inevitably led to "cheap mass-produced art" (Ligeti, 2010). Alike other art doctrines, Socialist Realism illustrates how art becomes kitsch, whenever it is stripped of its dishabituation function and used as a vehicle for political propaganda (Kundera, 1984/1999). Culture capital also offers a plausible explanation why some formerly derogatory concepts have become highly respectable terms (e.g., Impressionism), while kitsch continues to be negatively connoted. An Impressionist painting is unlikely to please the naïve spectator at first sight: Its subject is only vaguely identifiable as brushstrokes have been hastily jotted onto the canvas. To the naïve perceiver it appears unfinished or otherwise carelessly executed. Some background knowledge (i.e., culture capital) about the intentions, practices, and merits of Impressionist painting is required to fully appreciate these works (Kulka, 1996). By contrast, in the case of kitsch aesthetic pleasure is without any presuppositions in terms of art expertise—most people can relate to it at first sight. Research literature from empirical aesthetics supports Bourdieu's assumption by showing that a transfer of art-related knowledge increases people's appreciation of novelty and complexity in general (McWhinnie, 1968; Smith and Melara, 1990; Palmer and Griscom, 2013) and of abstract paintings in particular (Stojilović and Marković, 2014). At least two of these studies even suggest that an increase in aesthetic expertise leads to a veritable distaste for conventional harmony (Smith and Melara, 1990; Palmer and Griscom, 2013).

If we think of kitsch and avant-garde art as the poles of a continuous dimension connecting perfectly conventional, benign, and determinate aesthetic objects (kitsch) and highly original, ambivalent, and indeterminate ones (avant-garde art), one's current level of art expertise defines the anchor point of one's personal aesthetic frame of (p)reference. With an increasing level of art expertise this set point moves toward the avant-garde pole. Thus, the range of people's aesthetic comfort zone will vary greatly according to their aesthetic standards. As a result, Monet's famous water lilies may provoke extremely different reactions: They may be too concrete and mainstream for some, while others dismiss them as too abstract and avant-gardist. By and large, the concept of culture capital can account for such interindividual differences in aesthetic judgment; yet it does not explain why the same person is not always 'in the mood' for Monet. On the whole, Bourdieu's view on taste is a rather static one. However, the value of a sociological perspective should not disguise the fact that our relationship to kitsch and art is more complex and flexible. For instance, it cannot explain why, from time to time, people are attracted to kitsch rather than repulsed by it (Kulka, 1996; Kundera, 1984/1999; Dettmar and Küpper, 2007; Pazaurek, 1912/2012). In the following we devise a theoretical framework that accounts for the dynamic aspects of aesthetic liking by relating them to the ever-conflicting demands of human attachment behavior.

LINKING KITSCH AND ART TO THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL MOTIVATION

"I call beauty a social quality"
(Burke, 1757/1990, p. 39)

Philosopher Walter Benjamin once claimed that "art begins at a distance of two meters from the body [while] in kitsch, the world of things advances on the human being" (Benjamin, 1927/2008, p. 238). As we will see in the following this is by no means a metaphorical expression, but a very accurate observation which can be taken almost literally: By relating changes in aesthetic liking to the dynamics of social distance regulation, we will devise a functional model of kitsch and art that rests on two propositions: Firstly, kitsch and avant-garde art ideally represent two types of aesthetic experience, which can be reliably discriminated in terms of processing characteristics and positive emotional content; secondly, preference for the one or the other is modulated by needs for intimacy and autonomy. Similar claims have been made by philosopher Edmund Burke who already speculated about a close interrelation between two distinct aesthetic ideas—the beautiful and the sublime—and their origins in social motivation (Burke, 1757/1990). According to Burke, it is a drive for affiliation that attracts us to the beautiful, while a drive for self-preservation fascinates us with the sublime: Anything beautiful evokes tender feelings of affection along with the desire to draw near to it (e.g., fluffy kittens). In contrast, the underlying emotions of the sublime are fear and awe (Eskine et al., 2012). Hence, the sublime is only aesthetically pleasing as long as it is observed from a safe distance (e.g., tigers at the zoo). By proposing two antagonistic drives for affiliation and self-preservation Burke's theory touches upon the basic dilemma of social distance regulation that is vividly illustrated by Schopenhauer's (1851/1989) well-known 'porcupine parable': On a cold day a group of porcupines huddles together in search of warmth; yet the closer they move together, the more they hurt each other with their spines. As a result, they veer away from each other until the need for warmth prevails and they search each other's company again. Now this "primordial conflict of intimacy and autonomy" (Bischof, 1975, p. 1) is not only inherent in porcupines, but also in humans and other social animals. Moreover, the basic dilemma of social motivation has always been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for artistic production: Apart from leaving its universal mark on fairy tales and world mythology (Campbell, 1949; Bischof, 2004), it is the stuff of poems, novels, and theater plays, as well as pop music, films, and daily soaps. We therefore make a case that dynamics of social

motivation are key to understanding the changes in aesthetic appreciation on a cultural, an individual, and a situational level. For the sake of clarity, we devise our model in a stepwise approach starting with the four basic components of the *Zurich Model of Social Motivation* (Bischof, 1975, 1993, 2001). In a second instance, we introduce the concepts of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and regulatory focus (Higgins, 1998) to the model. In doing this we shall point out how each of these variables can be related to concepts and findings from empirical aesthetics. Finally, we hypothesize how needs for intimacy and autonomy modulate aesthetic preferences based on two scenarios.

Zurich Model of Social Motivation

The *Zurich Model of Social Motivation* by Bischof (1975, 1993, 2001) is a comprehensive systems theory of social distance regulation in humans and other social animals, including porcupines. Its key proposition reads that human attachment behavior is hinged upon two antagonistic motives for intimacy and autonomy. According to Bischof, it takes at least three different motivational systems to deal with the complex requirements of social distance regulation comprehensively: an arousal system, a security system, and an autonomy system. In addition, he postulated an auxiliary system—the coping system—that only 'kicks in' if one of the other subsystems is blocked by an obstacle (Schneider, 2001). Since requirements of social motivation vary across the lifespan—attachment and protection are vital for the newborn, while autonomy and exploration are of utmost concern to the adolescent—the model also has developmental implications. In the following, the role of each subsystem is described and the close interrelations with concepts and findings from empirical aesthetics are pointed out. We start with the two subsystems that figure most prominently in early infancy: the arousal and the security system.

Arousal System

The arousal system monitors and regulates an individual's current level of activation. Arousal refers to an unspecific activation pattern of the sympathetic nervous system that accompanies "interest, fascination, curiosity, as well as feelings of alarm or fear" (Schneider, 2001, p. 10122). It is based on the assumption that any unfamiliar event will provoke a (startle) response: When we walk the streets alone at night and suddenly notice the silhouette of a tall stranger, our heartbeat quickens involuntarily. Apart from enhancing our responsiveness to unexpected and potentially unpleasant encounters, the arousal system is also responsible for maintaining a level of basic activation. Whether the current state of activation is agreeable or not, depends on an internal reference variable called "enterprise" (see [1] in **Figure 3**). The current arousal level is continuously monitored in relation to this set point: If activation should fall short of enterprise, an appetence for arousal arises (see [2] in **Figure 3**): We are likely to show exploratory behavior in search for something excitingly new (curiosity). Conversely, whenever arousal exceeds enterprise, we experience sensory overload resulting in a temporary aversion to further collative stimulation (distress). For the arousal system, anything unfamiliar is associated with an increase in arousal. Thus, its activity is highest when a high-ranking adult stranger is approaching. The easiest way to maintain an agreeable level of arousal is to adjust one's physical distance to this conspecific: In the case of an unexpected nightly encounter, we could change the side of the street or, should a state of curiosity prevail, walk toward the person and say hello.

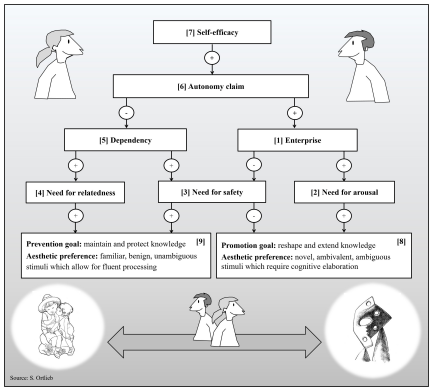

FIGURE 3 | Overview of variables and interrelations. Arrows with a "+" indicate an excitatory relationship (e.g., if variable **[1]** is high, variable **[2]** is elevated), while arrows with "–" signify an inhibitory relationship (e.g., if variable **[1]** is high, variable **[3]** is diminished).

The arousal system reflects a basic "need for exploration" (Lorenz, 1943) that has been related to a wide variety of universal cultural phenomena such as game, competition, and humor. Moreover, it has been argued that curiosity and exploratory behavior form the motivational basis for creating and responding to art (Dissanayake, 1990). In *Aesthetics and Psychobiology*, Berlyne (1971) devised a psychobiological model of aesthetics that draws on the same homeostatic concept of arousal management as the Zurich Model: By assuming that the hedonic quality of an artwork lies in its arousal potential, Berlyne postulated a positive link between the aesthetic appeal of a stimulus array and its degree of novelty, complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Since random patterns are, however, not considered aesthetically pleasing, liking is not seen as a monotonically increasing function of collative stimulus properties. According to Berlyne, the relationship between the hedonic (i.e., aesthetic) value and the arousal potential of a stimulus array is expected to follow an inverted u-shaped curve. The maximum of this curve should vary, depending on a viewer's previous experience: For example, the more art expertise one has, the more unlikely it is that one encounters something surprisingly new and discrepant. By stating that aesthetic appeal is a function of arousal potential, Berlyne's notion of aesthetics is perfectly in line with the core values of avant-garde art: novelty and change.

This emphasis on novelty and conflict, however, disregards aesthetic pleasure associated with fluent processing. Especially, the popular success of kitsch and a widespread indifference toward Modern art cast doubt on Berlyne's claims. A second motivational system is needed to account for the "warm glow of familiarity" and conventional harmony.

Security System

Probably the most important variable for attachment behavior is security (Bowlby, 1969). It can be defined as a feeling of warmth and protection that is instilled by the presence of familiar and trustworthy individuals (Schneider, 2001). Security hereby combines notions of intimacy and safety. Therefore, the security system regulates a need for safety (see [3] in **Figure 3**) as well as a need for relatedness (see [4] in **Figure 3**). Otherwise, it works analogously to the arousal system: In the case of the security system the reference variable is called "dependency" (see [5] in **Figure 3**). Yet in contrast to the arousal system, activity of the security system peaks whenever a familiar and relevant conspecific is close (e.g., during infancy this is typically one's primary caregiver). Our notion of security is continuously monitored with regard to this set point: "As long as dependency exceeds security, needs for safety and relatedness are maintained. This induces the subject to show attachment behavior, that is, to reduce the distance to a person who is able to provide security. The opposite situation, frequently encountered in puberty, results in an aversion against security and consequently in an avoidance of familiar persons (surfeit behavior)" (Schneider, 2001, p. 10122).

The security system of the Zurich Model accounts for a large body of research on attachment behavior inspired by the seminal works of John Bowlby (1969). Also with reference to Bowlby's attachment theory, Dissanayake (2015) has made a case that "the close early interactions between infants and their caretakers are the prototypes for what will become our later experiences of love, allegiance, art, and other forms of self-transcendence" (p. 7). In *Art and Intimacy*, she argued that human sensibility for aesthetic experience arises from our extraordinary responsiveness to social cues that in turn results from the vital significance of attachment in early infancy. From an evolutionary perspective it must be inherently pleasurable to care for a baby and to establish and maintain close social bonds between babies and their primary care-givers (e.g., physiologically triggered by oxytocin release or perceptually by the baby scheme). Conversely, it is of vital interest to the baby to memorize the individual characteristics (e.g., sound of the voice, smell, facial features) of the people it frequently engages with (Bischof-Köhler, 2006). Since there is no possibility for a newborn baby to identify its biological parents among other adults, frequent exposure (i.e., familiarity) seems the best estimate. The more often an individual is around, the more likely it is a caring, trustworthy kin. It is therefore quite reasonable to assume that a general preference for familiar stimuli (Zajonc, 1968) originates in a hard-wired heuristic equating familiarity with safety (Smith, 2000; Zajonc, 2001) and relatedness. Due to its vital importance, especially during infancy, this mechanism is not limited to conspecifics; it also spills over onto places (e.g., one's birthplace) or inanimate objects (e.g., heirloom, keepsakes, talismans, and souvenirs).[9] In several respects, kitsch actually seems to mimic the characteristics of familiar and trustworthy conspecifics, typically represented by primary caregivers: It is familiar, unambiguous, and elicits positive emotions (e.g., mother with child, baby scheme).

In a now classical textbook of psychology, Titchener (1910) wrote that recognition of familiar stimuli is associated with "a glow of warmth, a sense of ownership, a feeling of intimacy, a sense of being at home," (p. 408) as well as feelings of ease and comfort. This definition is well in line with the hypothesis that familiarity is an ecologically valid cue for safety (Smith, 2000; Zajonc, 2001) and that "positive affect is [therefore] integral to the implicit feeling of familiarity" (Garcia-Marques and Mackie, 2001, p. 241). Research on the so-called "mere-exposure effect" (Zajonc, 1968) shows that liking is positively correlated with exposure rates; a finding which is not limited to the visual domain but expands to other modalities as well (haptics; Jakesch and Carbon, 2012). In a cross-cultural study on kitsch, a positive interrelation between self-transcendence and liking of decorative everyday objects was found (Ortlieb et al., 2017). Another rating study using the same stimulus material in combination with the *Motive Profile Following the Zurich Model* (MPZM; Schönbrodt et al., 2009) showed that decorative day-to-day objects were perceived as less kitschy and more likable by participants who valued security over arousal (Vlasova et al., 2018). As already mentioned by Bischof (2001), the security system also forms the psychobiological basis for xenophobia. According to the Zurich Model, a need for security is inherently related to an aversion of arousal. Since unfamiliar conspecifics constitute a source of arousal, a need for security will inevitably increase likeliness for xenophobic reactions (e.g., fear of strangers in infancy). Interestingly, this ambivalence is also found in kitsch that readily lends itself to right-wing propaganda (Friedländer, 1985/2007). Schmidt (1994), for example, observed that "something in kitsch refers to homeland and familiarity, a need which cannot be rejected, but which has to be mistrusted" (p. 143).

Autonomy System

Autonomy refers to freedom from external control (independence) and the capacity to act in accordance with one's own rules and principles (self-determination). Since dependency upon adult caretakers is very high throughout childhood it is not until early adolescence that the third motivational system—the autonomy system—comes into play. To what extent we aspire autonomy (or avoid it) is determined by the autonomy system and its reference variable "autonomy claim," (see [6] in **Figure 3**) which "is closely related to the power and the achievement motives, as well as the need for prestige and an aspiration for self-confidence" (Schneider, 2001, p. 10123). The autonomy system receives its input from a different source than the other two systems. A person's autonomy claim increases with his or her notion of achievement: When we succeed in solving problems and obtain other people's admiration

[9] As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) pointed out "the words familiar and family are both derived from the Latin word *familia*, which included the kin as well as household possessions" (p. 185).

or acknowledgments our notion of self-confidence increases (Schneider, 2001). The Zurich Model posits that whenever "individuals feel an appetence for autonomy, they are assumed to behave assertively by becoming threatening, demanding, or even aggressive. In the opposite case, if individuals have too much autonomy and feel aversive, they will show submissive behaviors such as behaving humbly or servilely" (p. 10123). Among the three subsystems of the Zurich Model, the autonomy system takes an exceptional position. Its reference variable (autonomy claim) modulates the set points of the other two subsystems (dependency and enterprise) in that it inhibits dependency and enhances enterprise: If self-confidence is diminished, autonomy claim will also be reduced. As a consequence, needs for safety and relatedness stand a good chance to prevail over a need for arousal. In the opposite case, whenever autonomy claim is increased due to a high level of self-efficacy, a need for arousal is likely to arise, while needs for safety and relatedness are tuned down. Interestingly, Bischof (2001) assumes that the activity of the autonomy system is inhibited during infancy and that its reference variable (autonomy claim) peaks during puberty. Thus, if aesthetic appreciation is related to an urge for autonomy, we would expect a preference for arousing stimuli to be particularly pronounced among adolescents.

From an art historian's point of view, autonomy is a key concept to modern aesthetics. On the whole, the historical avant-garde has been described as an emancipatory movement aiming for a "breakup of traditional aesthetic authority" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 4). Inspired by Kant's (1790/1951) distinction between free beauty (*freie Schönheit*) and dependent beauty (*anhängende Schönheit*), modern artists struggle for an individual diction and against the aesthetic conventions of the past.[10] In the second half of the 19th century this autonomy claim became manifest in the unprecedented idea of *art for art's sake* as well as in alternative art institutions such as the Societé des Artiste Indépendants in Paris or the Viennese Secession. This detachment from normative constraints also redefines the role of the perceiver, who is now expected to maintain a critical distance instead of readily indulging in beauty and harmony. As has been pointed out before, the derogatory label of kitsch plays a significant role in intergenerational conflict: Artists and spectators who expressed "nostalgic feelings about the lost ancient ideal of beauty" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 4) risked to be scorned as "Kitschiers" (Avenarius, 1920, p. 222).

Self-Efficacy

In the previous section it has been stated that the set point of the autonomy system (autonomy claim) is positively linked to one's personal sense of achievement and competence. For conceptual clarity, we identify this variable with self-efficacy (see [7] in **Figure 3**). Following Bandura's (1977) classical definition, self-efficacy refers to the extent of a person's confidence in his or her own ability to complete tasks, solve problems, and achieve goals. Usually, notions of self-efficacy vary across different situations depending on a person's skills and his or her previous experience with certain tasks. Perceived self-efficacy is generally higher in familiar, non-threatening situations than in unfamiliar and potentially threatening ones. According to our model, different notions of self-efficacy have a direct bearing on a person's autonomy claim: Whenever we enjoy a high sense of competence and achievement, we are likely to feel more self-determined and thus less dependent on others.

How does self-efficacy affect aesthetic preferences? If self-efficacy is positively linked to the reference variable of the autonomy system (autonomy claim), which, in turn, defines the set points of the security (dependency) and the arousal system (enterprise), then it should also modulate aesthetic preferences for conventional, clear-cut, and benign stimuli, or original, indeterminate, and ambivalent ones, respectively. Findings by Muth et al. (2017a) suggest that "[t]he experience of ambivalent images is strongly linked to mood and self-efficacy" (p. 307): Muth and her colleagues observed that participants rated artistic photographs with highly ambivalent content more positively, if they had received encouraging feedback on a previous puzzle task.

In one of the above sections (Why Is Kitsch Considered Worthless?) we have found that art expertise plays an eminent role when it comes to judgments of taste. Art expertise can be interpreted as a task-related component of self-efficacy in that it gives us the feeling that we can account for our aesthetic judgments based on valid criteria. As mentioned before, there is substantial empirical evidence that art expertise tends to increase people's preference for stimuli which stand out from their previous experience. Based on a review of studies on perceptual choices in artists with non-artists, McWhinnie (1968) concluded that "[i]ndividuals with training in art seem to prefer the more complex figures; whereas, those without training prefer the simple figures" (p. 373). Concordantly, Stojilović and Marković (2014) observed that art lectures increase appreciation of abstract paintings and with regard to music, Smith and Melara (1990) found that music graduate students preferred atypical harmonic progressions, while novices favored music with conventional harmonies. Palmer and Griscom (2013) also examined preferences for conventional harmony using four different sets of stimuli (color, shape, spatial location, and music). They reported that individual preferences for harmony were highly correlated across these domains. Yet this initial preference for harmonious stimuli "decreased consistently with training in the relevant aesthetic domain" (p. 453). As a task-related component of self-efficacy, art expertise clearly seems to elevate people's aesthetic standards with regard to complexity and originality.

Theoretically, one's current level of art expertise defines the anchor point on a continuous dimension connecting the polar opposites of easy-to-process aesthetic objects (kitsch) and difficult-to-process ones (avant-garde art). The more art expertise we command, the closer our anchor point will be to the avant-garde pole and vice versa. Wherever our frame of (p)reference may be located on this dimension, we expect to observe the following dynamics relative to this individual anchor point: Prevalent needs for safety and relatedness will shift the aesthetic comfort zone away from the initial set point into the direction of the kitsch pole, while needs for arousal and autonomy will

[10] According to Dettmar and Küpper (2007), the Kantian opposition of *free* and *dependent* beauty can be seen as one of the precursor concepts of the dichotomy of art and kitsch.

push it toward the avant-garde pole. In the following we make a case that these tendencies should be particularly pronounced, whenever the default mechanism of social distance regulation is unavailable to us and we have to deal with anxiety (or boredom) symbolically.

Coping System

> "Kitsch is the quickest means of reconciling oneself to circumstances"
> (Schmidt, 1994, p. 141)

How do we accommodate needs for security and arousal when physical distance regulation is ruled out? Often we cannot simply walk away from a source of distress (or tedium) and when we feel miserable there is no guarantee that friends and relatives are available to comfort us. Should physical distance regulation be blocked by an obstacle, the auxiliary system of the Zurich Model comes into play. The so-called coping system serves as a kind of toolbox for emergency situations. It contains three sets of reactions: aggression, supplication, and invention.

Aggression and supplication are probably the most primordial responses to critical situations. Supplication means that one turns to another person for help. This is the first and one of the most effective coping strategies (apart from invention): A baby, for example, has no choice but to send out supplication signals to its care-givers. Thanks to the aforementioned baby scheme and the corresponding innate releasing mechanism, supplication signals are in fact inscribed in the baby's bodily appearance promoting caretaking behavior and inhibiting aggression (Zebrowitz, 1997). In early infancy, it is mainly the primary care-givers who provide a safe and optimally stimulating environment: Either by preventing overstimulation or by engaging in lively face-to-face interaction (Dissanayake, 2015). As soon as an infant is capable of crawling, however, it starts to self-regulate needs for arousal and security via locomotion and eye-contact with its caregivers. Finally, with language acquisition toddlers learn that symbols and signs may serve as safety signals. Symbols carrying cultural or idiosyncratic meaning offer new possibilities to deal with trying situations: For example, it is through rituals, talismans, keepsakes, and lucky charms that people bolster their notions of security and achievement. Many objects we find on office desks bespeak these two needs: Family photos convey feelings of affection as they emulate the people dearest to us, while sport trophies and diplomas work as a source of pride and self-confidence by reminding us of past achievements (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Norman, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). According to Fischer et al. (2018), there is preliminary indication that people with different anxiety-related coping styles respond differently to everyday things: Participants with little confidence in their own abilities who claimed to be rather intolerant of uncertainty and highly vigilant about threatening information (*sensitizers*) rated decorative objects more likable and less kitschy than participants who overestimated their abilities and habitually avoid or deny threatening cues (*repressors*). This complementary preference pattern in sensitizers and repressors directs our attention to the final component of our model: regulatory focus.

Regulatory Focus

A systems theoretical approach to dynamics of aesthetic liking implicates that aesthetic evaluation is somehow goal directed and therefore regulated by feedback-controlled processes. *Regulatory Focus Theory* by Higgins (1998) proposes a fundamental distinction between two motivational orientations: One directing us toward preventing threats (*prevention focus*) and another one that promotes opportunities for growth and achievement (*promotion focus*). A prevention focus clearly reflects a need for safety in that it increases our sensitivity to possible threats in our environment. Besides, it motivates us to protect and maintain our present knowledge structures. By contrast, a promotion focus is rooted in a need for learning and achievement that closely resembles an appetence for arousal (curiosity): It increases our sensitivity to opportunities rather than to potential risks. Thus, a promotion focus entails the urge to extend or at least modify one's present knowledge.

How does regulatory focus relate to aesthetic liking? Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell (2008) have distinguished between "mild aesthetic pleasure associated with simple or familiar objects [and a] more intense pleasure associated with complex or novel objects" (p. 305). Inspired by Kant's (1790/1951) opposition of dependent and free beauty they claimed that these two forms of aesthetic pleasure can be differentiated in terms of regulatory focus and corresponding epistemic goals: "Pretty, fluently processed stimuli implicate prevention goals that maintain and project knowledge. Beautiful, novel stimuli implicate promotion goals that reshape and expand knowledge" (Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell, 2008, p. 305). Apparently, this distinction fits squarely to the concepts of kitsch and Modern art advocated in the present article: Kitsch, it seems, is designed to please prevention goals, while avant-garde art promises promotion goal attainment. There is also empirical evidence that regulatory focus modulates aesthetic liking of easy-to-process stimuli. In an experiment by Freitas et al. (2005) the motivational context in which people experienced fluent processing was manipulated. One group of participants was instructed to describe strategies for the attainment of good health, good grades, and financial success (promotion condition), while another group was asked to generate strategies for avoiding health problems as well as academic and financial failure (prevention condition). Subsequently, all participants evaluated images of affectively neutral, everyday objects that were presented either with matching (fluent stimuli) or mismatching (non-fluent stimuli) contour primes. As a result, only participants from the prevention condition showed a preference for easy-to-process stimuli. Together with findings from another concordant study these results amounted to the conclusion that "safety connotations of familiarity are valued in relation to one's current motivational orientation" (p. 642). It seems that hedonic value of fluent processing is moderated by contextual factors as well as by initial stimulus valence (Albrecht and Carbon, 2014). Since we have claimed that immediate identifiability is one of the most important assets of kitsch, we expect that regulatory focus and appreciation of kitsch are dynamically interrelated. In the next section, we take a closer look at the system dynamics.

Dynamics of Aesthetic Appreciation

Finally, the variables of our model are compiled and their dynamic interplay is described on the basis of two complementary scenarios. For each scenario additional empirical evidence is presented to elaborate on this dynamic approach to aesthetic liking.

Scenario I: Familiarity Breeds Contempt

Figure 4 illustrates the system dynamics for a familiar and non-threatening situation. Whenever the environment is safe and predictable, people feel more self-sufficient as they enjoy a higher level of self-efficacy. Under such conditions, the reference variables of the autonomy system (autonomy claim) and the arousal system (enterprise) are increased, while the reference variable of the security system (dependency) is tuned down. Given these parameters, an appetence for arousal easily overrules needs for safety and relatedness. Consequently, the model predicts a promotion focus, which means that a person is motivated to reshape and extend his or her previous knowledge (curiosity). With regard to aesthetic liking, this person's frame of preference is also expected to move away from the initial anchor point into the direction of the avant-garde pole: He or she should show more interest in novel, complex, and ambiguous stimuli promising new insights (Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell, 2008); i.e., qualities typically found in avant-garde art and cutting-edge design. In effect, there is empirical indication for a concordant interrelation between feelings of safety and the appreciation of innovative design (Carbon et al., 2013).

What happens if we fail to attain a promotion goal, because we encounter familiar easy-to-process stimuli instead? According to Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell (2008), we are likely to experience boredom or even dejection since "failure to attain promotion goals leads to low-arousal, negative emotions because when a gain is unrealized, there is an absence of novelty—we are left with what we have, with what we know" (p. 317). When we seek for accomplishment and encounter nothing but perfectly conventional aesthetic objects with a strong emotional charge, we dispraise of them as kitsch. In a series of experiments De Vries et al. (2010) used self-reports and psychophysiological measures to explore whether cognitive and affective responses to familiar stimuli are modulated by mood. Participants were instructed to describe either a happy, or a sad autobiographical memory, before responding to a set of familiar (i.e., prototypical) and unfamiliar (i.e., non-prototypical) visual patterns. Participants in a sad mood showed a preference for familiar patterns. This was, however, not the case for participants in a happy mood: Although prototypical patterns were rated as more familiar, they were not valued more positively. From this study De Vries et al. (2010) concluded that"[i]f mood signals a safe environment, familiarity loses its glow" (p. 325). However, these findings also suggest that the opposite is the case when people feel troubled.

Scenario II: Home Sweet Home

Imagine a group of pupils about to take their final exams. Some have brought stuffed animals or other lucky charms with them and placed them on their desk. The mere presence of these familiar and trusted objects seems to ease their inner tension in the face of a highly relevant and thus potentially threatening situation. **Figure 5** shows the predicted system dynamics for such a trying situation: Under unfamiliar, uncertain, and potentially

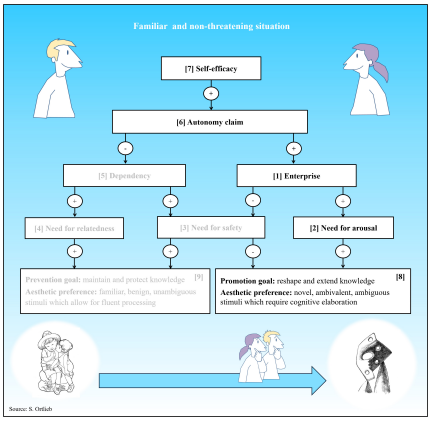

FIGURE 4 | System dynamics in a familiar and non-threatening situation. Arrows with a "+" indicate an excitatory relationship (e.g., if variable **[1]** is high, variable **[2]** is elevated), while arrows with "–" signify an inhibitory relationship (e.g., if variable **[1]** is high, variable **[3]** is diminished).

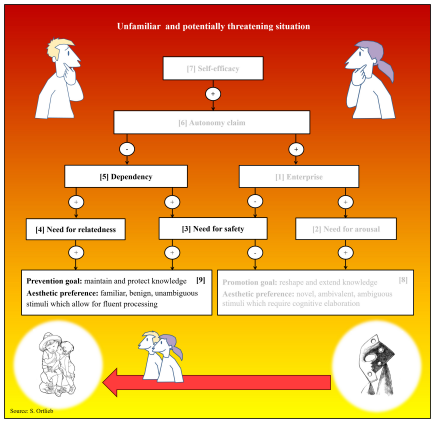

FIGURE 5 | System dynamics in an unfamiliar and potentially threatening situation. Arrows with a "+" indicate an excitatory (e.g., if variable **[1]** is high, variable **[2]** is elevated), while arrows with "–" signify an inhibitory relationship (e.g., if variable **[1]** is high, variable **[3]** is diminished).

threatening conditions self-efficacy expectations are reduced. One's autonomy claim is tuned down as one feels more vulnerable and dependent on others. With needs for safety and relatedness coming to the foreground, an aversion for arousal arises. Cognitively, this state is characterized by a prevention focus, implying a motivation to maintain and protect one's previous knowledge (nostalgia). Accordingly, people's aesthetic comfort zone will shift away from the initial set point toward the kitsch-pole; we thus expect people to become more susceptible to the familiar, clear-cut, and comforting properties of aesthetic objects they might otherwise dispraise as overly sentimental and consoling. Two experiments showed that decorative everyday objects were rated less kitschy, after participants had reflected on their own mortality (Raab et al., 2015; Ortlieb et al., 2016a).

What if we are confronted with strange, difficult-to-process aesthetic objects in pursuit of a prevention goal? Presumably, this causes a state of irritation and uneasiness due to an excessive increase in arousal. Feeling somewhat "lost in a chaos of sound and rhythms, colors and lines, without rhyme or reason" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 2), we expect the perceiver's openness and affection for avant-garde art to be diminished. Accordingly, Landau et al. (2006) observed a more pronounced distaste for Modern artworks—representational and abstract paintings—in participants with a high need for cognitive structure after mortality concerns had been induced.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

> "How does common taste change? Through individuals—powerful, influential, and without any sense of shame—who announce and tyrannically enforce [...] the judgment of their taste and disgust"
> (Nietzsche, 1882/2001, p. 56)

The aim of the present paper is to show that dynamics in aesthetic liking are synchronized with a basic mechanism of social distance regulation that has evolved in social living animals to reconcile needs for safety and intimacy with needs for arousal and autonomy. We believe that it is this constant tension between attachment and detachment that creates emotional involvement and shapes the 'ups and downs' in interpersonal relationships as well as in aesthetic experiences. In modern Western aesthetics this conflict between tradition and innovation has produced the particularly clear-cut dichotomy of kitsch and avant-garde art that can be mapped onto two complementary streams of research in empirical aesthetics: Hedonic fluency (e.g., Reber et al., 2004) and cognitive mastery (e.g., Leder et al., 2004). Our model posits that preference for the one or the other is driven by needs for secure relatedness (nostalgia), respectively self-determined exploration (curiosity): Whenever we feel safe and self-sufficient, an appetence for excitingly new, complex, and ambiguous stimuli arises (art). By contrast, whenever we feel vulnerable and dependent, an aversion toward arousal emerges and we develop an appetence for safety and relatedness, which makes us susceptible to the warm glow of familiar, clear-cut, and benign stimuli (kitsch). According to our model, aesthetic preferences are thus moderated by notions of autonomy that are, in turn, enhanced by expectations of self-efficacy.

The role of social forces in the dynamics of aesthetic appreciation is not without controversy. In *The Clockwork Muse* Martindale (1990) made a strong case that artistic change is stifled rather than inspired by social influences. Instead, he pointed out that some intrinsic pressure for novelty and distinction shapes individual artistic careers and trends. According to Martindale, this balance wheel works against "social forces [which] are analogous to friction, in that they impede or slow down the progress of an artistic tradition" (pp. 34–35). At first glance, this may sound contradictory to the approach advocated in the present article. But in fact, Martindale's remarks nicely summarize an essential aspect of our model by assuming a perpetual conflict between needs for autonomy and affiliation on an individual level and between innovation and tradition on a cultural level. Nevertheless, drawing on our model, we dispute Martindale's claim that artistic change would flourish in a "social vacuum" (p. 34): Outside of a social context, there is apparently no need to strive for autonomy and distinction. For a person in the position of Robinson Crusoe our model predicts a strong desire for safety and affiliation.[11] Under such conditions, we expect Mr. or Mrs. Crusoe to indulge in keepsakes and souvenirs, rather than to contemplate on challenging artworks. Apparently, Martindale's view on aesthetics is strongly influenced by a modernist concept of art emphasizing change and novelty. His model sympathizes with the autonomous artist who bravely struggles against an oppressive tradition in his/her quest for a unique point of view and a distinctive artistic signature. Due to the extraordinary efforts of exceptional individuals "the progress of an artistic tradition" (p. 34) is maintained. With this statement Martindale clearly refers to the "antitraditional tradition" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 66) of Modernism. We make a case that a modernist view has placed its mark on the most influential theories of empirical aesthetics (Ortlieb and Carbon, 2018). For instance, in *Aesthetics and Psychobiology* Berlyne (1971) stated that collative stimulus properties such as novelty, surprise, and ambiguity form the "essential ingredients of art and of whatever else is aesthetically appealing" (p. viii). Apparently, both Martindale and Berlyne committed themselves to an "aesthetic of deviation" (Fricke, 2000), which is based on the premise, that whatever is aesthetically pleasing has to stand out from the beholder's previous experience questioning his or her normative expectations. This approach to aesthetics certainly has its place. Yet, unfortunately, it has narrowed our view to the perspective of the self-contained individual in the pursuit of promotion goals and autonomy. As a consequence, the importance of arousal for aesthetic pleasure has been overrated in Western art-related theories (e.g., Berlyne, 1971), whereas the role of familiarity in aesthetics for maintaining a cultural worldview, social identity formation, and group cohesion has been neglected (see Dissanayake, 1990). The affirmative function of aesthetics and its social dimension has received little attention

[11] In the movie "Cast away" which is loosely based on Defoe's novel, the only survivor of an airplane crash creates a fictitious counterpart: In desperate need for affiliation, he paints a human face onto a volleyball and maintains a social relationship with "Mr. Wilson."

in empirical aesthetics. Under the influence of a "modernist" approach to aesthetics, it seems that we have lost sight of some highly relevant aesthetic phenomena, including the entire field of popular aesthetics (e.g., kitsch, folk art, religious rites, and customs). Interestingly, a complementary view upon the arts can be found among scholars from anthropology, design theory, and social psychology. For instance, Dissanayake (1990) claimed that art production evolved from a collective effort to deal with uncertainties of nature by symbolically exerting control over it. According to Dissanayake, art attempts to make particular things, locations, events, and behaviors *special*—i.e., more salient, pleasurable, and therefore memorable—because they are important either for survival or social cohesion. By turning artifacts into devotional objects, locations into sacred places, and behaviors into rituals or customs, premodern artists made certain objects and events stand out from everyday experience. Yet instead of thwarting the beholder's normative expectations, these practices help to establish and maintain a common worldview. Today, it seems that this affirmative function of art still applies to various phenomena of popular culture, particularly kitsch. In his book on *Emotional Design* Norman (2004) claimed that souvenirs and keepsakes are special to us because they refer to friends and relatives thereby evoking pleasant memories of important episodes of our life. By instilling us with feelings of communality and affection these artifacts may cheer us up on a rainy day (Norman, 2004). Based on Kulka's (1996) definition, we have made a case that these reassuring qualities are ideally represented by kitsch. In empirical aesthetics the discovery of "attitudinal effects of mere exposure" by Zajonc (1968) has inspired extensive research on the hedonic value of processing fluency and raised awareness for the important role of familiarity in aesthetic appreciation (Reber et al., 2004). In social psychology, this turn away from collative variables has led to a strikingly different understanding of art. *Terror Management Theory* (TMT), for example, states that the main psychological function of art is to provide "opportunities to bolster cultural belief systems that provide death-transcending meaning and significance" (Landau et al., 2010, p. 114). With reference to Dissanayake's (1990) ideas, TMT highlights the reassuring function of art in "social life, including rituals to ensure success in group ventures, rites of passage, recognition of seasonal changes, and memorial occasions" (Landau et al., 2010, p. 115). Consequently, the terror management approach to aesthetics adopts a definition of art—"culturally significant meaning, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium" (Anderson, 1990, p. 238, quoted from Landau et al., 2010)—which is perfectly in line with Kulka's (1996) kitsch criteria, but seems hardly compatible with the emancipatory aims of avant-garde art (e.g., Dadaism).[12] In the case of TMT, scholars are primarily interested in the effects of existential threats on aesthetic judgments. Hence, unlike theories proposed by Martindale and Berlyne, TMT puts special emphasis on the alienated individual (i.e., unsettled by mortality concerns) and its needs for relatedness and meaning. By looking at aesthetic phenomena under a prevention focus, it is not surprising that priority is given to the reassuring aspects of art. A considerable body of research shows that reminders of mortality amplify people's—positive and negative—aesthetic judgments (Landau et al., 2010): Artworks that appear accessible based on the beholder's cultural worldview are rated more positively, whereas artworks which defy meaningful interpretation are rated more negatively. These findings are consistent with the basic assumption of our model that people prefer aesthetic stimuli that allow for immediate apprehension, whenever they feel vulnerable and dependent.

What is art for? Answers to this question obviously turn out quite differently depending on the theoretical vantage point: Looking at the self-contained individual, scholars tend to emphasize an intrinsic appetence for change and novelty and an emancipatory function of art (e.g., Berlyne, 1971; Martindale, 1990; Nietzsche, 1882/2001). By contrast, when research is focused on the vulnerable individual, special emphasis is placed on needs for safety and relatedness. As a result, the reassuring function of art is put forward. Clearly, each of these approaches to dynamics in aesthetic appreciation has its merits. However, both appear one-sided as they presuppose different motivational states (i.e., different regulatory foci) in the observer, respectively the artist. According to our model, these perspectives are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they represent two sides of the same coin: A psychobiological mechanism which has evolved to balance needs for autonomy and intimacy in social living animals. We claim that changes in aesthetic appreciation can only be understood if we discriminate between two types of aesthetic experience—a fluent and a disfluent one—which account for these conflicting needs. Moreover, we argue that the state of tension between them is ideally represented by the polemic opposition of kitsch and art. Hence, the dynamics which result from a perpetual conflict between autonomy and relatedness modulate our motivation to engage with the one or the other. Such dynamics are also discernible on a cultural level regarding the relationship between kitsch and art: A recent study by Hanquinet et al. (2014) suggests that Bourdieu's dichotomy of popular (based on beauty and harmony) and highbrow aesthetics still plays an important role, although "the content of highbrow aesthetics has changed, now privileging 'postmodernist' dimensions over modernist ones" (p. 111). This change of common taste has brought about a fundamental reevaluation of kitsch: Since the late 1960s, Pop Art and Postmodernism have blurred the distinction of kitsch and avant-garde art. Today, paintings and sculptures featuring prototypical attributes of kitsch are recognized as high art (e.g., Jeff Koons). Can our model account for this shift in aesthetic evaluation? In an interview the former director of Tate Modern, Chris Dercon, stated that contemporary art no longer intends to separate, shock or polarize, but to provide guidance and relatedness: "[I]n a world that is becoming more and more complex, which nobody can overview, people strive for a sense of belonging" (Sebastian and Dercon, 2014, p. 1, translation by the authors) and he predicted that before long "we will be searching for artworks which help us to remember. The old will become more important than the new" (p. 2, translation by the authors). Given Dercon's premise,

[12]The aim of Dadaists was to ridicule and undermine the dominant worldview of their contemporaries, not to skillfully codify "culturally significant meaning" (Anderson, 1990, p. 238, quoted from Landau et al., 2010).

that the world is becoming more and more confusing, our model makes precisely the same prediction: In the face of increasing uncertainty, we expect people to seek for the "warm glow of familiarity" across different domains, including art.[13]

CONCLUSION, EXPLANATORY SCOPE, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

So far we have made a case that seemingly contradictory findings and theoretical concepts from various disciplines may be reconciled, if they are related to mechanisms of social distance regulation: By drawing on the *Zurich Model of Social Motivation* (Bischof, 1975, 1993, 2001) and *Regulatory Focus Theory* (Higgins, 1998) we are able to specify conditions under which novel stimuli should become more attractive than familiar ones and vice versa. In general, our model predicts that whatever affects people's notion of security and self-efficacy will yield in a shift of regulatory focus and thus affect aesthetic judgments. Finally, we would like to make some closing remarks on the explanatory scope of our model and to point out possible limitations as well as implications for future research on dynamics of aesthetic appreciation.

First and foremost, our model suggests a dynamic interrelation between aesthetic evaluation and critical life events. For instance, any episode in life during which needs for security and attachment are significantly augmented (e.g., couples expecting a baby) should be associated with a greater susceptibility for familiar, easy-to-process-stimuli, whereas life events that boost people's sense of achievement (e.g., passing one's final exams) and autonomy (e.g., leaving the parental home) should coincide with a state of increased appetence for novelty also in the aesthetic domain. Resting on the Zurich Model with its psychobiological foundations, our model can account for developmental aspects such as a characteristic shift in aesthetic taste during adolescence. Due to a general inhibition of the autonomy system throughout infancy and a sharp increase of its reference variable (autonomy claim) with the onset of puberty, we expect appetence for extremely arousing imagery to peak during adolescence. Market research on target groups of horror films supports this assumption (see Blothner, 2004).[14] Yet, based on our model we would also expect to find a particularly high reluctance to familiar stimuli reflecting parental taste. In the context of inter-generational conflict, the term kitsch is commonly used to ridicule the outdated aesthetic standards of an older generation (Avenarius, 1920; Stemmle, 1931; Dettmar and Küpper, 2007).

Social motivation is one of the broad themes in research on gender differences (Eagly and Wood, 1991; Feingold, 1994). In a cross-cultural study including participants from 26 cultures by Costa et al. (2001), women scored higher than men in warmth and gregariousness, but lower in assertiveness and excitement seeking. With reference to findings from child development, Bischof-Köhler (2006) suggested that needs for safety and relatedness, respectively arousal and autonomy, are weighted differently in males and females: If this is the case, aesthetic preferences should differ accordingly. For instance, we would expect males and females to respond differently to artworks with troubling content (Chamorro-Prezumic et al., 2010; Ortlieb et al., 2016b) or certain film genres (horror films; Blothner, 2004). In an experimental study by Wühr and Schwarz (2016) men recalled details from action films more accurately than women, while women excelled in recalling content from romantic films. Interestingly, this gender gap is not a stable phenomenon: A survey on film preferences in older adults (aged 50+) showed that "[w]ith increasing age, older men prefer film genres that otherwise tend to be preferred by female viewers. Women, as they are older, tend to increasingly prefer female film content" (Hoffmann and Schwender, 2007, p. 473). When Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) interviewed members of 82 US-families about their most cherished possessions, a similar pattern emerged: In the parent's generation, men mentioned objects which were associated with action and/or personal achievements (e.g., tools and trophies) more often than women, who in turn put more emphasis on objects reflecting interpersonal relationships and/or nurturant behavior (e.g., heirloom and plants). However, as in the case of film preferences, these gender differences were leveled out among older respondents: In the grandparent's generation both men and women stressed objects referring to memories and self-transcendence (e.g., photos). It would certainly be worthwhile to examine whether such long-term dynamics in gender-related aesthetic preferences reflect changes in social motivation.

Kitsch is a truly international term (see Ortlieb et al., 2017). However, any culture (or subculture) will place its stamp on the innate mechanism of social motivation by putting special emphasis on certain needs (e.g., autonomy) and by devaluing others (Dissanayake, 2015). Thus, a cross-cultural comparison of kitsch concepts between individualistic and more collectivistic societies could be enlightening. According to Hofstede (2001), members of highly individualistic cultures tend to prefer autonomy over strong social ties. They are expected to take care of themselves (e.g., self-made man/woman) and encouraged to swim against the mainstream. By contrast, collectivistic societies place special emphasis on a common worldview and strong social bonds. Consequently, members of collectivistic societies are expected to tune down their autonomy claim in exchange for security and relatedness. Clearly, cross-cultural differences in terms of collectivism and individualism touch upon the basic variables of our model. In popular culture of modern individualistic societies Dissanayake (2015) observed an obsession with harmony and romantic love that have been barred from high art. By contrast, totalitarian states can be seen as corner cases (or grotesque caricatures) of collectivistic societies.

[13]Interestingly, contemporaneous trend analysts spoke of a "New Generation Biedermeier" (Krüger, 2014, translation by the authors) as an increasing number of young people valued safety and intimacy over autonomy and achievement. According to Grünewald (2013), this withdrawal from the public into the private sphere reflects a general tendency to escape from the growing demands of meritocracy in a globalized world.

[14]Blothner's (2004) analysis of film consumption in Germany showed that preference for horror films was highest among (male) teenagers between 15 and 19 years. However, this fascination with horror films was reduced among participants in their early twenties. In all other age groups older than 25 years, the horror genre played only a marginal role.

Its individual members submerge in a whole, which is exclusively dedicated to serving a higher idea. An abstract common good is given absolute priority over any individual desire for autonomy which is officially devalued and violently suppressed (e.g., Nazi-propaganda slogan "You are nothing, your people is everything"). Analyses of right- and leftwing totalitarian societies suggest that under the influence of any collectivistic ideology artistic production will inevitably yield in kitsch production (Greenberg, 1939; Kundera, 1984/1999; Friedländer, 1985/2007).

Apart from basic research on dynamics in aesthetic appreciation, we are convinced that our model can inform applied research. Social motivation is about dynamics of attachment and detachment. Thus, our model should be of practical use for product design (e.g., design evaluation) and marketing (e.g., measures to establish and maintain consumer ties). In terms of design evaluation, we can specify conditions under which innovation is likely to be appreciated: For instance, we recommend providing an environment in which people feel safe and competent, if we wish for them to gratify futuristic design (Carbon et al., 2013). By contrast, we expect uncertain contexts (e.g., traveling a foreign country) to increase the "glow of warmth" radiated by traditional products[15] or familiar brands (e.g., Coca Cola™ or Starbucks™).

Certainly, our model has its limitations: Based on a systems theoretical approach to social motivation which was originally devised from an evolutionary, ethological, and developmental perspective, it is only partially compatible with trait constructs from personality research that figure prominently in empirical aesthetics (e.g., Extraversion, Openness, Schizotypy, etc.). This makes it difficult to relate certain findings on aesthetic preferences and personality to the model we have outlined. Schönbrodt et al. (2009) have developed a set of standardized scales for the assessment of interindividual differences in security, arousal, power, prestige, and achievement, that is explicitly based on the Zurich Model. In fact, content-validity of the *Motive Profile following the Zurich Model* (MPZM) has been cross-checked and approved by the author of the Zurich Model (Schönbrodt et al., 2009). When construct validity of the MPZM was studied in a multitrait-multimethod analysis using the German adaptation of the *NEO-Five-Factor Inventory* (NEO-FFI; Körner et al., 2002), the *Multi-Motive Grid* (MMG; Schmalt et al., 2000), and the *Personality Research Form* (PR-D; Stumpf et al., 1985) it only "showed convergent validity to content-matched scales of the PR-D (r = 0.55), [but] no differentiated relationship to the MMG, and few correlations to the NEO-FFI" (p. 141). In a study on external validity including biographical data, however, the MPZM outperformed both the NEO-FFI and the MMG in terms of predictive power and incremental validity (Schönbrodt et al., 2009). Albeit our theoretical framework is not well-aligned with standard models of personality research, there is first indication that the MPZM, the anxiety-related coping inventory (ABI) by Krohne and Egloff (1999), and the *General Self-Efficacy Scale* (GSE) by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) make appropriate measures for the empirical study of the model's main propositions (Muth et al., 2017b; Fischer et al., 2018; Vlasova et al., 2018).

[15] The city of Bamberg is located in Upper Franconia, the region with the highest density of small, privately owned breweries in the world. From their personal experience the authors of this paper report warm feelings of belonging, whenever they encounter a traditional beer from these premises elsewhere.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SO had the initial idea to bring the Zurich Model together with dynamics of aesthetic appreciation, mainly wrote the manuscript, and created the figures. C-CC brought insight from empirical aesthetics. SO and C-CC worked further on the manuscript and finished it together.

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A.4 Kitsch and Perception: Towards a New 'Aesthetic from Below'

Kitsch and Perception: Towards a New 'Aesthetic from Below'*

Stefan A. Ortlieb[1,2,3] and Claus-Christian Carbon[1,2,3]

[1]University of Bamberg
Department of General Psychology and Methodology
Markusplatz 3, D-96047 Bamberg, Germany
[2]Bamberg Graduate School of Affective and Cognitive Sciences (BaGrACS)
Markusplatz 3, D-96047 Bamberg, Germany
[3]Forschungsgruppe EPÆG (Ergonomics, Psychological Æsthetics, Gestalt)
Markusplatz 3, D-96047 Bamberg, Germany

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Abstract
Although kitsch is one of the most important concepts of twentieth-century art theory, it has gone widely unnoticed by empirical aesthetics. In this article we make a case that the study of kitsch is of considerable heuristic value for both empirical aesthetics and art perception. As a descriptive term, kitsch makes a perfect example of hedonic fluency. In fact, the frequently invoked opposition of kitsch and art reflects two types of aesthetic experience that can be reliably distinguished in terms of processing dynamics: a disfluent one that promises new insights but requires cognitive elaboration (art), and a fluent one that consists of an immediate, unreflective emotional response but leaves us with what we already know (kitsch). Yet as a derogatory word, kitsch draws our attention to a general disregard for effortless emotional gratification in modern Western aesthetics that can be traced back to eighteenth-century Rationalism. Despite all efforts of Pop Art to embrace kitsch and to question normative values in art, current models of aesthetic liking—including fluency-based ones—still adhere to an elitist notion of Modern art that privileges style over content and thereby excludes what is essential not only for popular taste and Postmodern art but also for premodern artistic production: emotionally rich content. Revisiting Fechner's (1876) criticism of highbrow aesthetics we propose a new *aesthetic from below* (*Aesthetik von Unten*) that goes beyond processing characteristics by taking content- and context-related information into account.

Keywords
empirical aesthetics; art perception; kitsch; hedonic fluency; perceptual fluency; conceptual fluency; pleasure; interest; Fechner; aesthetic from above; aesthetic from below

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1 Introduction

In his influential essay on *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* art critic Clement Greenberg (1939) once expressed his wonder about the coexistence of two such irreconcilable things in modern Western aesthetics as a Cubist painting by Braque and a flashy cover illustration of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Today, we have come to take these disparities for granted as the line between kitsch and art has blurred: In a show of twentieth-century art we discover action paintings by Pollock next to comic-style pin-ups by Mel Ramos and when we leave the museum through the gift shop we run into "art with a 100 percent, absolute and instantaneous availability for consumption" (Benjamin, 1982/2002, p. 395): coffee mugs, umbrellas, ball pens, and fridge magnets adorned with sunflowers by Van Gogh. Finally, in the queue at the cash register we realize that there is a market for these things. With Pop Art using kitsch elements and, conversely, with merchandise capitalizing on iconic artworks (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008), kitsch has become "one of the most bewildering and elusive categories of modern aesthetics" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 232). Is there a perspective in empirical aesthetics broad enough to deal with it? When we think of empirical aesthetics, we usually think of art perception. Alike other phenomena of popular taste, kitsch has so far received hardly any attention. In the following, we therefore raise the questions why one of the most important concepts of twentieth-century art theory has been overlooked and why the study of kitsch might be of relevance for empirical aesthetics in general and art perception in particular.

In the first section, we touch upon the origins of the word *kitsch* and the aesthetic concept it designates (Where does "kitsch" come from?). Subsequently, a definition by Kulka (1996) is introduced and elaborated to clarify our understanding of kitsch (What is kitsch?). The third section accounts for the mass appeal of kitsch (Why is kitsch so popular?), while section four deals with its supposed aesthetic deficiency (Why is kitsch considered aesthetically worthless?). Finally, we discuss possible reasons for a persistent disregard of kitsch in empirical aesthetics and close by renewing Fechner's (1876) criticism of highbrow aesthetics that led to the establishment of experimental aesthetics in the first place.

2 Cheap Artistic Stuff: Where Does 'Kitsch' Come From?

This section is about the origins of the word *kitsch* and the aesthetic concept it represents. According to Călinescu (1987), it was in Munich between 1860 and 1880 that "kitsch" entered the jargon of painters and art dealers as a synonym for "cheap artistic stuff" (p. 234).[1] Despite its rather recent appearance, etymology of the word kitsch still lies in the dark and has been subject to wildest speculation (Kluge & Seebold, 2011).[2] From his personal recollections, Avenarius (1920) reported that the German "Kitsch" comes from a mispronunciation of the English "sketch" that was widespread among artists who sold oil paint-

[1] The earliest written account of the word kitsch is a satirical poem by art critic Max Bernstein (1884) making fun of a contemporary genre painting displayed at the annual show of the Munich Art Society in 1883.

[2] See Călinescu (1987) for a comprehensive overview of etymological theories.

ings of poor quality as souvenirs to Anglo-American tourists visiting Bavaria's capital. Although Avenarius claimed to be an ear witness in the case, his theory seems rather improbable as a typical German mispronunciation of "sketch" [skɛtʃ] does not sound similar to "kitsch" [kitʃ]. Derivations from other European languages appear equally far-fetched (e.g., the French "chic" pronounced backwards; Kulka, 1996) since the word "kitsch" is detectable in some German dialects before it became a label for bad taste. According to Best (1985), the noun "Kitsch" originates in Swabian dialect where it was used to designate scrap wood, flotsam, or crude wooden objects, while the corresponding verb "kitschen" referred to peddling but also to carrying a heavy burden on one's head or by means of a back-basket. Related expressions from Alsatian dialect (noun "Ketsch"; verb "ketschen") support the hypothesis that the semantic field originally comprised the content of a peddler's carrying frame (noun "Kitsch") as well as the act of petty trading (verb "kitschen"). Apart from allocating the origins of the word kitsch to local German dialects from the region where it first appeared in its modern sense, Best's etymological theory also touches upon two influential socio-economic developments of the nineteenth century that have been regarded as essential requisites of kitsch production: Industrialization and universal literacy (Greenberg, 1939). It was with increasing literacy that mass-produced paperbacks became a profitable trading good for haberdashers who carried their merchandise in wooden crates or back baskets (Best, 1985). This 'reading frenzy' of the early 1800s also gave reason to a controversy among writers and literary critics that forestalled some of the main tropes of the later kitsch discourse (Schöberl, 1984; Niehaus, 2002): Pulp literature was rejected as trivial and sentimental, produced for the sole purpose of bringing immediate affection and cheap thrills in exchange for quick money. By the end of the 1920s, the word kitsch had entered many modern languages (see Ortlieb, Stojilović, Rutar, Fischer, & Carbon, 2017) and its context of use gradually extended beyond bad taste in painting and literature (Călinescu, 1987): Today, it applies to music (e.g., folk-like pop music), filmmaking (e.g., romantic love films), TV formats (e.g., telenovelas), and gardening (e.g., garden gnomes), as well as to architecture (e.g., fake antique columns), fashion (e.g., heart-shaped sunglasses), furnishing (e.g., Cuckoo clocks), and interior decoration (e.g., plastic flowers). Nevertheless, there still are some limitations to its use: For example, the word kitsch is never applied to anything smelt, tasted or touched, although the adjectives "touching" or "tasteless" may be used interchangeably.[3] In the following we clarify our understanding of kitsch by examining its preferred subjects and stylistic devices in the visual domain.

[3]Certainly, a sentimental love story can be encoded and decoded using Braille alphabet. The concept of kitsch can thus be acquired by a blind person via haptic sensations. The point is, that the word "kitsch" is never used to describe a tactile or a haptic sensation (e.g., we do not say "the silky texture of this heart-shaped pillow *feels* kitschy"). Conversely, however, the adjective "touching" may be used as a synonym for "kitschy." A corresponding asymmetry is observable in the gustatory domain: Although one would never say "this cake *tastes* kitschy," the term "kitsch" itself is a "taste judgement" and "syrupy sweetness" may be used as a metaphor to describe something "kitschy."

3 Anything but Art: What Is Kitsch?

Over the last one hundred years, the term kitsch has been frequently used to contrast different notions of art (Pazaurek, 1912/2012; Greenberg, 1939; Simon-Schäfer, 1980; Kulka, 1996). In the present section we introduce three necessary conditions for kitsch classification, mainly proposed by philosopher Tomaš Kulka (1996), which reliably distinguish kitsch from Modern art: (A) content charged with positive emotions, (B) immediate identifiability of the depicted subject matter, and (C) a perfectly conventional manner of representation. Based on concrete examples we relate these criteria to findings from empirical aesthetics. Furthermore, Kulka's definition is formalized and operationalizations for the empirical study of kitsch are derived.

Emotionally rich content. Whether something is regarded as kitsch largely depends on its content. Certain themes and subjects are simply more evocative of kitsch than others (Simon-Schäfer, 1980). What do they have in common? According to Greenberg (1939), kitsch prefers the "lowest common denominators of experience" (p. 16) such as love, birth, family, and nostalgia. In addition to these universal themes of human existence, Pazaurek (1912/2012) mentioned patriotic feelings (*Hurrakitsch*) and devotional sentiments as shared by the supporters of a sports club, an ideology, or a religious confession (*Devotionalienkitsch*). More specifically, Kulka (1996) claimed that "[t]he subject matter typically depicted by kitsch is generally considered to be beautiful (horses, long-legged women), pretty (sunsets, flowers, Swiss villages), cute (puppies, kittens), and/or highly emotionally charged (mothers with babies, children in tears)" (p. 26). In perfect agreement with Simon-Schäfer (1980) and others, Kulka (1996) arrived at the conclusion that kitsch generally requires a theme or a subject matter that will "spontaneously trigger an unreflective emotional response" (p. 26) and that whatever adds to the emotional charge of a subject matter, will also increase its potential to provoke kitsch classification. According to this premise, the theme *Mother and Child* (Fig. 1A) should make a particularly gratifying kitsch subject. Firstly, because it alludes to basic needs for security and nurturance and is therefore universally understood (Dissanayake, 2015) and secondly, as it can be tailored to the yearnings and sentiments of a more specific target group: Simply by adding nimbuses, mother and child will be identified as *Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus* (Fig. 1B) and the image will tap into the emotionally rich associations of religious Roman-Catholics. In Bavarian Catholics it is even likely to arouse patriotic feelings since the *Mother of God* is officially recognized *Patrona Bavariae* (Kreiml & Neumann, 2017).

Apart from a contentwise enrichment of the theme *Mother and Child* (e.g., *Mother of God*), Figures 1A and 1B illustrate two stylistic devices that will add to its emotional charge by bringing conventional beauty and cuteness into play: the *beauty-in-averages-effect* (Halberstadt, 2006) and the *baby scheme* (Lorenz, 1943). In both figures the mother is not portrayed as an individual person; instead her facial features represent a perfectly prototypical female face. Most likely, this manner of representation will add to the emotional impact of the depicted subject matter, since facial averageness is positively associated with judgements of attractiveness, good health, and desirable personality traits (Fink, Neave, Manning, & Grammer, 2006). With "a head large in relation to the body, eyes set low in the head, a large protruding forehead, round protruding cheeks, a plump rounded body shape, short thick extremities, [and a] soft

Figure 1: *Mother and Child* as a universal kitsch subject (A) and *Mary, Mother of Jesus* as a devotional modification of this theme (B). Drawings adapted by first author.

body surface" (Morreall & Loy, 1989, p. 68) the two babies ideally represent the well-known "baby scheme" (Lorenz, 1943). As part of an innate releasing mechanism for nurturing behavior this set of physical features in babies and toddlers is universally understood. Besides, attracting the perceiver's attention, it will reliably elicit a spontaneous affective response that enhances care-taking behavior and deters aggression (Zebrowitz, 1997). Responsiveness to this pattern is in fact so strong, that immediate affection also strikes us when we detect it in other mammalian infants (e.g., puppies and kittens). In kitsch one typically finds exaggerated versions of the baby scheme with an excessively large head and big round eyes. The use of such supernormal key stimuli makes juvenile features even more salient and further increases likeliness of a spontaneous emotional response (Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999, *peak-shift principle*).

Positive valence. Does kitsch draw on highly emotional content per se? Disturbing and saddening events such as illness, death, loss, and separation also form part of the human condition and images of snakes or spiders may reliably trigger strong feelings of fear and disgust due to a 'hard-wired' response mechanism (Hoehl, Hellmer, Johansson, & Gredebäck, 2017). In spite of their strong emotional charge, these themes and subjects do not work for kitsch. According to Kulka (1996), kitsch "avoid[s] all unpleasant or disturbing features of reality, leaving us only with those we can easily cope with and identify with" (p. 27). Although he agrees that the affective palette of kitsch is confined to positive emotions, his first precondition does not exclude negative emotional content. We therefore suggest to make a slight but significant modification: First and foremost, kitsch requires a subject matter with a positive emotional charge. On a rough two-dimensional scheme, emotional states can be described in terms of valence (how positive or aversive does it feel?) and arousal (how activating or deactivating does it feel?). Although limited in terms of valence, it seems

unspecific with regard to activation: It may cheer us up on a rainy day or calm us dawn when we feel upset (Norman, 2004). By confining kitsch to agreeable content, we are able to distinguish an unadulterated heartwarming response to kitsch from the more complex aesthetic experience of *being moved* (Menninghaus et al., 2015), that is characterized by mixed emotions (Weth, Raab, & Carbon, 2015) including physiological markers for negative affect (Wassiliwizky, Koelsch, Wagner, Jacobsen, & Menninghaus, 2017).

Identifiability. Is positive emotional content sufficient for kitsch classification? Certainly not. After all, many acclaimed artists deal with the most agreeable aspects of human existence. The celebrated sculptor Henry Moore, for example, has created an extensive series of works dedicated to the subject of *Mother and Child* (Fig. 2). In spite of their heartwarming subject, these works are recognized as icons of modern sculpture. Yet, unlike the makers of the previous versions of *Mother and Child* (Fig. 1 A/B), Moore chooses a manner of representation that makes it very difficult for us to identify what is depicted. Without the descriptive title *Reclining Mother and Child* the perceiver would be absolutely clueless. It is even with this piece of information that Moore's sculpture persistently defies categorization.

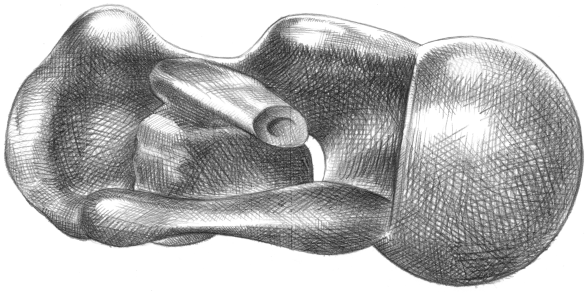

Figure 2: Henry Moore (1961): *Reclining Mother and Child.* Drawing adapted by first author.

Even the most touching subject will not release an unreflective positive response, unless it is fairly recognizable. Kulka (1996) therefore claims that "instant and effortless identifiability of the depicted subject matter" (p. 29) is the second sine qua non for kitsch classification. But how can immediate identifiability be attained? First of all, one should refrain from any inventive manner of depiction which is sure to spoil the intended unreflective emotional response. A Cubist style interpretation of *Maternity* (Fig. 3A), for example, that dissolves the subject into disparate patches of paint or plaster will certainly impair instant recognition and Gestalt detection (Muth, Pepperell, & Carbon, 2013). Thus, with regard to formal aspects, kitsch prefers conventional realism to any kind of idiosyncratic rendering or even indeterminate display (Muth & Carbon,

2016). Apart from non-figurative works of art, still countless celebrated artworks come to mind that are perfectly compliant with Kulka's first and second preconditions. At this point, we have to clarify what we mean by "art," in order to further specify what we mean by "kitsch".

Conventionality. In 1920 the artist Paul Klee famously wrote that "[a]rt does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible" (Klee quoted from Chipp, 1968, p. 182). This idea—that artworks transform the way we see the world, instead of faithfully imitating it—has been expressed in many different ways by scholars and artists alike: Goodman (1984), for instance, remarked that "[w]hen we leave an exhibition of the works of an important person, the world we step into is not the one we left when we went in; we see everything in terms of those works" (p. 192). How does art bring about such changes? Through an unconventional rendering of a familiar subject, artists like Moore (Fig. 2) and Villon (Fig. 3A) deliberately "complicate [. . .] what is presented to us so that we must see it, not merely recognize it in the routine habitual way of ordinary experience" (Dissanayake, 1990, pp. 69–70). Likewise, Shklovsky (1917/2002) spoke of the dishabituation function of art: It challenges our perceptual routines by breaking up the familiar and acquainting us with the unusual. Recent empirical findings support these notions by showing that appreciation increases, if spectators report insight moments while engaging with ambiguous stimuli (*Aesthetic Aha*; Muth & Carbon, 2013) or artworks that allow for multiple interpretations (*Semantic Instability*; Muth & Carbon, 2016). Moreover, there is preliminary indication that artworks with distinguishing stylistic features transform the way we see the world by readjusting the viewer's perceptual system (Carbon, 2011): In a study by Carbon, Leder, and Ditye (2007) participants adapted their face prototypes to elongated faces in portraits by Amedeo Modigliani, while a complementary style-related adaptation effect was observed for the excessively round proportions in artworks by Fernando Botero. It seems that, after looking at portraits by Modigliani or Botero for some time, people literally "see everything in terms of these works" (Goodman, 1984, p. 192). However, artworks may also challenge our mental representations on a semantic level. The painting *The Blessed Virgin Chastising the Infant Jesus Before Three Witnesses* by Max Ernst (1926), for example, shows precisely what the title suggests (Fig. 3B). Nevertheless, there is something outrageous to its subject matter as the artist makes ironic reference to two tropes of Christian art by combining them in a domestic scene: the ever-harmonious mother-son relationship and the flagellation of Christ. Although Ernst adheres to conventional realism and even borrows his composition from famous artworks,[4] he deliberately thwarts the observer's expectations in terms of Christian iconography.

Altogether, we conclude that Modern art is valued primarily for its ability to reshape and extend our mental representations in a meaningful way (Armstrong & Detweiler-Bedell, 2008; Muth, Hesslinger, & Carbon, 2015). Kitsch, however, does not aim for new insights. Instead, it takes advantage of people's standard associations and confirms them by employing stereotypes and well-tried clichés. According to Kulka (1996), it is the capacity of art to "enrich our associations relating to the depicted object or theme" (p. 37) that is absent in kitsch. In

[4]Infrared reflectography of the underdrawings showed that the artist used reproductions of works by Michelangelo and Tintoretto as templates for the figure composition of *The Blessed Virgin Chastising the Infant Jesus Before Three Witnesses: André Breton, Paul Eluard and the Painter* (Krischel, 1998).

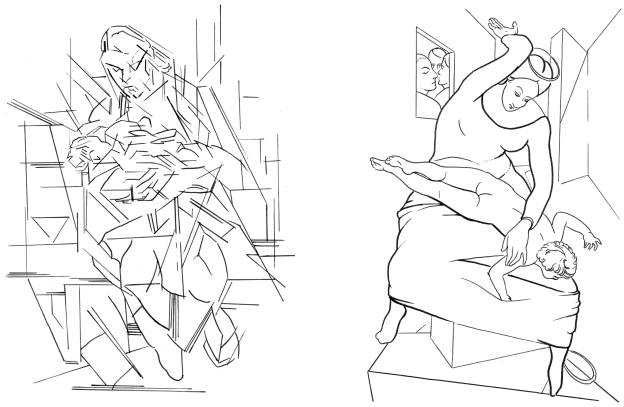

Figure 3: (A) Jacques Villon (1952): *Maternity.* (B) Max Ernst (1926): *The Blessed Virgin Chastising the Infant Jesus Before Three Witnesses.* Drawings adapted by first author.

opposition to avant-garde art "[k]itsch comes to support our basic sentiments and beliefs, not to disturb or question them" (p. 27). Mainly based on Kulka's (1996) definition we suggest that the application of the concept of kitsch requires three things: (A) a subject matter charged with positive emotions, (B) instant and effortless identifiability, and (C) a perfectly conventional manner of representation that does "not substantially enrich our associations relating to the depicted objects or themes" (p. 37). We also agree with Kulka, that, although each of these three preconditions is a necessary one, only a combination of all three is sufficient for kitsch classification. Since positive emotional charge, identifiability, and conventionality may vary considerably between perceivers of different age or cultural background, a classificatory definition with three dichotomic criteria seems impractical, especially for the empirical study of kitsch. We therefore follow Kulka's (1996) suggestion of conceptualizing the three kitsch criteria as continuous dimensions: "The more clearly, saliently, and unambiguously the picture complies with our three conditions, the more paradigmatic an example of kitsch it is" (p. 38). Based on this modified definition, we claim that kitschiness of a visual stimulus array can be estimated based on the product of three continuous variables:

$$\text{Kitschiness} = \text{positive valence} \times \text{identifiability} \times \text{conventionality} \qquad (1)$$

Equation 1. Codomain of dependent and independent varables: 0-1.

This formula allows for straightforward operationalization and empirical testing: Of course, the dependent and the three independent variables could be assessed using standardized rating scales (e.g., 0=*not at all kitschy*; 6=*very kitschy*). Since kitsch is a highly derogatory term, it is probably advisable to use implicit measures in addition to self-reports (see Reiter, Ortlieb, & Carbon, 2015): Valence and intensity of an emotional response could be assessed via facial expressions (sEMG; Cacioppo, Petty, Losch, & Kim, 1986; FaceReader; Weth, Raab, & Carbon, 2015) or implicit associations (md-IAT; Gattol, Sääksjärvi, & Carbon, 2011), while naming latencies and name agreement might serve as behavioral measures of identifiability and conventionality (Snodgrass & Vanderwart, 1980). In the following, we intend to show that our 'formula for kitsch' is also key to a preliminary understanding of kitsch as a mass phenomenon.

4 Instant Beauty: Why Is Kitsch So Popular?

Unlike Abstract Expressionism, kitsch proves tremendously popular. What do people like about kitsch? In this section, we identify three potential sources of its mass appeal: The positive emotional charge of its content and the inherently pleasant experience of fluent processing on a perceptual and a conceptual level.

Style follows content. According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1979/1984), it is one of the main characteristics of popular aesthetics that content is more important than form ('style follows content'). Above all, works of popular taste have to represent something that perceivers can easily relate to their everyday experience, while stylistic choices are made to ensure immediate apprehension of the depicted subject matter (Hanquinet, Roose, & Savage, 2014). Faithful imitation and the classical ideals of beauty and harmony are thus preferred over formal experimentation that is likely to put general accessibility at stake. According to Kulka (1996), the popular principle of 'content over form' holds particularly true for kitsch: "In kitsch paintings, unlike in real art, what is represented is more important than how it is rendered. The *what* overshadows the *how*" (p. 80). From this observation he somewhat prematurely concludes that the appeal of kitsch must be 100 percent content-driven: "People are attracted to kitsch because they like its subject matter" (p. 28).

Hedonic fluency. Do people like kitsch just because they feel passionate about its content? A large body of research from empirical aesthetics suggests that some of the content-independent characteristics of kitsch might also have a share in its popular success. For example, there is strong indication that people prefer familiar (mere exposure effect; Zajonc, 1968) and prototypical stimuli (averaged objects; Halberstadt & Rhodes, 2003; prototypical colors; Whitfield & Slatter, 1979; Martindale & Moore, 1988; Rhodes & Tremewan, 1996) if they are depicted in an unambiguous, clear-cut manner (clarity of contours; Reber, et al., 1998; canonical perspective; Palmer, Rosch, & Chase, 1981; Khalil & McBeath, 2006). Altogether, these findings have amounted to the hypothesis that any aspect of a visual stimulus that facilitates the ability of our mind to process it efficiently and with relative ease has a positive effect on aesthetic liking. The *Hedonic Fluency Model* (HFM) by Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman (2004) postulates a monotonically increasing relationship between processing speed and liking: "The more fluently the perceiver can process an object, the

more positive is his or her aesthetic response" (p. 366).[5] According to the HFM, processing fluency is an inherently pleasurable experience that is then attributed to the object itself (for empirical support see Winkielman & Cacioppo, 2001) Furthermore, Reber and colleagues (2004) discriminate between fluency at two different levels: *Perceptual fluency* is defined as "the ease of identifying the physical identity of the stimulus" (p. 367), while *conceptual fluency* refers to the "ease of mental operations concerned with stimulus meaning and its relation to semantic knowledge structures" (p. 367). It seems safe to assume that kitsch makes a perfect example of perceptual fluency. After all, effortless identifiability is one of its defining properties (identifiability). But is there any indication that kitsch also features conceptional fluency? In accordance with Kulka (1996) we have found that kitsch does not question standard associations relating to its subjects or themes. Instead, it confirms and protects existent semantic knowledge by "avoid[ing] all unpleasant or disturbing features of reality, leaving us only with those we can easily cope with and identify with" (p. 27). From these considerations we predict that kitsch will also feature a high level of conceptual fluency (conventionality).

Practically all authors who have ventured to express their thoughts about kitsch are agreed in that its appeal consists of an immediate emotional response, without intermediate reasoning (Greenberg, 1939; Simon-Schäfer, 1980; Benjamin, 1982/2002; Călinescu, 1987; Kulka, 1996; Menninghaus, 2009). Like no other aesthetic concept, kitsch embodies the "principle of immediacy, immediacy of access, immediacy of effect, instant beauty" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 8). If this is the case, we expect hedonic fluency to contribute to the appeal of kitsch in addition to the positive emotional charge of its content. In sum, we postulate that the popular success of kitsch is driven by the following three factors:

$$\text{Kitsch appeal} = \text{positive valence}^{(\text{perceptual fluency} \times \text{conceptual fluency})} \qquad (2)$$

Equation 2. Codomain of dependent and independent variables $0 < x \leq 1$.

Note that, unlike Equation 1, the appeal of kitsch does not result from three equally weighted variables. Equation 2 accounts for the popular principle of 'content over form' by placing special emphasis on the emotional charge of the depicted subject matter. In terms of liking, lack of emotional charge cannot be fully compensated by content-independent aspects. Jointly, this triad of pleasant content-related associations, perceptual and conceptual fluency may account for the appeal of kitsch. Yet it certainly cannot explain why kitsch is a derogatory term above all. What is wrong with 'instant beauty' and unconditional accessibility?

[5] Albrecht and Carbon (2014) found that fluency increases intensity, but not necessarily positivity of a stimulus. Thus, the fluency-positivity-hypothesis seems to be limited to stimuli with a positive valence. In the case of aversive stimuli, fluency amplifies negative valence accordingly. Since kitsch is, by definition, limited to *positive* emotional content, this limitation of the *Hedonic Fluency Model* is of no concern here.

5 Unbearable Lightness: Why Is Kitsch Considered Aesthetically Worthless?

Despite its popularity, kitsch is a term of abuse. Why would people dispraise of something that is perfectly agreeable? In the present section, we fathom into the origins of a peculiar aversion towards effortless emotional gratification in modern Western aesthetics that can be traced back to eighteenth-century Rationalism when aesthetic value was linked to epistemic interest and cognitive enrichment.

In his *Critique of Social Judgement of Taste* Bourdieu (1979/1984) remarked that "the whole language of aesthetics is contained in a fundamental refusal of the *facile*" (p. 486). Drawing on everyday examples, he revealed a dismissive attitude towards anything that appears "easy in the sense of simple, and therefore shallow, and 'cheap', because it is easily decoded and culturally 'undemanding'" (p. 486). Furthermore, he pointed out that whatever "offers pleasures that are too immediately accessible [is contrasted with] the deferred pleasures of legitimate art" (p. 486). Again, kitsch makes a prototypical example of Bourdieu's claims as it represents the "principle of immediacy" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 8) in contrast to art. But where does this aversion to instant enjoyment come from? It was in the eighteenth century, that aesthetics was first established as a distinct matter of study by philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1750/1983). For Baumgarten, aesthetics was not merely a philosophy of art and beauty. In fact, he envisioned a new branch of epistemology dedicated to the preconditions of gaining knowledge from sensual experience ("scientia cognitionis sensitivae," p. 79). In the following we make a case that it was precisely this confusion of aesthetics and epistemic interest that prepared the ground for a "refusal of the *facile*" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 486).

Beautiful and sublime. Edmund Burke (1757/1990), a contemporary of Baumgarten, was among the first to distinguish two aesthetic ideas by means of their accessibility: the beautiful and the sublime. Whatever is beautiful, according to Burke, conveys a clear idea of an agreeable subject. Its "smooth and voluptuous satisfaction which the assured prospect of pleasure bestows" (p. 35) inspires the perceiver with "sentiments of tenderness and affection" (p. 39). While beauty instils 'love at first sight,' the sublime strikes us with confusion and awe resulting from the obscure notion of an unsettling subject matter (Burke, 1757/1990). By comparing the Burkeian sublime to the process of *accommodation*, Keltner and Haidt (2003) revealed an interesting parallel between Burke's aesthetic theory and *Genetic Epistemology* by Piaget and Inhelder (1969). Sublimity is fascinating, yet disturbing, because it transcends the perceiver's previous experience. Thus, encounters with the sublime defy integration into existing mental structures unless these are successfully modified (i.e., accommodated). Conversely, Burke's notion of beauty resembles what Piaget and Inhelder (1969) referred to as *assimilation*. While the sublime forces us to see the world differently, the beautiful validates our cognitive structures by conveying a clear-cut idea that perfectly accords with our expectations. In his own words Burke (1757/1990) asserts that "we submit to what we admire [i.e., sublimity], but we love what submits to us [i.e., beauty]" (p. 103). This quotation also shows a patronizing attitude towards the beautiful. Elsewhere Burke further stipulates that truly important ideas cannot be expressed by beauty

since "[a] clear idea is [only] another name for a little idea" (p. 58). Apart from immediate accessibility Burke's condescending notion of beauty already bears a considerable family resemblance with the concept of kitsch.

Dependent and free beauty. Contempt towards the 'facile' is also inherent in Kant's (1790/1951) complementary ideas of free and dependent beauty. In his *Critique of Judgement*—a reply to both Baumgarten and Burke—Kant claims that an experience of beauty is "merely dependent" (p. 81) whenever it results from an object that adheres perfectly well to some prototype the beholder has in mind. Thus, whatever is dependently beautiful in a Kantian sense "immediately succumbs to conceptual understanding because it perfectly satisfies the 'rules' for the application of a concept" (Armstrong & Detweiler-Bedell, 2008, p. 310). This would certainly apply to the conventional renderings of *Mother and Child* in Figures 1A and 1B. Here there is no need for a descriptive title as the meaning of both images is obvious. In the case of free beauty, however, the perceiver fails to apply a definite concept to the object in question. Nevertheless, he or she "senses an abstract, potential unity of the features suggested by the object" (p. 310). This would correspond to Moore's sculpture (Fig. 2) and Villon's Cubist interpretation of maternity (Fig. 3).

Pretty and beautiful. Armstrong and Detweiler-Bedell (2008) have proposed a distinction between the pretty and the beautiful that maps the Kantian ideas of dependent and free beauty onto cognitive processing dynamics. They made a case that "Kant's notion of dependent beauty nicely describes the aesthetic pleasure associated with fluent processing" (p. 310) and argued that we experience pretty objects whenever our "'normal', concept-bound cognition is particularly successful" (p. 310)—for instance, when we recognize an iconic image, a brand logo or a popular advertisement jingle. Obviously, it is but a small step from prettiness (i.e. dependent beauty) to the concept of kitsch advocated in this article.

Pleasure and interest. Finally, the *Pleasure-Interest Model of Aesthetic Liking* (PIA Model) by Graf and Landwehr (2015) combines fluency-based aesthetics with a dual-process perspective and epistemic motivation. It posits that aesthetic preferences are shaped by "two hierarchical, fluency-based processes" (p. 395) with different outcomes: Evaluations of pleasure (i.e., immediate affective reactions) result from an initial gut-level process that is stimulus-driven and does not involve cognitive elaboration, while judgements of interest arise from a controlled, higher order process that is activated by stimulus-based affordances (e.g., ambiguity) and/or the perceiver's need for cognitive enrichment. Again, it is the beholder's epistemic motivation that coins his or her aesthetic judgement: According to Graf and Landwehr (2015), "pleasure is a *backward-oriented process* that is not associated with the motivation for further exploration of the target, whereas interest also has a *forward-oriented character* related to the motivation for learning" (p. 404, emphases by the authors). This description of the two hierarchical processes involved in aesthetic evaluation recalls Greenberg's (1939) famous characterization of kitsch as a cultural "rear-guard" (p. 9) drawing on "accumulated experience" (p. 10) in opposition to a future-oriented artistic avant-garde. This said, the PIA Model offers a plausible explanation for the puzzling ambivalence of kitsch: Designed to create a particularly smooth processing experience that "directly feels good on an affective level" (p. 397), kitsch should excel in the initial "default type of aesthetic stimulus processing" (p. 399). For perceivers with a low motivation to

learn, this inherently pleasurable processing experience directly translates into a positive aesthetic evaluation. However, when it comes to controlled processing, kitsch fails to arouse continuing interest: As an easy-to-process stimulus, it frustrates perceivers with a high need for cognitive enrichment in that it leaves them with what they already know. In this case, the positive first impression ("How cute!") should be overwritten by a negative interest-related judgement ("How kitschy!"). In fact, there is preliminary indication that implicit and explicit evaluations of kitsch stimuli may dissociate (Reiter, Ortlieb, & Carbon, 2015): A within-subject comparison of explicit and implicit attitudes towards decorative everyday objects showed that kitschy objects were received more positively in a multi-dimensional implicit association test (md-IAT; Gattol et al., 2011) than in self-reports (Likert-scales). Based on the PIA Model, we hypothesize that the magnitude of this discrepancy between implicit, gut-level appreciation and explicit, cognitive refusal should increase with a person's level of art expertise. Several studies have shown that the acquisition of art-related knowledge raises people's aesthetic standards in terms of novelty and complexity (McWhinnie, 1968; Smith & Melara, 1990) as well as their appreciation of abstract paintings (Stojilović & Marković, 2014). Palmer and Griscom (2012) obtained a complementary effect for easy-to-process-stimuli that is particularly informative with regard to kitsch: In this case artistic training reduced an initial preference for conventional harmony. Altogether, the PIA Model gives a plausible answer to our initial question why aestheticians show so very little interest in kitsch: Assuming that scholars and researchers are driven by an exceptionally high motivation to learn and explore, they should prefer aesthetic objects that allow for cognitive enrichment (e.g., avant-garde art) and despise of undemanding conventional ones (e.g., kitsch). Looking at the historical precursors of the polemic opposition of kitsch and art, it seems that an early confusion of aesthetic value and epistemic interest gave rise to a latent disregard for aesthetic objects that provide immediate emotional gratification. To what extent is this highbrow attitude still discernible in empirical aesthetics today and how can it be overcome?

6 Discussion

> "By the association principle I mean a principle, that is already known and recognized in psychology for its significance and its scope, but which is hitherto hardly appreciated in aesthetics"
>
> — Fechner, 1876, Chap IX, p. 86, translation by the authors[6]

When Gustav Theodor Fechner launched experimental aesthetics in 1876, he thought of it as an inductive down-to-earth complement to a philosophical *aesthetic from above* (*Aesthetik von Oben*) without any empirical foundation. With his experimental approach to aesthetic problems (*experimentale Aesthetik*), he hoped to establish an *aesthetic from below* (*Aesthetik von Unten*) that would bridge the gap between high-browed speculation and everyday experience. Fechner himself set a good example in that he sought the rules of aesthetic appeal not

[6]Original version: "Unter Associationsprincip verstehe ich ein Princip, dessen Wichtigkeit und Tragweite in der Psychologie längst bekannt und anerkannt, in der Aesthetik aber bisher im Ganzen wenig gewürdigt ist" (Fechner, 1876, Chap IX, p. 86).

in high art but in common things such as cigar cases (Do people prefer cigar cases whose proportions accord with the so-called golden section?) or the cold meats of a butcher's display (Why are sausages cut diagonally rather than perpendicularly?). However, when interest in experimental aesthetics revived in the 1950s, after a longer period of stalemate, the focus had shifted from everyday phenomena to art perception. For the trailblazer of new experimental aesthetics, Daniel E. Berlyne (1971), art was essentially a manifestation of exploratory behavior. Resting on the basic assumption that novelty and conflict form the guiding principles behind any kind of aesthetic experience, his influential biopsychological model bespeaks a modernist notion of art. To the present day, Modern art is widely acknowledged as the ultimate touchstone for a general understanding of human aesthetic experience. The well-received information-processing *Model of Aesthetic Appreciation and Aesthetic Judgement* by Leder, Belke, Oeberst, and Augustin (2004), for example, centers on the question "why modern art's large number of individualized styles, innovativeness and conceptuality offer positive aesthetic experiences" (p. 489). But can it also account for kitsch? We think not: Since the model is all about mastering the "[c]ognitive challenges of both abstract art and other conceptual, complex and multidimensional stimuli" (p. 489) an unreflective emotional response to kitsch is not provided for.

With fluency-based aesthetics a complementary stream of research emerged, that seems more suitable for the study of kitsch. After all, the main proposition of the *Hedonic Fluency Model* (Reber et al., 2004, HFM), that aesthetic liking is a positive function of processing ease, has already led us to a better understanding of its hedonic value (see section four), while another fluency-based framework—the *Pleasure-Interest Model of Aesthetic Liking* (PIA Model) by Graf and Landwehr (2015)—has been informative regarding the "contradictory preference patterns for easy [e.g., kitsch] versus difficult-to-process aesthetic stimuli [e.g., Modern art]" (p. 396). With epistemic motivation as a moderating variable, the PIA Model gives a plausible answer to our initial question why aestheticians show so very little 'interest' in kitsch (see section five). Does a dual-process perspective on fluency-based aesthetics bring us back onto the right track of Fechnerian aesthetics then? Surprisingly, the answer is 'no.' Alike the HFM, the PIA Model is preoccupied with the perceiver's processing experience and thereby "excludes the influence of content-based object information on aesthetic preferences" (Graf & Landwehr, 2015, p. 406). Drawing on Kant's (1790/1951) famous dictum of 'disinterested interest' the authors of the PIA Model argue that "[e]specially for stimuli with salient semantic content, an 'aesthetic' preference judgement may [...] be obscured by content-based stimulus information, making the preference judgement not exclusively aesthetic" (Graf & Landwehr, 2015, p. 406). If we maintain that positive emotional content is a sine qua non for kitsch classification and key to its popular success, we have to admit that fluency-based aesthetics cannot fully account for it. A dual-process model of fluency-based aesthetics can reliably distinguish between kitsch and Modern art; yet in an everyday context, where everything features high perceptual and conceptual fluency (e.g., traffic signs), it ignores precisely what makes kitsch special: a heartwarming subject matter.

It was again Fechner (1876) who first criticized a general disregard for content-related associations in aesthetics and it was precisely the Kantian ideal of *disinterestedness* which he held responsible for the widespread misconception that pure aesthetic judgements should be entirely independent from any content-

based information (free beauty). From introspection (Why is it that we find an orange more beautiful than a wooden ball of the exact same size and color?) and thought experiments (If our aesthetic judgement was based solely on stylistic aspects wouldn't we value an equally colorful, but perfectly symmetrical carpet pattern over the Sistine Madonna?), Fechner concluded that content-related aspects (*associative Factoren*) must be at least as important for the formation of aesthetic judgements as stylistic ones (*direkte Factoren*).[7] Meanwhile, there is substantial empirical support for his claim: A study on the microgenetic processes of art perception by Augustin, Leder, Hutzler, and Carbon (2008), for example, demonstrated that style literally follows content: When presentation times of representational artworks were systematically varied (10 ms, 50 ms, 202 ms, and 3,000 ms), Augustin and colleagues observed that "effects of content were present at all presentation times, [whereas] effects of style were traceable from 50 ms onwards" (p. 127). This finding, that content-related information is processed prior to stylistic aspects, has been confirmed in a follow-up study using a dual-task EEG-paradigm (Augustin, Defranceschi, Fuchs, Carbon, & Hutzler, 2011) as well as in an ERP-based study on facial attractiveness (Carbon, Faerber, Augustin, Mitterer, & Hutzler, 2018): Upon examining the temporal order and the interplay of gender-specific facial features and facial attractiveness, Carbon and colleagues summarized that "processing of facial attractiveness seems to be based on gender-specific aesthetic pre-processing, for instance via activating gender-specific attractiveness prototypes which show focused processing of certain facial aspects" (p. 186). Furthermore, research on aesthetic preferences in poetry suggests that a predominance of content is also found outside of the visual domain. According to Belfi, Vessel, and Starr (2018), the best predictors for aesthetic liking of a sonnet or a haiku were the "vividness of imagery experienced in reading, valence, and arousal of perceived emotion in a poem's content" (p. 341). In the light of these findings, it seems that our perceptual apparatus is itself governed by the popular principle of 'content over form.' Should this be the case, our aesthetic judgements would never be 'purely aesthetic' in a Kantian sense, no matter how much art expertise we acquire. In the following we intend to show that a disregard for content prevents a comprehensive understanding not only of kitsch but also of premodern artistic production.

6.1 Kitsch: A Relic of Premodern Taste?

So far, we have made a case that Modern art is the preferred subject in theory and practice of empirical aesthetics because it is believed to be somehow representative for human aesthetic experience (Berlyne, 1971; Leder et al., 2004). This basic assumption turns out to be highly questionable if we take findings from sociology, anthropology, and art history into consideration. Based on a cross-cultural account of artistic production in premodern societies, Dissanayake (1990) arrived at the conclusion that "modern Western aesthetic sensibility differs from the rest of humankind" (p. 159). She goes on to point out that the function of Western art is, in fact, directly opposed to the purpose of the arts in premodern societies: The core values of Modern art are novelty and change and the artist's role combines a subjective view on society with criticism of tradition

[7] Of course, Fechner did not take the possibility of abstract art into consideration. However, with regard to non-representational art it can be argued that content-related associations may also be triggered by colors, shapes, and textures.

(Călinescu, 1987). In premodern cultures, however, art production was not a "private predilection, separated from primary lived experience" (Dissanayake, 1990, p. 183), but an essential part of communal and spiritual life: Embedded into rituals and customs the arts were used to communicate and reinforce the 'traditional ways,' not to question them. Figure 4A, for example, shows a miniature statue of the ancient Egyptian deity Isis nursing her son Horus. Vast numbers of these figurines were produced for devotees of the Isis-and-Osiris-cult which was particularly popular with the common people (Assmann, 1984/2001). For well over a millennium these idols show a remarkable continuity in terms of style and content (Müller, 1963).[8] Centuries later, the subject of Isis nursing Horus (*Isis lactans*) entered Christian iconography (*Madonna lactans*) and lives on in modern-day souvenirs (Müller, 1963).

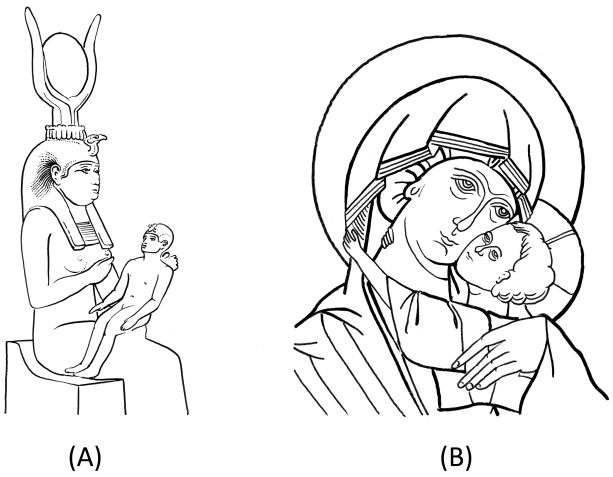

Figure 4: (A) Egyptian figurine of *Isis Nursing Horus* from the 7th century B.C., (B) Christian-Orthodox icon showing the *Mother of God*. Drawings adapted by first author.

The Greco-Byzantine tradition of icon painting is another example for art production that has little in common with avant-garde art. Orthodox icon painting confines itself to a pre-defined set of biblical themes (*Mother of God*; Fig. 4B). To the present day, traditional icon painters adhere to a scheme of formal conventions regarding composition, color palette, and lighting in ac-

[8] According to Müller (1963), considerable stylistic modifications occurred during the reign of Hellenistic and Roman rulers. Yet it seems that Hellenistic and Roman fashion and aesthetic conventions were applied to the Egyptian blueprint of *Isis Nursing Horus* to make it more appreciable for the new ruling class.

cordance with an officially recognized canon of wonder-working icons. Such an affirmative function of art was also prevalent in Western Europe before the onset of modernity: Neither the cave paintings of Lascaux nor the original stained-glass windows of a Gothic cathedral were created to challenge the beholder's worldview. More likely, these works were "designed to impose upon individuals unforgettable patterns of tribally essential knowledge and explanation" (Dissanayake, 1990, p. 154). On the whole, premodern art and modern-day kitsch have something in common that separates them from the avant-garde: Both come "to support our basic sentiments and beliefs, not to disturb or question them" (Kulka, 1996, p. 27). Is kitsch possibly a relic of some primordial aesthetic sensibility? It is one of the most recurrent arguments against kitsch that it relies on second-hand experience and culturally "pre-established forms" (Adorno, 1932/2002, p. 501). In his analysis of Fascist aesthetics historian Saul Friedländer (1985/2007) referred to kitsch as a "run-down form of myth" (p. 55, translation by the authors) haunting an excessively rational modern world as a distant "echo of sunken cultures" (p. 55, translation by the authors). With regard to kitsch in music, philosopher Theodor W. Adorno (1932/2002) spoke of a "receptacle of mythic basic materials" (p. 501) that have lost their cultural significance. After all, kitsch might be regarded as a living fossil of premodern taste that "draws its life blood, so to speak, from [a] reservoir of accumulated experience" (Greenberg, 1939, p. 40).[9] By drawing on the lowest common denominators of culture Greenberg predicted that kitsch was to become "the first universal culture ever beheld" (p. 6). Its tremendous cross-cultural success, its proclivity to themes of general human interest, its use of innate releasing mechanisms (e.g., baby scheme) make kitsch a particularly promising subject not only for evolutionary aesthetics but for a general understanding of human aesthetic sensibility (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2017). From the supposed roots of kitsch in premodern aesthetics we now turn to its recent manifestations in Postmodern art.

6.2 Kitsch: A Device of Postmodern Art

By the middle of the twentieth century Modernism arrived at a dead end (Eco, 1980/1984): Avant-garde music had advanced from atonality to absolute silence, poetry had reached the blank page and there was nothing left of painting but "the white, the slashed, the charred canvas" (p. 67). Although the historical Avant-garde "had exhausted all its formal possibilities" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 277), the promised unity of life and art remained a distant utopia. Ironically, the divide between popular taste and the arts had never been greater (Greenberg, 1939). In the 1960s and 1970s this sense of crisis gave rise to Postmodernist art theories which expressed a "willingness to *revisit* the past" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 276, emphasis in the original) and to overcome the separation of high and low culture by promoting "a 'playful' aesthetic which embraces both popular and traditional cultural motifs" (Hanquinet et al., 2014, p. 114). Not surprisingly, kitsch became one of the preferred vehicles of Postmodernist ideas. According to Walter Benjamin's (1982/2002) striking characterization of kitsch as "art with a

[9] We certainly do not wish to imply that premodern or traditional art production is identical with modern-day's mass-produced commodities or even Totalitarian art. Yet, with regard to their affirmative function and the essential role of emotion, we claim that these artistic streams stand closer to kitsch than to avant-garde art.

100 percent, absolute and instantaneous availability for consumption" (p. 395), it seemed like the perfect intermediary between high art, the popular and the commercial. As a playful element of Pop Art, it attracted people to museums and art galleries, who had hitherto felt alienated by avant-garde art; at the same time, kitsch answered to the expectations of art aficionados by challenging their perceptual habits in an art-related context (Muth, Raab, & Carbon, 2017). Under the influence of Postmodernism, the dividing line between kitsch and art may have blurred; but it certainly did not disappear altogether. Based on a survey of museum visitors, Hanquinet, Roose, and Savage (2014) found that people's motivation to engage with visual art still followed Bourdieu's basic distinction of popular and highbrow aesthetics. Both Călinescu (1987) and Kulka (1996) are agreed in that a functional distinction between kitsch and art can be maintained: "(1) the avant-garde is interested in kitsch for aesthetically subversive and ironical purposes, and (2) kitsch may use avant-garde procedures (which are easily transformed into stereotypes) for its conformist purposes" (p. 254). Nevertheless, this Postmodern practice considerably complicates the separation of kitsch and art since works of art have become highly context sensitive and socially reflective (Hanquinet et al., 2014). Whether a comic-style pin-up is perceived as garish kitsch or as an ironical artistic statement on 'Capitalist Realism,' depends on the setting. This, again, has far-reaching implications for the empirical study of art perception. For the sake of standardization (as well as convenience), aesthetic research is mostly conducted in a lab setting (Carbon, 2019). This procedure, of course, eliminates the effects of a museum context (Carbon, 2017). In the case of Pop Art, however, this disregard for situational aspects becomes a serious issue since artists aim for the friction that results from mundane objects (e.g., a bubblegum machine) in an art-related context. On a computer screen in a lab environment, such works will appear as plain kitsch as their aesthetically subversive effect only shows in a museum setting, where they appear strangely out of place. If art has become explicitly context sensitive and socially reflective, shouldn't empirical aesthetics too become more responsive to situational aspects? We think so: As an element of Postmodern art, kitsch forces us "to examine more closely and with more originality than hitherto the relationship between aesthetic experience as met by the specific—not generalized—individual, and the social and historical contexts in which that experience takes place" (Greenberg, 1939, p. 34).

7 Conclusions

The aim of this article is to raise awareness for a "gigantic apparition" (Greenberg, 1939, p. 39) of everyday culture that has strangely been overlooked by empirical aesthetics: The pink elephant in the room goes by the name of *kitsch*. How could it possibly slip our attention? And, more importantly, why is it worth studying? Empirical aesthetics, as presently practiced, is mainly preoccupied with Modern art perception at the expense of a great variety of everyday phenomena. Against Fechner's (1876) original intention, its current theories build on an 'Aesthetic from above' that was invented by a group of art-educated, upper-class men[10] from Central Europe under the impression of eighteenth-

[10]Possible indication for a *male gaze* in empirical aesthetics is discussed by Ortlieb, Fischer, and Carbon (2016).

century Rationalism. As a result, today's paramount models of aesthetic liking are missing out what makes popular aesthetics popular in that they privilege style over content (e.g., Reber et al., 2004) and cognitive enrichment over emotional gratification (e.g., Leder et al., 2004), Although basic perceptual research (Augustin et al., 2008; Carbon et al., 2018), sociological accounts of popular taste (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Hanquinet et al, 2014), and the cross-cultural study of premodern art (Dissanayake, 1990; 2015) cast serious doubt on the basic assumptions of highbrow aesthetics, the nature of aesthetic experience is still mistaken for what inquisitive, art-educated researchers like about avant-garde art. Certainly, Modern art is a subject worth studying, but we should take it for what it is: a fascinating corner case of art history rather than a touchstone for a general understanding of human aesthetic sensibility. Why should we pay more attention to kitsch instead? As a borderline phenomenon of Modern art, it could be the missing link to a vast variety of popular, commercial, premodern, and postmodern aesthetic phenomena and the key to a new aesthetic from below that goes beyond processing dynamics by taking content- and context-related associations into account. In the course of this investigation kitsch has already proved its heuristic value by directing our attention to several blind spots in theory and practice of empirical aesthetics. However, a comprehensive understanding of kitsch is also essential for art perception, if only to keep up with recent developments in the arts. We feel that it is about time to extend our scope of research and that kitsch makes a particularly promising subject to start with.

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A.5 On Kitsch and Kič

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On kitsch and kič: Comparing kitsch concepts from Bavaria, Serbia and Slovenia

Stefan A. Ortlieb[1], Ivan Stojilović[2], Danaja Rutar[3], Uwe C. Fischer[1], and Claus-Christian Carbon[1]

[1]*Department of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg, Germany*
[2]*Laboratory of Experimental Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia*
[3]*School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Science, University of Edinburgh, UK*

The German word kitsch has been internationally successful. Today, it is commonly used in many modern languages including Serbian and Slovenian (kič)—but does it mean the same? In a pilot study, thirty-six volunteers from Bavaria, Serbia and Slovenia rated two hundred images of kitsch objects in terms of liking, familiarity, determinacy, arousal, perceived threat, and kitschiness. Additionally, art expertise, ambiguity tolerance, and value orientations were assessed. Multilevel regression analysis with crossed random effects was used to explore cross-cultural differences: Regardless of cultural background, liking of kitsch objects was positively linked to emotionally arousing items with non-threatening content. Self-transcendence was positively linked to liking, while ambiguity of the parental image was concordantly associated with kitschiness. For participants from Serbia and Slovenia, threatening content was correlated with kitschiness, while participants from Bavaria rated determinate items as kitschier. Results are discussed with regard to literature on kitsch and implications for future research.

Keywords: empirical aesthetics; kitsch; kič; aesthetic appreciation; cross-cultural research; terminology; multilevel regression analysis; preference; liking; everyday objects

Highlights:

- Kitsch objects were rated as non-threatening, determinate but hardly arousing.
- Particularly non-threatening and mildly arousing kitsch objects were preferred.
- Liking of kitsch objects was positively associated with self-transcendence.
- Female participants tended to prefer familiar and non-threatening kitsch objects.
- In the Serbian and Slovenian sample, kitsch was linked to threatening content.

Corresponding author: stefan.ortlieb@uni-bamberg.de

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Introduction

Out of the manifold expressions for bad taste from various modern languages, only the German word kitsch has been internationally successful (Menninghaus, 2009): As an antithesis to high art and a synonym for "tasteless mass produced trash" (Pazaurek, 1912/2012, p. 349, translation by first author) kitsch counts among the most controversial aesthetic concepts of 20th century art theory (Simon-Schäfer, 1980). The term itself can be traced back to the late 1800s when it started circulating among artists and art dealers from Munich as a derogatory label for "cheap artistic stuff" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 234).[1] Meanwhile, kitsch has also entered many modern languages including Serbian and Slovenian (kič). This raises two questions: Firstly, is the colloquial use of the term kitsch consistent with basic assumptions from art theory? Secondly, when people from different cultures use the word kitsch colloquially, do they refer to the same aesthetic idea or is kitsch just an umbrella term for rather culture-specific notions of bad taste? In a first pilot study, we sought preliminary answers to these questions based on a comparison of kitsch concepts from Bavaria, Serbia and Slovenia. For this study, a set of comparative dimensions was identified from the extensive literature on kitsch and art. Practically all authors who have expressed their thoughts about kitsch are agreed that the term serves as a derogatory label of bad taste, which may be used either for nominal categorisation (e.g. A is kitsch, but not B) or continuous evaluation (e.g. A is kitschier than B) of anything subject to aesthetic judgement. Recent accounts of kitsch dwell on the contradictory relationship between liking and kitsch (Kulka, 1996): Although kitsch is despised, it is proving commercially successful. Especially with Pop Art, tension between high art and kitsch has eased considerably. In the present study, liking and kitschiness were therefore considered as two separate, but not independent, variables.

What variables predict kitsch judgements? In *Kitsch and Art,* the philosopher Tomaš Kulka (1996) elaborates on three characteristics of kitsch: Above all, he claims that kitsch requires a familiar, heart-warming subject matter that elicits an immediate emotional response. Secondly, this subject should be depicted in a perfectly conventional way allowing for instant identifiability. Thirdly, context and manner of representation must not enrich the observer's "associations relating to the depicted objects or themes" (p. 37). Kulka concludes that the more clearly and unambiguously an object complies with these "three conditions, the more paradigmatic an example of kitsch it is" (p. 38). This definition advocates a continuous assessment of kitschiness. Moreover, it links kitsch to several variables that figure prominently in empirical aesthetics: familiarity, determinacy, positive emotional valence, and arousal.

Familiarity seems highly relevant for kitsch since it relies on themes to which the beholder has been positively predisposed. This claim is shared by

1 The earliest written account is a satirical poem by Max Bernstein published in 1878 which makes fun of an oil painting by Franz Adam titled "Mounted Bosnian insurgents" (see Joachimsthaler, 1995).

several authors who observe that nostalgia in particular engenders kitsch. Norman (2004), for instance, argues that keepsakes are mainly cherished for their ability to instil positive emotions and pleasant memories: As relics of the good old times they radiate what Titchener (1910) once described as "a glow of warmth, a sense of ownership, a feeling of intimacy, [and] a sense of being at home" (p. 408). Hence, we expect that an object will not be regarded as kitsch, unless it appears highly familiar. For kitsch to elicit a spontaneous affective response, its emotion-laden subject must be immediately and unambiguously identifiable (Kulka, 1996). Research literature even suggests that lack of ambiguity is what distinguishes kitsch from art (Muth, Hesslinger, & Carbon, 2015; Ortlieb & Carbon, 2014). We therefore surmise that kitsch has to be highly determinate in order to be enjoyable. Apart from being familiar and determinate, kitsch must not disturb or question our basic sentiments and beliefs. Only if its subject matter is charged with positive emotions, it will be able to comfort us. Thus, we expect that kitsch has to be perceived as non-threatening in order to yield a spontaneous heart-warming response. Apart from Kulka several authors have asserted that the appeal of kitsch lies in its "instantaneous emotional gratification without intellectual effort" (Menninghaus, 2009, p. 41). Since the concept of arousal plays an important role in both empirical aesthetics (Berlyne, 1971) and emotional appraisal theories (James, 1884; Lange, 1887/2013; Schachter & Singer, 1962), it appears particularly relevant for the study of kitsch. According to literature, we expect that cognition plays a completely different role in the appreciation of art and kitsch: Art is exciting because it acquaints us with something new or enigmatic (Berlyne, 1971). Thus, art perception mostly involves cognitive mastery (Leder, Belke, Oeberst, & Augustin, 2004). By contrast, kitsch offers immediate emotional gratification without reasoning (Călinescu, 1987; Kulka, 1996; Menninghaus, 2009) in that it draws on common life experience, shared beliefs and representational conventions. Hence, the consoling properties of kitsch—familiarity, determinacy and positive valence—suggest a negative relationship between kitschiness and arousal.

So what is wrong with immediate emotional gratification? Why are people repulsed rather than attracted by kitsch? So far we have addressed object-related aspects of kitsch. In the following, we will focus on five variables that might account for variance between individuals in terms of liking: art expertise, ambiguity tolerance, value orientation, age, and gender. Kitsch is usually contrasted with applied art (Pazaurek, 1912/2012), avant-garde art (Greenberg, 1939), or art proper (Kulka, 1996; Simon-Schäfer, 1980). Thus, it seems likely that one's kitsch concept depends on one's previous knowledge about art. This assumption accords with theories from sociology of art relating taste judgements to culture capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Since kitsch is seen as an antithesis to high art, we speculate that a high level of expertise will be positively correlated with kitsch ratings and negatively associated with liking. Ambiguity tolerance is another personality trait that is relevant in this respect. It moderates a person's

openness to the enigmatic, contradictory and even disturbing properties of contemporary artworks (Muth et al., 2015). Regarding kitsch, we expect that individuals with a low tolerance for ambiguity are particularly susceptible to its familiar and clear-cut qualities. Dissanayake (1990) writes that it is from our emotional responses to art that we learn about our personal values. So what does our affective response to kitsch tell us about our values? For Greenberg (1939) and Broch (1933/2002)—two supporters of the avant-garde—kitsch stands for "Evil in the Value-System of Art" (p. 137): hedonism and conservatism. Accordingly, hedonistic and conservative value orientations should be positively correlated with liking, but negatively with kitsch ratings. Even demographical aspects such as gender and age have been associated with kitsch: The writer and theatre critic H. W. Fischer (1919), for example, claimed that kitsch reflects female taste, while two authors relate kitsch to intergenerational conflict (Avenarius, 1920; Stemmle, 1931). Avenarius (1920) reports that young artists of the early 1900s made fun of their well-established predecessors and their old-fashioned ways by calling them "Kitschiers." From these early accounts of kitsch one might infer that liking ratings should be higher among female participants and positively associated with age, while kitsch ratings should be higher among male participants and negatively related to age.

Is the colloquial use of the word kitsch today still compatible with literature on kitsch? And when people from different cultures use the term, do they have the same aesthetic concept in mind? In the following we report on a cross-cultural pilot study that explored these questions by comparing kitsch concepts from Bavaria, Serbia and Slovenia.

Method

Samples

A total of thirty-six participants from Slovenia (n = 12; 6 males), Serbia (n = 12; 6 males) and Bavaria (n=12; 6 males) attended to the present study. Participants from Ljubljana (Slovenia) were aged between 21 and 56 years (M_{age} = 25.3 yrs., SD = 9.76). Participants from Belgrade (Serbia) were aged between 19 and 22 years (M_{age} = 19.3 yrs., SD = 0.89) and the age range of participants from Bamberg (Bavaria) was from 19 to 46 years (M_{age} = 22.7 yrs., SD = 7.57). Most participants were psychology students who participated for course credit.

Stimulus material

Being a very broad aesthetic concept, kitsch of course raises the question of appropriate stimulus material. Although kitsch may apply derogatorily to music, literature, filmmaking, architecture, fashion, furnishing, and interior decoration, it was originally limited to artistic production in the visual domain (Călinescu, 1987). Hence, we decided to address kitsch in everyday objects: A set of 200 high-resolution digital images of kitsch objects such as keepsakes (e.g. miniature Eiffel tower), give-aways, toys, or collectibles (Fig. 1 D), as well as

merely decorative (Fig. 1, A and C), and devotional objects (Fig. 1, A and E) was used.[2] Apart from these 200 images of kitsch objects, eight images of plain household objects (see Figure 1, F) were included as base stimuli.

Figure 1. Examples of typical stimuli from the study. All objects were photographed and provided by the Department of General Psychology and Methodology (University of Bamberg).

Variables and measures

The 208 images were rated in terms of liking, familiarity, determinacy, arousal, perceived threat, and kitschiness. For each rating, a seven-point Likert-scale was used (see Table 1). The German, Serbian and Slovenian versions of these scales were created by the first, second and third author based on an English reference version.[3] Based on these translations three otherwise identical digital questionnaires were created using the ExperimentBuilder© (Version 1.10.165) software.

2 Of course, these different types of objects do not represent disjunctive categories. An old teapot may serve as a decorative object, while a glass paperweight is of some—albeit rather limited—practical use apart from pleasing the eye with its marbled inclusions.

3 All translations were checked for translation correctness based on back translations by three native speakers from each country.

Table 1
Likert-scales and translations

English version (created by 1st author)	German version (translated by 1st author)	Serbian version (translated by 2nd author)	Slovenian version (translated by 3rd author)
Liking:	Gefallen	Dopadanje	Všečnost
How do you like the depicted object? (1=*I don't like it at all*; 7=*I like it very much*)	Wie gefällt Ihnen der dargestellte Gegenstand? (1=*gefällt mir gar nicht*; 7=*gefällt mir sehr*)	Koliko vam se dopada prikazani predmet? (1=*uopšte mi se ne dopada*; 7=*veoma mi se dopada*)	Kako vam je všeč prikazani predmet? (1=*sploh mi ni všeč*; 7=*zelo mi je všeč*)
Familiarity:	Vertrautheit	Poznatost	Poznanost
How familiar do you find this object? (1=*not familiar at all*; 7=*very familiar*)	Wie vertraut finden Sie diesen Gegenstand? (1=*gar nicht vertraut*; 7=*sehr vertraut*)	Koliko vam je poznat prikazani predmet? (1=*uopšte mi nije poznat*; 7=*veoma mi je poznat*)	Kako znan se vam zdi prikazani predmet? (1=*zelo neznan*; 7=*zelo znan*)
Determinacy:	Eindeutigkeit	Jasnoća	Enoznačnost
How determinate do you find this object? (1=*not determinate at all*; 7=*very determinate*)	Wie eindeutig finden Sie diesen Gegenstand? (1=*gar nicht eindeutig*; 7=*sehr eindeutig*)	Koliko vam je prikazani predmet jasan? (1=*uopšte nije jasan*; 7=*veoma je jasan*)	Kako enoznačen se vam zdi prikazani predmet? (1=*zelo večznačen*; 7=*zelo enoznačen*)
Arousal	Aufgeregtheit	Uzbudljivost	Vzburjenost
How exciting do you find this object? (1=*not exciting at all*; 7=*very exciting*)	Wie aufregend finden Sie diesen Gegenstand? (1=*gar nicht aufregend*; 7=*sehr aufregend*)	Koliko vam je uzbudljiv prikazani predmet? (1=*uopšte nije uzbudljiv*; 7=*veoma je uzbudljiv*)	Kako zanimiv se vam zdi prikazani predmet? (1=*zelo nerazburljiv*; 7=*zelo razburljiv*)
Perceived threat:	Bedrohlichkeit	Pretnja	Grožnja
How threatening do you find this object? (1=*not threatening at all*; 7=*very threatening*)	Wie bedrohlich finden Sie diesen Gegenstand? (1=*gar nicht bedrohlich*; 7=*sehr bedrohlich*)	Koliko vam je prikazani predmet preteći? (1=*uopšte nije preteći*; 7=*veoma je preteći*)	Kako grozeč se vam zdi prikazani predmet? (1=*zelo negrozeč*; 7=*zelo grozeč*)
Kitschiness:	Kitsch	Kič	Kič
How kitschy do you find this object? (1=*not kitschy at all*; 7=*very kitschy*)	Wie kitschig finden Sie diesen Gegenstand? (1=*gar nicht kitschig*; 7=*sehr kitschig*)	Koliko vam je prikazani predmet kič? (1=*uopšte nije kič*; 7=*veoma je kič*)	Kako kičast se vam zdi prikazani predmet? (1=*zelo nekičast*; 7=*zelo kičast*)

A self-devised questionnaire was applied to estimate the participants' level of expertise in the visual arts domain (see Table 2). The original German version was created by the senior author. The Serbian and Slovenian versions of this questionnaire were translated from an English version which was also provided by the senior author. Table 3 shows how scores for art expertise were calculated.

Table 2
Self-devised questionnaire for art expertise

German version (Carbon, unpublished)	English version (Carbon, unpublished)	Serbian version (translated by 2nd author)	Slovenian version (translated by 3rd author)
(1) Üben Sie kunstbezogene Hobbies aus (z.B. Malen, Tanzen)?	(1) Do you practice any art-related hobbies (e.g. painting, dancing)?	(1) Da li imate neke hobije povezane sa umetnošću (npr. slikanje, ples...)?	(1) Ali imate kakšne umetniško hobije (npr. slikanje, ples...)?
(2) Wie viele Kunstausstellungen besuchen Sie pro Jahr (durchschnittlich)?	(2) How many art exhibitions do you visit every year (on average)?	(2) Koliko često posećujete umetničke izložbe u toku godine (u proseku)?	(2) Kako pogosto na leto obiščete umetniško razstavo (v povprečju)?
(3) Wie viele Kunstbücher besitzen Sie?	(3) How many art books do you own?	(3) Koliko knjiga o umetnosti imate?	(3) Koliko umetniških knjig imate?
(4) Wie wichtig ist Ihnen Kunst? (1=*gar nicht wichtig*; 7=*sehr wichtig*)	(4) How important is art to you? (1=*not important at all*; 7=*very important*)	(4) Koliko je za Vas važna umetnost? (1=*uopšte nije*; 7=*veoma mnogo*)	(4) Kako pomembna je za vas umetnost? (1= *sploh ne*; 7=*zelo*)
(5) Wie würden Sie Ihre Kunstkenntnisse einschätzen? (1=*keine Kenntnisse*; 7=*Experte*)	(5) How would you rate your knowledge of art? (1=*no knowledge at all*; 7=*expert*)	(5) Kako biste ocenili svoje znanje o umetnosti? (1=*početnik*; 7=*stručnjak*)	(5) Kako bi ocenili svoje znanje o umetnosti? (1= *zelenec*; 7= *profesionalec*)

Table 3
Coding of art expertise questionnaire (Carbon, unpublished)

Items	Item type	Coding
(1) *Do you practice any art-related hobbies (e.g. painting, dancing)?*	Free text	At least one art-related hobby from the visual domain reported (=2 pts.); only art-related hobbies from outside of the visual domain reported (=1 pt.); no art-related hobby reported (=0 pts.)
(2) *How many art exhibitions do you visit every year (on average)?*	Free text	Number of art exhibitions reported equals number of points (2 exhibitions=2 pts.)
(3) *How many art books do you own?*	Free text	No art books reported (=0 pts.); between 1 and 10 art books (=1 pt.); more than 10 art books (=2 pts.)
(4) *How important is art to you?* (1=*not important at all*; 7=*very important*)	Rating	Rating equals number of points
(5) *How would you rate your knowledge of art?* (1=*no knowledge at all*; 7=*expert*)	Rating	Rating equals number of points

Ambiguity tolerance was measured using the German *Inventar zur Messung der Ambiguitätstoleranz* (IMA) by Reis (1996). According to the IMA-manual, persons scoring high on scales for ambiguity tolerance are likely to "(a) seek out ambiguity, (b) enjoy ambiguity, and (c) excel in the performance of ambiguous tasks" (MacDonald, 1970, quoted from Reis, 1996, p. 7), whereas persons with low scores tend "to perceive or interpret information marked

by vague, incomplete, fragmented, multiple, probable, unstructured, uncertain, inconsistent, contrary, contradictory, or unclear meanings as actual or potential sources of psychological discomfort or threat" (Norton, 1975, quoted from Reis, 1996, p. 7). The IMA comprises 40 items which discriminate between ambiguity tolerance regarding openness to experience (OE), role stereotypes (RS), parental image (EB), unsolvable problems (PR), and social conflict (SK). For each participant, six sum scores—five sub scores and a global IMA-score—were calculated in accordance with the IMA-manual: Twenty-four items featured a six-point Likert-scale ranging from 1=*very true* to 6=*not true at all*. The original German version of the IMA has been validated and normative data is reported by Reis (1996). The Serbian and Slovenian versions of the IMA-scales were translated by the second and third author from an English translation by the first author. All versions of the IMA-scales are reported in Table 4.

Table 4
IMA-scales and translations

IMA (Reis, 1996)	English version (translation by 1st author)	Serbian version (translation by 2nd author)	Slovenian version (translation by 3rd author)
IMA-subscale ambiguity tolerance regarding openness to experience (OE)			
(1) Ich weiß gerne im Voraus, was mich in meinem Urlaub erwarten wird.	(1) I like to know in advance what to expect when I go on holiday.	(1) Volim da znam unapred šta da očekujem kada idem na godišnji odmor.	(1) Ko grem na počitnice, želim vnaprej vedeti, kaj lahko pricakujem.
(1=*trifft sehr zu*; 6=*trifft gar nicht zu*)[a]	(1=*very true*; 6=*not true at all*)[a]	(1=*potpuno tačno*; 6=*uopšte nije tačno*)[a]	(1=*povsem drži*; 6=*sploh ne drži*)[a]
(8) Ich gehe am liebsten auf Parties, auf denen ich neue Menschen kennen-lernen kann.	(8) I prefer going to parties where I can meet new people.	(8) Volim da idem na žurke na kojima mogu da upoznam nove ljude.	(8) Najraje hodim na zabave, kjer lahko spoznam nove ljudi.
(6=*trifft sehr zu*; 1=*trifft gar nicht zu*)[b]	(6=*very true*; 1=*not true at all*)[b]	(6=*potpuno tačno*; 1=*uopšte nije tačno*)[b]	(6=*povsem drži*; 1=*sploh ne drži*)[b]
(11) Es macht mir manchmal Spaß, mit meinen Bekannten neue Unternehmungen durchzuführen.	(11) Together with my friends I sometimes enjoy going on new adventures.	(11) Ponekad uživam da zajedno sa prijateljima idem u nove avanture.	(11) Marsikdaj se zabavam, ko se s prijatelji odločimo za pustolovščino.
(17) Ich brauche eine vertraute Umgebung, um mich wohlzufühlen.	(17) I need a familiar environment in order to feel comfortable.	(17) Potrebno mi je poznato okruženje da bih se osećao/-la prijatno.	(17) Za to, da se počutim udobno, potrebujem znano okolje.
(21) Ich fahre gerne in Länder, die ich noch nicht kenne.	(21) I like to travel to countries which I do not know.	(21) Volim da putujem u zemlje koje ne poznajem.	(21) Rad/a potujem v neznane države.
(26) Ich mag es nicht, in irgendeiner Weise überrascht zu werden.	(26) I do not like to be surprised in any way.	(26) Ne volim nikakva iznenađenja.	(26) Ne želim si biti kakorkoli presenečen/a.
(34) Ich interessiere mich für ausländische Sitten und Gebräuche	(34) I am interested in foreign customs and traditions.	(34) Interesuju me strani običaji i tradicije.	(34) Zanimam se za tuje navade in tradicije.
(40) Ich kann mich leicht für neue Hobbies begeistern.	(40) I easily get inspired by new hobbies.	(40) Lako me inspirišu novi hobiji.	(40) Hitro se lahko navdušim nad novim hobijem.

IMA (Reis, 1996)	English version (translation by 1st author)	Serbian version (translation by 2nd author)	Slovenian version (translation by 3rd author)
IMA-subscale ambiguity tolerance regarding role stereotypes (RS)			
(2) Frauen sollten sich beim Tanzen vom Mann führen lassen.	(2) When dancing, women should give men the lead.	(2) U plesu žene treba da prepuste muškarcima da vode.	(2) Med plesom naj bi ženska prepustila vodstvo moškemu.
(7) Die Kleidung sollte das Geschlecht des Trägers erkennen lassen.	(7) One should be able to identify gender by the kind of clothing a person is wearing.	(7) Pol neke osobe trebalo bi da može da se odredi po odeći koju ta osoba nosi.	(7) Spol osebe naj bi bil prepoznaven na podlagi tega, kako se oseba oblači.
(13) Eine Frau sollte sich entscheiden, ob sie Karriere machen oder Kinder haben will.	(13) A woman should decide between having a career or having children.	(13) Žena treba da izabere da li će graditi karijeru ili imati decu.	(13) Ženska bi se morala odločiti med kariero in otrokom.
(18) Ich finde es gut, dass es zunehmend mehr sogenannte „Hausmänner“ gibt.	(18) I appreciate that there is an increasing number of so-called “house-husbands”.	(18) Cenim to što je sve više „muževa domaćica”.	(18) Dobro se mi zdi, da je vedno več tako imenovanih “gospodinjskih moških”.
(19) Auch homosexuelle Paare sollten Kinder adoptieren dürfen.	(19) Homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children.	(19) Homoseksualnim parovima treba dozvoliti da usvoje decu.	(19) Homoseksualni pari bi morali imeti možnost posvojitve otrok.
(23) Ich finde es gut, wenn Lehrer sich von ihren Schülern duzen lassen.	(23) I appreciate it when teachers are on first-name terms with their pupils.	(23) Cenim kada se nastavnici obraćaju učenicima na ti.	(23) Dobro se mi zdi, ko se učitelji in učenci tikajo.
(36) Lehrer sollten zu ihren Schülern ein distanziertes bzw. klar abgegrenztes Verhältnis haben.	(36) The relationship between teachers and their pupils should be distant and clearly defined.	(36) Odnos između nastavnika i učenika treba da bude na distanci i jasno definisan.	(36) Odnos med učitelji in njhovimi učenci mora biti distanciran/zadržan in jasno definiran.
(38) Frauen sind in manchen Berufen einfach fehl am Platze (z.B. in Kirchenämtern oder beim Militär).	(38) Women are out of place in certain professions (e.g. clergy or military).	(38) Ženama nije mesto u nekim profesijama (npr. sveštenstvo ili vojska).	(38) Nekateri poklici niso primerni za ženske (npr. duhovništvo ali vojska).
(39) Ein Mann sollte sich ausschließlich seinem Beruf widmen können.	(39) A man should be able to dedicate himself only to his work.	(39) Čovek treba da može da se posveti samo svom radu.	(39) Moški bi se morali posvečati izključno svojemu poklicu.
IMA-subscale ambiguity tolerance regarding parental image (EB)			
(3) Meine Eltern haben mir sowohl oft geholfen als auch oft geschadet.	(3) My parents have often both helped and harmed me.	(3) Moji roditelji su mi često i pomagali i odmagali.	(3) Tako pogosto kot so mi moji starši pomagali, so mi tudi škodovali.
(5) Ich habe zu meinem Vater ein zwiespältiges Verhältnis.	(5) My father and I have an ambivalent relationship.	(5) Moj otac i ja imamo ambivalentan odnos.	(5) Z očetom imava ambivalenten odnos.
(6) Ich werde meine Kinder genauso erziehen, wie meine Eltern mich erzogen haben.	(6) I will raise my children exactly the way my parents raised me.	(6) Odgajaću svoju decu na potpuno isti način kao što su mene odgajali moji roditelji.	(6) Svoje otroke bom vzgajal/a natanko tako, kot so moji starši vzgajali mene.
(10) Ich habe zu meinem Vater immer ein gutes Verhältnis gehabt.	(10) I have always had a good relationship with my father.	(10) Uvek sam imao/-la dobar odnos sa ocem.	(10) S svojim očetom sem vedno imel/a dober odnos.

IMA (Reis, 1996)	English version (translation by 1st author)	Serbian version (translation by 2nd author)	Slovenian version (translation by 3rd author)
(15) Manches hätte ich bei meiner Erziehung anders gemacht als meine Eltern.	(15) In terms of my education I would have done some things differently than my parents.	(15) Kada je u pitanju moje obrazovanje, neke stvari bih uradio drugačije nego moji roditelji.	(15) Nekatere stvari povezane z mojo izobrazbo bi naredil/a drugače kot moji starši.
(20) Ich habe zu meiner Mutter ein zwiespältiges Verhältnis.	(20) My mother and I have an ambivalent relationship.	(20) Moja majka i ja imamo ambivalentan odnos.	(20) Z mojo mamo imava ambivalenten odnos.
(22) Es gab keine Konflikte zwischen mir und meiner Mutter.	(22) There were no conflicts between me and my mother.	(22) Između moje majke i mene nije bilo konflikata.	(22) Med mano in mojo mamo ni bilo nobenih konfliktov.
(24) Meine Eltern haben mich zu wenig geliebt.	(24) My parents have loved me too little.	(24) Moji roditelji su me premalo voleli.	(24) Moji starši so me premalo ljubili.
(31) Es gab Konflikte zwischen mir und meinem Vater.	(31) There were conflicts between me and my father.	(31) Između mene i mog oca bilo je konflikata.	(31) Med mojim očetom in mano so bili konflikti.
(32) Ich habe zu meiner Mutter immer ein gutes Verhältnis gehabt.	(32) I have always had a good relationship with my mother.	(32) Uvek sam imao/-la dobar odnos sa majkom.	(32) S svojo mamo sem vedno imel/a dober odnos.
(35) Meine Mutter hat mich geliebt, aber auch gehasst.	(35) My mother loved me, but she also hated me.	(35) Majka me je volela, ali me je i mrzela.	(35) Moja mama me je ljubila, a tudi sovražila.
IMA-subscale ambiguity tolerance regarding unsolvable problems (PR)			
(4) Probleme, die mir als unlösbar erscheinen, empfinde ich als persönliche Herausforderung.	(4) I consider problems that appear unsolvable to me to be a personal challenge.	(4) Probleme koji mi izgledaju nerešivi vidim kao lični izazov.	(4) Probleme, ki se zdijo nerešljivi, si vzamem za osebni izziv.
(9) Mit Problemen, die mir unlösbar erscheinen, würde ich mich nicht ernsthaft beschäftigen wollen.	(9) I would not like to deal with problems that appear unsolvable to me.	(9) Ne bih voleo/-la da se bavim problemima koji mi se čine nerešivim.	(9) Ne želim se ukvarjati s problemi, ki se mi zdijo nerešljivi.
(12) Auch für viel Geld würde ich meine Zeit nicht mit Problemen vergeuden, die mir unlösbar erscheinen.	(12) Even for a lot of money I would not waste time on problems that appear unsolvable to me.	(12) Čak ni za velike pare ne bih traćio/-la vreme na probleme koji mi izgledaju nerešivi.	(12) Tudi za veliko denarja ne bi zapravljal/a svojega časa za probleme, ki se mi zdijo neresljivi.
(27) Probleme, die mir unlösbar erscheinen, versuche ich zu umgehen.	(27) I try to avoid problems that appear unsolvable to me.	(27) Pokušavam da izbegavam probleme koji mi se čine nerešivi.	(27) Problemom, ki se mi zdijo nerešljivi, se poskušam izogibati.
(30) Es erscheint mir sinnlos, mich mit Problemen zu beschäftigen, die mir unlösbar erscheinen.	(30) For me it is pointless to deal with difficult problems that appear unsolvable to me.	(30) Mislim da nema svrhe baviti se teškim problemima koji mi se čine nerešivim.	(30) Zdi se mi nesmiselno ubadati se s težkimi problmemi, ki se mi zdijo nerešljivi.
(37) Eine Beschäftigung mit Problemen, die mir als unlösbar erscheinen, kann auch dann für mich von Nutzen sein, wenn ich sie nicht lösen werde.	(37) Dealing with problems that appear unsolvable can be beneficial for me even if I am not able to solve them.	(37) Bavljenje problemima koji se čine nerešivim može biti korisno za mene čak i kada nisam u stanju da ih rešim.	(37) Ukvarjanje s problemi, ki se zdijo nerešljivi, se mi zdi koristno, tudi če problemov ne morem rešiti.

IMA-subscale ambiguity tolerance regarding social conflict (SK)			
(14) Ich versuche, Streitigkeiten zu vermeiden.	(14) I try to avoid conflicts.	(14) Pokušavam da izbegavam konflikte.	(14) Poskušam se izogibati konfliktom.
(16) Ich gehe Menschen, die sich gerne streiten, nach Möglichkeit aus dem Weg.	(16) If possible, I avoid people who like to argue.	(16) Kada je to moguće, izbegavam ljude koji vole da se svađaju.	(16) Č je le možno, se poskušam izogibati ljudem, ki se radi prepirajo.
(25) Ich gehe Streitigkeiten nach Möglichkeit aus dem Weg.	(25) If possible, I avoid conflicts.	(25) Ako je to moguće, izbegavam konflikte.	(25) Če je možno, se izogibam konfliktom.
(28) Ich versuche, mit jedem gut auszukommen.	(28) I try to get along with everybody.	(28) Pokušavam da se dobro slažem sa svima.	(28) Poskušam se razumeti z vsemi.
(29) Es ist für mich wichtig, dass andere Leute mich nicht für streitsüchtig halten.	(29) For me it is important that other people do not perceive me as quarrelsome.	(29) Važno mi je da me drugi ljudi ne vide kao svađalicu.	(29) Zame je pomembno, da me drugi ljudje ne doživljajo kot prepirljivega.
(33) Ich ziehe es vor, mit Bekannten über unverfängliche Themen zu sprechen.	(33) With acquaintances, I prefer to talk about harmless topics.	(33) Sa poznanicima više volim da pričam o nekim „bezbolnim“ temama.	(33) Z znanci se raje pogovarjam o neškodljivih temah.

[a] All items were combined with an identical six-point Likert-scale. For items 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 38, and 39 ratings were coded from 1=*very true* to 6=*not true at all*.

[b] For inverted items (i.e. 3, 4, 5, 8, 11, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 34, 35, 37, and 40) ratings were coded from 6=*very true* to 1=*not true at all*. Thus, higher IMA-scores indicate a higher level of tolerance for ambiguity (Reis, 1996).

For the assessment of basic value orientation, the *Short Schwartz's Value Survey-German* (SSVS-G) by Boer (2014) was applied (see Table 5). The underlying model by Schwartz (1992) describes commonalities in content and structure of values based on empirical research in twenty countries. It postulates two universal value dimensions: *Self-enhancement* versus *Self-transcendence* and *Conservation* versus *Openness-to-Change*. The first dimension relates to "the conflict between concern for the welfare of other people (high Self-Transcendence) and concern for individual outcomes and personal interests (low Self-Transcendence)" (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005, p. 171), whereas the latter reflects "the conflict between the motivation to preserve the status quo and the certainty that conformity to norms provides (high Conservation), on one hand, and the motivation to follow one's own intellectual and emotional interests (low Conservation) on the other hand" (p. 171). Participants rated the importance of ten abstract values—Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation, Self-direction, Universalism, Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity, and Security—on a six-point rating scale (1=*not important at all*; 2=*not important*; 3=*not really important*; 4=*somewhat important*; 5=*important*; 6=*very important*). For each participant four different scores were derived from these ratings: *Self-enhancement* (mean from scores on power and achievement), *Self-transcendence* (mean from scores on benevolence and universalism), *Conservation* (mean from scores on tradition, conformity and security), and *Openness-to-Change* (mean from scores on hedonism, stimulation and self-direction). In the case of the SSVS-G, the English version of the *Short Schwartz's Value Survey* (SSVS) by Lindeman and Verkasalo (2005) served as a basis for translations into Serbian and Slovenian. In both versions, however, rating scales were adjusted to the six-point scheme of the SSVS-G. All translations were checked for translation correctness based on back translations by three native speakers from each country.

Table 5
SSVS-scales and translations

SSVS (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005)	SSVS-G (Boer, 2014)	Serbian version (translated by 2nd author)	Slovenian version (translated by 3rd author)
Instruction			
Please read the following values and their descriptions. Following this, we ask you to rate how important these values are for you personally.	Bitte lesen Sie sich die folgenden Werte und ihre Beschreibungen durch. Kreuzen Sie dann an, wie wichtig diese Werte für Sie persönlich sind.	Molimo Vas da pročitate sledeće vrednosti i njihove opise. Nakon toga ocenite koliko su za Vas lično važne ove vrednosti.	Prosim, preberite naslednje trditve in njihove opise. Ko boste končali z branjem, prosim, ocenite, kako pomembna se vam zdi posamezna trditev.
How important are the following values for you?	Wie wichtig sind Ihnen die folgenden Werte?	Koliko su za Vas lično važne ove vrednosti?	Kako pomembne se vam zdijo naslednje trditve?
Response options[a]			
1=*not important at all*; 2=*not important;* 3=*not really important;* 4=*somewhat important;* 5=*important; 6=very important*	1=*überhaupt nicht wichtig*; 2=*nicht wichtig;* 3=*eher nicht wichtig;* 4=*eher wichtig;*5= *wichtig; 6=sehr wichtig*	1=*uopšte nije važno*; 2=*nije važno;* 3=*uglavnom nije važno;* 4=*pomalo važno;*5= *važno; 6=veoma važno*	1=*zelo nepomembna*; 2= *nepomembna;* 3=*ne prevec pomembna;* 4= *nekoliko pomembna;*5= *pomembna; 6=zelo pomembna*
Values			
POWER: social status and prestige, control of people and resources	MACHT: Sozialer Status und Prestige, Kontrolle oder Dominanz über Leute und Ressourcen	MOĆ: društveni status i prestiž, kontrola nad ljudima i resursima	MOČ: socialni status in prestiž, kontrola ljudi in virov
ACHIEVEMENT: personal success by demonstrating one's abilities	LEISTUNG: Persönlicher Erfolg durch die Demonstration von Kompetenz gemäß sozialer Maßstäbe	POSTIGNUĆE: lični uspeh kroz prikazivanje svojih sposobnosti	DOSEŽKI: osebni uspeh na podlagi demonstracije lastnih sposobnosti
HEDONISM: pleasure and sensually rewarding experiences	HEDONISMUS: Vergnügen und sinnliche Belohnung des Selbst	HEDONIZAM: zadovoljstvo i iskustva koja pružaju čulna uživanja	HEDONIZEM: ugodje in čutno nagrajujoče/ prijetne izkušnje
STIMULATION: leading an exciting life, appeal of the new, seeking challenges in life	ANREGUNG: Aufregendes Leben, Reiz des Neuen und Herausforderungen im Leben	STIMULACIJA: uzbudljiv život, privlačnost novog, traženje izazova u životu	STIMULACIJA: živeti razburljivo življenje, privlačnost novega, iskanje izzivov v življenju
SELF-DIRECTION: independent thinking, acting, creating and exploring	SELBSTBESTIMMUNG: Eigenständiges Denken und Verhalten, Kreieren und Erkunden	SAMOUSMERAVANJE: nezavisno mišljenje, gluma, stvaranje, i istraživanje	SAMOUSMERJANJE: neodvisno mišljenje, obnašanje, ustvarjanje, raziskovanje
UNIVERSALISM: sympathy, appreciation, tolerance and protection of the well-being of mankind and nature	UNIVERSALISMUS: Verständnis, Wertschätzung, Toleranz und Schutz des Wohles aller Menschen und der Natur	UNIVERZALIZAM: saosećajnost, uvažavanje tolerancija i zaštita dobrobiti čovečanstva i prirode	UNIVERZALIZEM: simpatija, razumevanje, toleranca in varovanje blagostanja človeštva in narave
BENEVOLENCE: the maintenance and enhancement of people's well-being in one's social environment	SOZIALITÄT: Erhaltung und Verbesserung des Wohlergehens der Menschen, mit denen man regelmäßigen Kontakt hat	DOBRONAMERNOST: održavanje i unapređivanje dobrobiti ljudi u svom društvenom okruženju	DOBROHOTNOST: vzdrževanje in izboljševanje blagostanja ljudi v njihovem socialnem okolju

TRADITION: respect, obligation and acceptance of customs and opinions that are directed by tradition or religion	TRADITION: Respekt, Verpflichtung und Akzeptanz von Bräuchen und Meinungen, die die Tradition oder Religion vorschreibt	TRADICIJA: poštovanje, negovanje i prihvatanje običaja i mišljenja koja su usmerena tradicijom i religijom	TRADICIJA: spoštovanje, upoštevanje in sprejemanje navad in mnenj, ki jih narekujeta tradicija ali religija
CONFORMISM: restraining one's behaviour and desires because they might bother or harm others or offend social expectations and norms	KONFORMITÄT: Zügelung von Verhalten oder Neigungen, die Andere verärgern oder schaden könnten und die soziale Erwartungen und Normen verletzen	KONFORMIZAM: sputavanje sopstvenih ponašanja i želja jer bi mogle uznemiravati ili naneti štetu drugima ili uvrediti društvena očekivanja i norme	KONFORMIZEM: obvladovanje lastnega vedenja in zelja, ker bi lahko motili ali škodovali drugim ali kršili socialna pričakovanja in norme
SECURITY: protection and harmony, stability of society, relationships and the self	SICHERHEIT: Schutz, Harmonie und Stabilität der Gesellschaft, von Beziehungen und des Selbst	BEZBEDNOST: zaštita i sklad, stabilnost društva, odnosa među ljudima i unutrašnja stabilnost	VARNOST: zaščita, harmonija in stabilnost družbe, odnosov in jaza

[a] The original SSVS by Lindeman and Verkasalo (2005) features a nine-point Likert-scale ranging from 0=*not important at all* to 8=*very important*. In the present study, response options were adjusted to the six-point scale of the SSVS-G.

Procedure

The study was conducted at the Universities of Bamberg (Bavaria), Belgrade (Serbia) and Ljubljana (Slovenia). In every location, the study was conducted according to the same procedure (Figure 2): Initially, participants signed an informed consent form and completed the art expertise questionnaire, the IMA-questionnaire (Reis, 1996) and the SSVS-G (Boer, 2014). Subsequently, 208 images of everyday objects were presented and rated in terms of liking, familiarity, determinacy, arousal, perceived threat, and kitschiness. In order to minimize loss of vigilance, stimuli were rated in two sessions ($k_1 = 92$ and $k_2 = 116$). Within each session images were presented in a random sequence, while the order of ratings was identical for every stimulus.

Figure 2. Procedure of the study.

Results

Initially, descriptive statistics for age, art expertise and personality scales were examined (see Table 6). Since some of the variables (age, IMA *Problems*, SSVS *Self-transcendence*, SSVS *Self-enhancement*, SSVS *Openness-to-Change*) had non-normal distributions, measured using the Shapiro-Wilk test, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used for all variables to test differences among the three cultures. Significant differences between the three subsamples were obtained for age, H (2) = 18.21, p <.01 and IMA *Parental image, H* (2) = 7.34, p <.05. Mann-Whitney tests were used to follow up these findings. Bonferroni correction was applied so effects are reported at a .0167 level of significance. It appeared that the Slovenian sample was older than the Serbian (U = 5, r = .83, p <.0167) and the Serbian sample had higher scores on IMA *Parental image* than the Bavarian (U = 31.5, r = .48, p <.0167).

Table 6
Descriptive statistics at the level of participants and Kruskal-Wallis H values for differences between the three groups (N = 36)

	Medians and Interquartile Ranges				*H*
	Total	Bavarian	Slovenian	Serbian	
Age	20.5 (3.0.)	20.0 (3.5)	**22.0 (2.0)**	**19.0 (0.0)**	18.21
Art expertise	15.0 (7.8)	12.5 (5.5)	16.0 (9.5)	18.0 (7.5)	5.15
IMA Unsolvable problems	29.0 (6.8)	29.0 (3.8)	27.0 (5.8)	31.0 (6.5)	2.50
IMA Social conflict	17.5 (7.8)	17.5 (11.8)	18.0 (6.3)	17.5 (7.8)	0.15
IMA Parental image	30.0 (12.5)	**29.0 (14.5)**	29 (7.5)	**37.0 (13.3)**	7.34
IMA Social stereotypes	43.0 (5.0)	43.0 (2.8)	42.5 (8.8)	42.0 (10)	0.60
IMA Openness	35.0 (8.5)	35.0 (8.5)	33.0 (9.8)	37.0 (8.5)	1.95
SSVS Self– transcendence	5.5 (1.0)	5.8 (0.9)	5.5 (1.0)	5.5 (0.9)	0.86
SSVS Self-enhancement	4.0 (1.4)	4.0 (1.4)	4.0 (1.4)	4.0 (1.4)	0.91
SSVS Conservation	3.5 (1.3)	3.5 (0.9)	3.9 (1.5)	3.0 (1.8)	0.80
SSVS Openness-to-change	5.0 (1.0)	5.0 (0.9)	5.2 (1.0)	5.0 (1.0)	0.36

Note. Bolded values are significant differences between the three groups at the level p <.0167, df = 2

The medians for averaged values for the six rating dimensions of 200 kitsch images are shown in Table 7 (eight non-kitschy objects were excluded from analysis). In general, kitsch objects were disliked and described as non-

threatening, non-arousing and highly determinate. Regarding perceived threat, 80% (!) of all ratings were equal to or less than 2 on a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 1=*not threatening at all* to 7=*very threatening*. Similarly, 54% of arousal ratings (1=*not exciting at all*; 7=*very exciting*) and 47% of liking ratings (1=*I don't like it at all*; 7=*I like it very much*) were equal to or less than 2. Besides, 54% of determinacy ratings (1=*not determinate at all*; 7=*very determinate*) were equal to or higher than 6. Again, normality of distribution was assessed using Shapiro-Wilk test, and for some scales (kitschiness, liking, arousal and perceived threat) non-normal distributions were confirmed. Therefore, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used for all variables to test the cross-cultural differences in terms of these ratings. In three cases, ratings differed significantly between the three cultures: familiarity, H (2) = 14.42, p <.01, determinacy, H (2) = 15.61, p <.01, and kitschiness, H (2) = 7.67, p <.05. In the Serbian sample, images were rated as more familiar than in the Slovenian (U = 25, r = .55, p <.01) and the Bavarian (U = 7, r = .77, p <.01) samples, and more determinate than in the other two samples (Slovenian: U = 10, r = .73, p <.01, Bavarian: U = 27, r = .53, p <.0167). The Bavarian sample rated the images as kitschier than the Slovenian (U = 28.5, r = .51, p <.01).

Table 7
Descriptive statistics of averaged ratings of images and Kruskal-Wallis H values for differences between the three groups (N = 36)

	Medians and Interquartile Ranges				*H*
	Total	Bavarian	Slovenian	Serbian	
Liking	2.91 (0.90)	3.23 (0.85)	2.66 (0.29)	2.99 (1.03)	3.39
Familiarity	4.31 (1.43)	**3.94 (0.63)**	**3.86 (1.79)**	4.80 (1.36)	14.24
Determinacy	5.28 (1.16)	**5.24 (1.02)**	**4.62 (1.34)**	**5.90 (0.87)**	15.61
Arousal	2.75 (0.87)	2.52 (1.70)	2.80 (0.42)	2.72 (1.01)	0.79
Perceived threat	1.63 (0.87)	1.50 (1.10)	1.89 (1.29)	1.48 (0.84)	2.94
Kitschiness	3.86 (0.89)	**4.31 (1.34)**	**3.79 (0.38)**	3.68 (1.54)	7.67

Note. Bolded values are significant differences between the three groups at the level p <.0167, df = 2

For further exploratory analyses, multilevel modelling of crossed random effects was used (Heck, Thomas, & Tabata, 2013; Hox, 2010). This method has two assets: Firstly, the advantage of multilevel analysis over traditional univariate or multivariate analysis on one level with mean ratings of individuals or mean ratings of images (Muth et al., 2015; Silvia, 2007). Secondly, crossed effects modelling has an advantage over hierarchical multilevel models in that

it avoids the problem of whether to analyse data on the level of ratings done by individuals within images or images within individuals (Fischer, Carbon, Rutar, Stojilović, & Ortlieb, 2016). Models of crossed random effects are able to take multiple sources of variation into consideration—variations between participants, between images and their interaction, and individual replies (level 1) are nested within participants and within images (level 2).

The restricted maximum likelihood method was used to evaluate the model. The significance of fixed effects was assessed using *p* values from the Wald test, and the significance of random effects was estimated using – 2ΔLL likelihood ratio tests and informative criteria (AIC and BIC) between two models including the same fixed effects (Hoffman, 2015). The values for denominator degrees of freedom were obtained by a Satterthwaite approximation.

Liking and kitschiness were defined as dependent variables. Ratings of familiarity, determinacy, arousal, and perceived threat, which varied with every new judgement, served as predictors on the level of kitsch stimuli, while constant values for art expertise, ambiguity tolerance, value orientation, gender, and age were included as predictors on the level of participants. All continuous predictors were centred on the grand mean.

Best predictors for liking

Initially, empty models (i.e. models without predictors) were modelled to split the total variance of liking. At both levels the diagonal matrix of random effects was defined providing an estimate of the variance for each random effect, and covariance between the two random effects was restricted to be zero. As a result, 17.7% of the total variation of liking is due to differences between participants, while 13.4% reflects variation between images. The remaining 68.9% of total variation is residual variance which cannot be explained by variation either at the level of participants or images (Table 8, Model I).

For the next model, both individual ratings of familiarity, determinacy, arousal, and perceived threat and their interactions were used. Three level-1 covariates were significantly related to liking judgements: arousal, familiarity and perceived threat. In Model II (Table 8) predictors on the level of participants are included. Predictors and interactions which were not significant were left out. Only for the SSVS-scale *Self-transcendence* a significant interrelation with liking was obtained: Higher scores on *Self-transcendence* were positively correlated with liking of kitsch objects. Relative to the empty model, predictors of Model II reduced the residual variance by pseudo-R^2_{res} = .31, image random variance by pseudo-R^2_{img} = .38 and subject random variance by pseudo-R^2_{sub} = .49. Model II reduced total variance from 3.36 (empty model) to 2.19, hence explaining 35% of total variance.

Table 8
Results for crossed subjects and images conditional models for liking with random intercepts (Models I and II) and random slopes (Model III). Bold values are p <.05.

Model Effects	Model I			Model II			Model III (ref group Male)		
	Est.	SE	*p* <	Est.	SE	*p* <	Est.	SE	*p* <
Model for the Means									
Intercept	**3.038**	0.138	.001	**3.059**	0.108	.001	**3.180**	0.144	.001
Arousal				**0.613**	0.012	.001	**0.603**	0.036	.001
Familiarity				**0.121**	0.010	.001	**0.059**	0.032	n.s.
Perceived threat				**-0.248**	0.014	.001	**-0.132**	0.042	.01
Arousal * Perceived threat				**-0.052**	0.007	.001	**-0.040**	0.008	.001
SSVS Self-transcendence				**0.435**	0.165	.05	**0.460**	0.163	.01
Gender (Female)							**-0.168**	0.201	ns
Gender (Female)* Familiarity							**0.130**	0.045	.01
Gender (Female)* Perceived threat							**-0.160**	0.058	.05
Model for the Variance									
Residual	**2.314**	0.039	.001	**1.595**	0.027	.001	**1.425**	0.024	.001
Image Random Intercept Variance	**0.451**	0.052	.001	**0.229**	0.028	.001	**0.203**	0.025	.001
Subject Random Intercept Variance	**0.596**	0.145	.001	**0.364**	0.090	.001	**0.336**	0.088	.001
Subject Random Arousal Slope Variance							**0.040**	0.011	.001
Subject Random Familiarity Slope Variance							**0.016**	0.004	.001
Subject Random Perceived threat Slope Variance							**0.021**	0.008	.05

In the last model, we examined the extent to which the effects of the image predictors show systematic individual differences by adding subject random slopes for the image predictors to the model (Table 8, Model III, Figure 3).We retained subject random effects for the intercept as well as for arousal, familiarity and perceived threat slopes. Given significant subject variation in the effect of three image predictors, the next step was to test that variation with subject predictors. The strongest interrelation with liking was obtained for arousal, $b = 0.60$, t (35.84) = 16.89, p <.01, $d = 2.82$. The importance of familiarity and perceived threat were moderated by gender: For female participants familiarity and liking were positively associated, $b = 0.13$, t (33.40) = 2.90, p <.01, d = 0.50, while the negative correlation between perceived threat and liking was less pronounced for male participants, $b = –0.16$, t (21.81) = 2.74, p <.05, $d = 0.59$. Model III explained 39% of total variance.

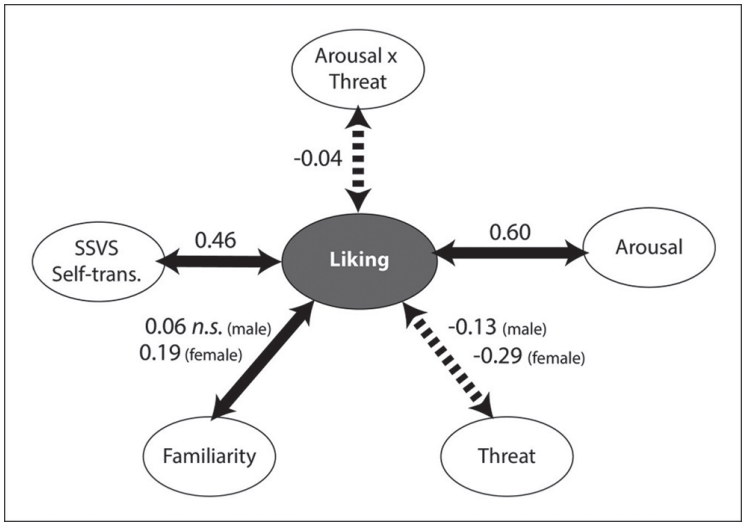

Figure 3. Illustration of final model for liking including strengths of relations based on regression coefficients. Legend: solid lines—positive regression coefficients; dashed lines—negative regression coefficients; numbers—unstandardized regression coefficients.

Best predictors for kitschiness

Again empty models were calculated to split total variance of kitschiness. At both levels the diagonal matrix was defined. 24.2% of total variation regarding kitschiness reflected differences between participants, while another 25.0% was due to variations between images leaving 50.8% of unexplained residual variance (Table 9, Model I).

Ratings of familiarity, determinacy, arousal, and perceived threat as well as their interactions were added to the next model. Arousal and determinacy had a significant direct effect. Perceived threat, however, revealed both a significant direct effect and interaction effects with familiarity and determinacy. For Model II predictors on the level of participants were added (Table 9). Since non-significant predictors and interactions were left out, only two predictors on the level of participants were retained: cultural background and IMA-parents. Participants from Serbia and Slovenia rated images less kitschy than participants from Bavaria, $b = –1.32$, t (32.02) = 3.40, $p < .01$, $d = 0.60$; $b = –0.81$, t (31.98) = 2.31, $p < .05$, $d = 0.41$. Participants who scored higher on IMA-parents rated images as kitschier. Compared to the empty model, Model II reduced the residual variance by pseudo-$R^2_{res} = .10$, image random variance by pseudo-$R^2_{img} = .06$ and subject random variance by pseudo-$R^2_{sub} = .22$. In sum, Model II explained 12% of total variance by reducing it from 3.79 (empty model) to 3.35.

Table 9
Results for crossed subjects and images conditional models for kitschiness with random intercepts (Models I and II) and random slopes (Model III). Bold values are p <.05.

Model Effects	Model I			Model II			Model III		
	Est.	SE	*p* <	Est.	SE	*p* <	Est.	SE	*p* <
Model for the Means									
Intercept (ref. Bavarian sample)	**4.062**	0.175	.001	**4.777**	0.262	.001	**4.739**	0.250	.001
Arousal				**-0.298**	0.012	.001	**-0.289**	0.035	.001
Perceived threat				**0.174**	0.016	.001	**-0.041**	0.058	*n.s.*
Determinacy				**0.027**	0.013	.05	**0.096**	0.020	.01
Familiarity				**-0.007**	0.011	*n.s.*	**-0.029**	0.025	*n.s.*
Perceived threat *Familiarity				**0.027**	0.007	.001	**0.026**	0.007	.01
Perceived threat * Determinacy				**-0.027**	0.007	.001	**-0.018**	0.008	.05
Serbian				**-1.325**	0.390	.01	**-1.205**	0.372	.01
Slovenian				**-0.806**	0.349	.05	**-0.897**	0.332	.05
IMA parents				**0.053**	0.022	.05	**0.051**	0.021	.05
Serbian * Perceived threat							**0.224**	0.080	.01
Slovenian * Perceived threat							**0.227**	0.076	.01
Serbian * Determinacy							**-0.087**	0.041	.05
Slovenian * Determinacy							**-0.095**	0.038	.05
Model for the Variance									
Residual	**1.927**	0.033	.001	**1.742**	0.030	.001	**1.560**	0.027	.001
Image Random Intercept Variance	**0.918**	0.222	.001	**0.890**	0.094	.001	**0.644**	0.167	.001
Subject Random Intercept Variance	**0.946**	0.100	.001	**0.721**	0.183	.001	**0.816**	0.086	.001
Subject Random Arousal Slope Variance							**0.036**	0.010	.01
Subject Random Familiarity Slope Variance							**0.017**	0.005	.01
Subject Random Perceived threat Slope Variance							**0.024**	0.009	.01
Subject Random Determinacy Slope Variance							**0.004**	0.003	*n.s.*

In Model III we examined the extent to which the effects of the image predictors show systematic individual differences (Table 9, Figure 4). We retained the subject random effects for the intercept and all four image predictor slopes—arousal, familiarity, determinacy, and perceived threat. Arousal was negatively linked to kitschiness, $b = –0.29$, t (35.89) = 8.36, p <.01, d = 1.39, while interrelations with perceived threat and determinacy differed with regard to cultural background, F (2, 28.6) = 5.93, p <.01; F (2, 26.64) = 3.68, p <.05: In the Bavarian sample, perceived threat and kitschiness were unrelated, whereas

ratings of perceived threat were positively correlated with kitsch ratings in the Serbian and the Slovenian sample. A positive link between determinacy and kitschiness was only observed in the Bavarian sample. Model III accounted for 18% of total variance.

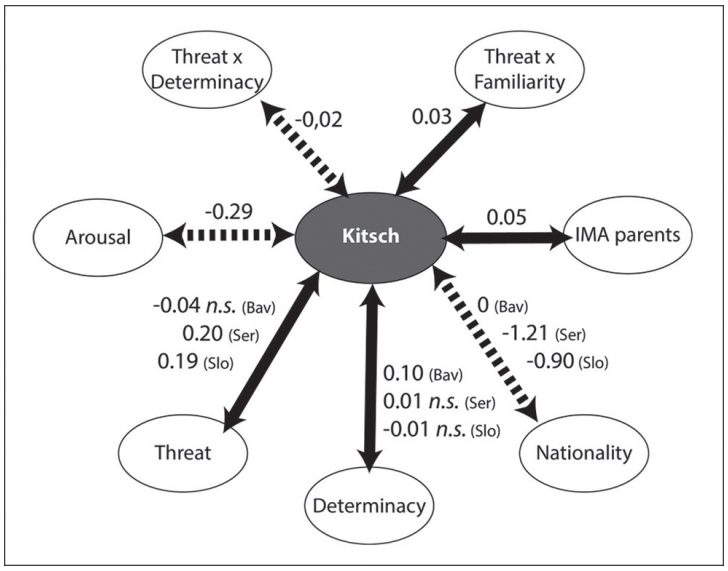

Figure 4. Illustration of final model for kitschiness including strengths of relations based on regression coefficients. Legend: solid lines—positive regression coefficients; dashed lines—negative regression coefficients; numbers—unstandardized regression coefficients. Abbreviations: Bav—Bavarian; Ser—Serbian; Slo—Slovenian.

Liking and kitschiness

Finally, the relationship between the two dependent variables—liking and kitschiness—was explored using multilevel modelling. With liking as a predictor centred on the grand mean, a moderate negative relationship between the two variables was obtained, $b = -0.41$, $t\ (7140) = 41.52$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.50$. This interrelation was not affected by cultural background.

Discussion

The German word kitsch has been adopted by many modern languages, including Serbian and Slovenian, yet it remains unclear whether its colloquial use is based on the same notion of bad taste. The aim of the present cross-cultural pilot study was to fathom differences and commonalities between concepts of

kitsch from Bavaria, Serbia and Slovenia. Thirty-six persons rated 200 images of kitsch objects in terms of liking, familiarity, determinacy, arousal, perceived threat, and kitschiness. Additionally, art expertise, ambiguity tolerance and value orientation were assessed and a multilevel regression analysis with crossed random effects was conducted to identify predictors for liking and kitschiness. In the following, we discuss results with regard to literature on kitsch and previous findings. Finally, the limitations of the present pilot study and the implications for further research are pointed out.

Descriptive analysis showed a consistent pattern: Most kitsch objects were disliked and a majority of them were characterized as perfectly harmless, highly determinate, but hardly arousing. From an item-based perspective, this accords with Kulka's (1996) assumption that non-threatening content and determinacy are necessary, but not sufficient preconditions for kitsch classification. Of course, these item-characteristics have to be taken into consideration when we interpret results from multilevel modelling.

Independently of cultural background, kitsch was used as a derogatory term: Apart from mean liking ratings, this is clearly indicated by a negative correlation between liking and kitschiness that did not vary significantly between cultures. A moderately high interrelation between the two dependent variables also suggests that the relationship between liking and kitsch is an ambivalent one: Although it is widely acknowledged that a proclivity to "[k]itsch is to be found in every human being" (Schmidt, 1994, p. 136), it is rejected as overly simplistic and consoling.

What aspects of kitsch are most predictive of liking? Interestingly, arousal ratings allowed for the best discrimination between likable kitsch objects and rejected ones: While arousal was positively associated with liking, it was inversely related to kitschiness. At first glance it may seem that these findings support Berlyne's (1971) basic assumption, that aesthetic appreciation results from an increase in arousal which is brought about by something surprisingly new, ambiguous or otherwise enigmatic. Upon closer examination, however, the range of arousal ratings and other item characteristics do not fit in: Mean arousal ratings were low-to-medium and a majority of kitsch objects was described as familiar, determinate and non-threatening. This pattern is perfectly in line with Kulka's (1996) criteria for kitsch: In order to be comforting, kitsch objects need to appear familiar, unambiguous and perfectly harmless. Possibly, responses to kitsch also follow Berlyne's (1971) positive correlation of arousal and liking, but only on a lower level. This hypothesis must be tested based on physiological measures of arousal. Due to our choice of method—self-reports instead of bio-feedback—our approach seems prone to emotional appraisal theories. In accordance with Schachter and Singer's (1962) two-factor-theory of emotion, for example, arousal may also be regarded as the unspecific component of an immediate emotional response to kitsch. From this point of view, the close interrelation between liking of kitsch objects and arousal seems concordant with the widely shared assumption that kitsch is liked for its capacity to "spontaneously trigger an unreflective emotional response" (Kulka, 1996, p. 26).

Finally, it cannot be excluded that operationalization might have contributed to a positive link between arousal and liking. As ratings were used, the concept of unspecific arousal had to be translated into everyday language. Unfortunately, near equivalents of arousal from common language are either limited to certain contexts of use, or they convey an evaluative surplus meaning. In German and Serbian, for example, the term "erregend/uzbuđen" implies sexual arousal, while the alternative translation "aufregend/uzbudljiv" (exciting) may also be used to express aesthetic appreciation. Thus, our choice of wording ("aufregend/uzbudljiv") might partly explain why stimuli were rated concordantly in terms of liking and arousal.

The SSVS-dimension of *Self-transcendence* reflects sympathy, tolerance and well-being of one's social environment. Across all samples, commitment to these values was positively related to liking of kitsch objects. Since kitsch ratings were unrelated to SSVS-scores for self-transcendence, it appears that participants scoring high on self-transcendence did not judge stimuli less harshly. They rate these objects as likable in spite of the fact that they recognize them as kitsch. Interestingly, self-transcendence figures prominently in Dissanayake's (1990) study on the arts in pre-modern societies: From a cross-cultural perspective, she argues that—with the only exception being Western avant-garde art—art production was originally about sharing "valued states of mind and body such as self-transcendence [and] intimacy with our fellows" (Dissanayake, 1990, p.132). Possibly the familiar, unambiguous and consoling qualities of kitsch compensate for these needs in Western societies (Ortlieb & Carbon, 2017).

Ambiguity of the parental image was associated with higher kitsch ratings. High tolerance of ambiguity regarding the parental image indicates that close relationships are not idealized, but reflected critically. Since students were overrepresented in all of the three samples, high ambiguity tolerance towards the parental image and higher kitsch ratings could be interpreted as statements of independent judgement from the younger generation: Although the parents are honoured and respected, the offspring claim autonomy with regard to aesthetic taste. This interpretation remains highly speculative since we cannot infer from our study data whether kitsch objects were truly perceived as "old-fashioned". In any case, kitsch has been repeatedly associated with intergenerational competition (Avenarius, 1920; Stemmle, 1931).

Independent of cultural background, strengths of interrelations between familiarity, perceived threat and liking varied between male and female participants: A positive association between familiarity and liking was only significant for female participants (see Fig. 3). Besides, non-threatening content seemed more relevant for women than for men. These results are consistent with previous research from empirical aesthetics indicating that women tend to prefer stimuli with non-threatening content over stimuli with threatening content (Ortlieb, Fischer, & Carbon, 2016). However, there was no further indication for gender differences in terms of liking or kitsch ratings.

To what extent do kitsch and kič reflect culture-specific notions of bad taste? So far, we have focused on cross-cultural commonalities. Multilevel modelling also suggests some minor cross-cultural differences: For participants from Serbia and Slovenia, kitschiness was positively associated with perceived threat, whereas participants from Bavaria rated kitschy objects as more determinate. Since the entire stimulus material was provided by researchers from Bavaria, it might be argued that these culture-specific results are due to the fact that kitsch objects were simply more familiar to the German subsample. However, there is no indication that stimuli were particularly typical for Bavaria: Apart from a Christmas bauble portraying Ludwig II of Bavaria, stimuli reflected an international canon of kitsch (e.g. Japanese *maneki-neko*; miniature Eiffel tower). Most importantly, there was no difference between participants from Bavaria and Slovenia regarding familiarity ratings. In the Serbian sample, familiarity ratings were even significantly higher than in the other samples. Anyhow, our culture-specific findings require replication and closer examination. For example, it would be desirable to conduct two otherwise identical studies based on a selection of typical kitsch objects from Serbia, respectively Slovenia.

As a very broad aesthetic concept, kitsch is applicable to "virtually anything subject to judgements of taste" (Călinescu, 1987, p. 235). Due to the stimulus material used—images of everyday objects—findings cannot be generalized to phenomena outside of the visual domain (e.g. kitsch in music or literature). Strictly speaking, the present study has focussed on kitsch in interior decoration (e.g. German *Nippsachen*) at the expense of other aspects in the visual domain (e.g. kitsch in architecture). Additional research is needed to clarify the consistency of the kitsch concept across various domains.

Finally, with kitsch being a derogatory term, the issue of social desirability has to be raised: Especially since there is some preliminary indication for discrepancies between implicit and explicit kitsch judgements (Reiter, Ortlieb, & Carbon, 2015), future studies should include implicit measures. Participants with an academic background may be particularly reluctant to admit that they have a 'heart for kitsch'. Since our pilot study was based on small samples which were also very homogenous with regard to age and education, results must be interpreted very cautiously. The three models presented in this paper have to stand further testing with larger, more diverse samples and stimuli before they can be generalized.

Conclusions

From the results of our pilot study, we conclude that there is a common understanding of kitsch which prevails over culture-specific aspects. Moreover, this shared notion of bad taste seems widely in agreement with prominent theoretical accounts of kitsch. So far, our findings are limited to the visual domain and a small homogenous sample. Further quantitative and qualitative research is needed to validate these findings and to shed light on the culture-specific facets of kitsch.

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A.6 Kitsch oder Coping? Die biologischen Grundlagen der sozialen Motivation als Determinanten des ästhetischen Erlebens

Kitsch oder Coping? Die biologischen Grundlagen der sozialen Motivation als Determinanten des ästhetischen Erlebens*

Stefan Ortlieb und Claus Christian Carbon

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Zusammenfassung. Im Gegensatz zu Kunst wird Kitsch als gefällig, gefühlsbetont und nostalgisch abgelehnt. Dennoch ist Kitsch allgegenwärtig. Warum ist unser Verhältnis zu Kitsch so ambivalent? Und warum erliegen wir seinem Zauber von Zeit zu Zeit? Einiges deutet darauf hin, dass Kitsch an Bedürfnisse nach Bindung, Sicherheit und Intimität appelliert, die im Widerspruch zu unserem Streben nach Unabhängigkeit, Autonomie und neuen Erfahrungen stehen. Ausgehend von dieser These stellen wir ein Modell vor, welches Veränderungen im ästhetischen Erleben mit den verhaltensbiologischen Mechanismen der sozialen Distanzregulation verknüpft.

1 Einleitung

> „In jedem von uns steckt ein Tropfen Kitsch, weil Kitsch der kürzeste Weg zur Versöhnung mit den Lebensumständen ist."
> — Schmidt, 1994, S. 14

Reiseandenken, Fanartikel, Glücksbringer und andere Nippsachen begegnen uns auf Schritt und Tritt. Viele dieser Dinge lassen weder einen praktischen Nutzen erkennen, noch gelten sie als ästhetisch wertvoll. Ganz im Gegenteil. Als Synonym für „geschmacklose[n] Massenschund" (Pazaurek, 1912/2012, S. 349) gibt uns Kitsch ein Rätsel auf: Einerseits als wertlos geschmäht, erfreut er sich andererseits größter Beliebtheit. Welche Funktion erfüllt Kitsch? Norman (2004) hat die These aufgestellt, dass wir gewisse Objekte – eine Schüttelkugel, eine Spieluhr oder einen Glücksbringer – nicht wegen ihrer Einzigartigkeit oder ihrer herausragenden künstlerischen Qualität schätzen, sondern weil sie angenehme Erinnerungen (vgl. franz. *souvenirs*, dt. *Andenken*) und Vorstellungen hervorrufen, die uns Gefühle von Vertrautheit, Sicherheit und Zugehörigkeit vermitteln. Ist diese Annahme zutreffend, so müsste unsere Empfänglichkeit (bzw. Geringschätzung) für Kitsch in Abhängigkeit von unseren Bedürfnissen nach Sicherheit und Bindung variieren. Tatsächlich liegen empirische Belege dafür vor, dass der Zusammenhang zwischen Vertrautheit (bzw. Neuartigkeit) und Gefallen situativen Einflüssen unterliegt: Neuartiges (z.B. innovatives Design)

*Ortlieb, S. A., & Carbon, C. C. (2017). Kitsch oder Coping? Die biologischen Grundlagen der sozialen Motivation als Determinanten des ästhetischen Erlebens. In C. Schwender, B. P. Lange, & S. Schwarz (Eds.), *Evolutionäre Ästhetik* (pp. 145–162). Lengerich: Pabst.

wird eher positiv bewertet, wenn sich die Befragten sicher fühlen (Carbon, Faerber, Gerger, Forster & Leder, 2013) oder positiv gestimmt sind (de Vries, Holland, Chenier, Starr & Winkielman, 2010). Umgekehrt werden moderne, nichtgegenständliche Kunstwerke von Probanden eher abgelehnt, wenn sie sich zuvor gedanklich mit ihrer Sterblichkeit auseinandergesetzt haben (Landau, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski & Martens, 2006). Schließlich gibt es Belege dafür, dass die gedankliche Beschäftigung mit dem Tod zu milderen Kitschurteilen führt (Raab, Ortlieb, Gebauer, Ettner & Carbon, 2015). Welche Mechanismen liegen dieser Dynamik des Gefallens zugrunde? Besitzt Kitsch wirklich eine emotionsregulierende Funktion? Um der Natur von Kitsch auf die Spur zu kommen, gehen wir zunächst auf die Entstehungsumstände des Wortes *Kitsch* ein und nehmen eine Begriffsbestimmung vor (Was ist Kitsch?). Anschließend klären wir, warum Kitsch so außerordentlich beliebt ist obwohl er doch als ästhetisch wertlos gilt (Warum ist Kitsch so populär?). Diese Vorüberlegungen bilden die Basis für ein Modell, das Veränderungen im ästhetischen Erleben mit den verhaltensbiologischen Grundlagen der sozialen Distanzregulation verknüpft (Wie viel Kitsch verträgst du heute?). Da es sich bei Kitsch um ein relativ junges ästhetisches Konzept handelt, gehen wir schließlich der Frage nach, ob es dafür zeit- und kulturübergreifende Entsprechungen gibt, die einen evolutionspsychologischen Ansatz rechtfertigen: Wie universell ist Kitsch?

2 Was ist Kitsch?

Obwohl das Wort *Kitsch* nur etwa 150 Jahre alt ist, bleibt seine sprachliche Herkunft ungeklärt (Kluge & Seebold, 2011). Als Bezeichnung für minderwertige Massenware tauchte es zwischen 1860 und 1870 im Münchner Kunsthandel auf und breitete sich von dort bis weit über den deutschsprachigen Raum hinaus aus (Dettmar & Küpper, 2007). Als Lehnwort hat Kitsch bis heute Eingang in viele Sprachen gefunden (Fischer, Stojilović, Ettner, Carbon & Ortlieb, 2015). Parallel zu seiner internationalen Verbreitung erweiterte sich auch sein Anwendungsbereich: Zielte der Kitschbegriff ursprünglich darauf ab Gemälde und Skulpturen als billige Massenware zu disqualifizieren, so ist er heute als abwertende Bezeichnung grundsätzlich auf alles anwendbar, was eine Beurteilung unter ästhetischen Gesichtspunkten zulässt, von Musik, Literatur, Film- und Fernsehformaten bis zu Bekleidung, Architektur, Inneneinrichtung und Gartengestaltung (Călinescu, 1987). Außerhalb der Alltagssprache bildet die Kunsttheorie den wichtigsten Gebrauchskontext des Kitschbegriffs (Greenberg, 1939; Kulka, 1996; Pazaurek, 1912/2012). In Abgrenzung zu einem modernen Kunstverständnis, das eine fortschrittliche „Abweichungsästhetik" (Zeitler, 1995) fordert, steht Kitsch für alles Gefällige, Erwartungskonforme, Gefühlsselige und Rückständige im ästhetischen Bereich (Greenberg, 1939). In den nächsten Abschnitten stellen wir eine Kitschdefinition vor, die sich aus einer Gegenüberstellung von Kitsch und Kunst ergibt. In *Kitsch and Art* schlägt Kulka (1996) drei notwendige Voraussetzungen für eine Kitschklassifikation vor: Erstens wird ein vertrautes Thema behandelt, das im Betrachter spontan eine intensive emotionale Reaktion hervorruft. Zweitens wird das Sujet so dargestellt, dass es für den Betrachter unmittelbar und eindeutig identifizierbar ist und drittens stiftet die Art der Darstellung keine neuen Assoziationen in Bezug auf die behandelte Thematik.

Abbildung 1: *Mutter und Kind* als typisches Kitschmotiv.

Wie kommt er zu diesen Kriterien? Zunächst macht Kulka (1996) darauf aufmerksam, dass bestimmte Inhalte enger mit dem Kitschbegriff verknüpft sind als andere. Zu diesem Negativkanon zählt er Darstellungen von Müttern, die wahlweise ein Baby auf dem Arm halten oder ein weinendes Kind trösten, Hundewelpen und Katzenbabys, Engeln, röhrenden Hirschen oder Liebespaaren beim Strandspaziergang. Was macht diese Themen zu prototypischen Kitschmotiven? Kulka stellt fest, dass es sich bei all diesen Sujets um vertraute, positiv besetzte Inhalte handelt, die bei vielen Menschen spontan eine starke emotionale Reaktion auslösen. Einige dieser Themen sind eher kulturspezifisch (z.B. Engel oder röhrende Hirsche), während andere auf allgemein menschliche Erfahrungen Bezug nehmen (z.B. Mutter und Kind). Bei dem Sujet *Mutter und Kind* (Abbildung 1) handelt es sich um ein besonders vielversprechendes Kitschmotiv, weil es gemäß der ersten Bedingung auf eine stark emotional besetzte, intensive Bindungserfahrung Bezug nimmt, der sich kaum ein Betrachter entziehen kann. An diesem Sujet lässt sich exemplarisch zeigen, dass jedes Stilmittel, welches den emotionalen Effekt eines Motivs verstärkt, zugleich die Wahrscheinlichkeit einer Kitschklassifikation erhöht. Die Mutter sollte beispielsweise jung und gutaussehend dargestellt werden, jedoch nicht aufreizend. Sie sollte einen gesunden Eindruck machen, also weder übergewichtig noch mager wirken und ein ebenmäßiges, symmetrisches Gesicht mit glatter Haut und Reifemerkmalen (z.B. hohe Wangenknochen) aufweisen (Hejj, 2017). Um eine Projektion persönlicher Gefühle und Erinnerungen zu begünstigen, empfiehlt es sich zudem auf individuelle Gesichtszüge zu verzichten und der Mutter ein Durchschnittsgesicht ohne besondere Merkmale zu verleihen. Für die ansprechende Darstellung des Kindes lassen sich ähnlich präzise Gestaltungsempfehlungen formulieren. Idealerweise sollte es sich um einen Säugling oder ein Kleinkind handeln, das gesund wirkt und einen Merkmalskomplex aufweist, der als *Kindchenschema* (Lorenz, 1943) bezeichnet wird: Ein großer Kopf im Verhältnis zum Rumpf, eine hohe vorgewölbte Stirn, Pausbacken und tiefsitzende Augen. Dazu ein kleiner Mund und eine kleine Nase sowie kurze, dicke Extremitäten. Diese Merkmale sind Teil eines angeborenen auslösenden Mechanismus, der bei erwachsenen Individuen eine Zuwendungsreaktion und Fürsorgeverhalten auslöst. Das Kindchenschema ruft auch dann spontanes Entzücken hervor, wenn es bei Jungtieren einer anderen Spezies auftritt wie bei Hundewelpen und Katzenbabys. Darüber hinaus ist das Motiv auf unterschiedliche Zielgruppen transponierbar. Nimmt man eine Einschränkung der Universalität – und damit der Zielgruppe – in Kauf, so lässt sich der emotionale Gehalt des Motivs durch religiöse (aus *Mutter mit Kind* wird zum Beispiel ein Bildnis von *Maria mit dem Jesuskind*), allegorische, ideologische oder Heimatbezüge steigern. Das Ergebnis wäre dann ,,Devotionalienkitsch" beziehungsweise ,,patriotischer Kitsch" (Pazaurek, 1912/2012).

Ist das Vorhandensein eines vertrauten, gefühlsbetonten Themas allein hinreichend, um von Kitsch zu sprechen? – Mit Sicherheit nicht: Der Bildhauer Henry Moore hat beispielsweise eine Serie von Skulpturen zu dem Thema *Mutter mit Kind* geschaffen, die heute als Ikonen der klassischen Moderne gelten (Abbildung 2). Auffallend ist, dass sich das Motiv in Abbildung 2 nicht auf den ersten Blick erschließt, da es atypisch ausgeführt wurde. Erst der Titel *Liegende Mutter mit Kind* (Moore, 1961) liefert den entscheidenden Hinweis, wie das rätselhafte Gebilde zu deuten ist, wohingegen das Objekt in Abbildung 1 keines Titels bedarf. Kulka (1996) leitet seine zweite Bedingung logisch aus der ersten ab: Nur wenn ein Sujet unmittelbar und eindeutig identifizierbar ist, kann es im Betrachter eine spontane emotionale Reaktion auslösen. Kitsch liegt also nur dann vor, wenn das gefühlsbetonte Thema so dargestellt ist, dass es für den Betrachter unmittelbar und eindeutig erkennbar ist (Kulka, 1996). Das dritte Kriterium besagt, dass Kitsch nicht originell sein darf (Kulka, 1996). Abbildung 3 zeigt ein Bild von Max Ernst (1926), das den Titel *Die Jungfrau züchtigt das Jesuskind vor drei Zeugen: André Breton, Paul Éluard und dem Maler* trägt. Hier ist der Betrachter sofort im Bild: Die Gottesmutter – zu erkennen an dem Nimbus – züchtigt das Jesuskind. Durch ein kleines Fenster im Hintergrund beobachten drei Personen die Szene. Soweit erfüllt das Werk also die zwei zuvor formulierten Kitschkriterien: Es wird ein idealtypisches Kitschthema (Mutter und Kind) behandelt, wobei der emotionale Gehalt des Sujets noch durch religiöse Bezüge gesteigert wird. Aufgrund der realistischen Malweise ist das Dargestellte für den Betrachter unmittelbar und eindeutig erkennbar. Zugunsten der Lesbarkeit des Motivs verzichtet Max Ernst auf formale Innovationen. Beim Bildaufbau orientierte sich der Künstler sogar nachweislich an historischen Vorlagen (Krischel, 1998). In einem entscheidenden Punkt verstößt der Künstler jedoch gegen die Konventionen der christlichen Ikonographie: Darstellungen von körperlicher Misshandlung (vgl. Geißelung, Kreuzigung) sind zwar in der christlichen Kunst ebenso gängig wie Darstellungen von Maria mit dem Jesuskind. Max Ernst bricht jedoch mit diesen Darstellungskonventionen, indem er beide Sujets in einer häuslichen Szene verbindet, die weder mit dem Ideal einer harmonischen Mutter-Kind-Beziehung noch mit dem Pathos der Passionsgeschichte vereinbar ist. Der Künstler stiftet also neue gedankliche Bezüge, indem er auf provokante Weise gegen bestehende Sehgewohnheiten verstößt und die Verletzung religiöser Gefühle in Kauf nimmt.

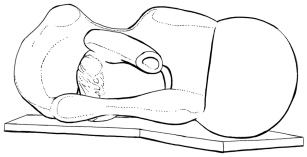

Abbildung 2: Moore (1961): *Liegende Mutter mit Kind.*

Abbildung 3: Ernst (1926): *Die Jungfrau züchtigt das Jesuskind vor drei Zeugen.*

Zusammenfassend lässt sich feststellen, dass Kitsch (A) ein gefühlsbetontes, (B) eindeutig identifizierbares Sujet voraussetzt, (C) dessen Kontext oder Art der Darstellung nicht von gängigen Klischees[1] abweicht und daher keine Botschaft vermittelt, die über den dargestellten Sachverhalt hinausweist (Kulka, 1996). Vor allem durch diese letzte Bedingung steht Kitsch im Widerspruch zum Kunstbegriff der Moderne, der von Künstlern Originalität und eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit traditionellen Inhalten und Darstellungskonventionen fordert.

3 Warum ist Kitsch so populär?

In *Aesthetics and Psychobiology* hat Berlyne (1971) die einflussreiche These formuliert, wonach die Wirkung von Kunst – sowie überhaupt von allem ästhetisch Reizvollen – durch kollative Reizmerkmale vermittelt wird. Unter kollativen Merkmalen versteht Berlyne das Erregungspotenzial einer Reizkonfiguration, welches durch den Grad der Neuartigkeit, Mehrdeutigkeit, Überraschung, Unbestimmtheit oder Komplexität bedingt ist. Von Reizmerkmalen zu sprechen ist eigentlich irreführend, weil Kollativität im Auge des Betrachters liegt: Ob dem Betrachter etwas neuartig oder vertraut erscheint, hängt allein von seiner Vorerfahrung, also von seinem Wissen und seiner Interpretation der Reizgegebenheiten ab (Carbon, 2014). Dennoch gibt es Fälle (z.B. kunsthistorische Schlüsselwerke), die in Bezug auf alles bisher Dagewesene neuartig sind und daher auf alle Menschen aufregend anders wirken. Auf den ersten Blick scheinen die bereits erwähnten Werke von Henry Moore und Max Ernst die Theorie Berlynes zu bestätigen: Zum Zeitpunkt ihrer Entstehung zeichneten sie sich entweder durch formale Innovationen oder inhaltliche Tabubrüche aus. Ihr Erregungspotenzial kommt dabei sinnfällig in den heftigen ablehnenden Reaktionen zum Ausdruck, die sie bei ihren Zeitgenossen hervorriefen. Als das Gemälde *Die Jungfrau züchtigt das Jesuskind vor drei Zeugen* 1926 im Salon des Indépendents in Paris zum ersten Mal ausgestellt wurde, sorgte es für lebhafte Diskussionen. Solche Kontroversen wecken aber auch Zweifel an der Allgemeingültigkeit von Berlynes Thesen: Wenn Kollativität tatsächlich den Schlüssel zum ästhetischen Erleben schlechthin darstellt, warum wird das Neue in der Kunst dann von so vielen Menschen zunächst so vehement abgelehnt (Carbon, 2011)? Neben einer weitverbreiteten Skepsis gegenüber künstlerischen Innovationen ist es aber vor allem die ungeheure Beliebtheit von Kitsch, die Berlyne in Verlegenheit bringt: Kitsch besticht gerade nicht durch Neuartigkeit, Mehrdeutigkeit, Überraschung oder Komplexität. Seine kalkulierte Wirkung beruht auf vertrauten, emotional besetzten Themen und einer konventionellen, eindeutigen Wiedergabe, die dem Betrachter ein unmittelbares Verständnis ermöglicht, ohne eine neue

[1] Unter einem Klischee (dt. Abklatsch) verstehen wir ehemals innovative Vorstellungen, Stilmittel oder Kunstwerke, die aber mittlerweile veraltet oder abgegriffen wirken. Auf den visuellen Bereich übertragen, wird durch diese Definition verständlich, wie es zu einer allmählichen Verkitschung von ursprünglich innovativen Kunstwerken kommen kann: Durch zahllose Reproduktionen werden beispielsweise Dürers „betende Hände", Raffaels „Sixtinische Madonna", Van Goghs „Sonnenblumen" oder Klimts „Kuss" zu Klischees einer allgemein anerkannten Kunstauffassung. Somit sind sie fast allen Menschen vertraut, ihr emotional besetzter Gegenstand ist dank einer realistischen Malweise unmittelbar identifizierbar. Darüber hinaus zählen sie mittlerweile zu den Standardassoziationen, die wir mit der Vorstellung von Kunst verbinden.

Sicht auf den dargestellten Gegenstand zu provozieren. Zahlreiche Studien aus der empirischen Ästhetikforschung belegen, dass Vertrautheit und Prototypikalität einen positiven Effekt auf unser ästhetisches Urteil haben. Der Effekt des bloßen Kontakts (?, ?)[*mere exposure effect*] trägt beispielsweise der Beobachtung Rechnung, dass Stimuli bei wiederholter Darbietung, also mit zunehmender Vertrautheit, positiver bewertet werden. Diese und andere Befunde haben zur Formulierung des *Hedonic Fluency Models* (Reber, Schwarz & Winkielman, 2004) geführt. Im Gegensatz zu Berlyne (1971) nehmen dessen Autoren an, dass grundsätzlich ein positiver Zusammenhang zwischen ästhetischem Genuss und der Verarbeitungsgeschwindigkeit besteht: Je geringer der kognitive Aufwand ist, mit dem ein Reiz verarbeitet wird, desto positiver wird er bewertet (Reber et al., 2004). Dieser Ansatz macht die Popularität von Kitsch verständlich: Die Fixierung auf vertraute Inhalte, das Festhalten an bewährten Darstellungskonventionen und der exzessive Gebrauch von supernormalen Reizen (z.B. übertriebenen Ausprägungen des Kindchenschemas) – all diese Aspekte deuten darauf hin, dass der Reiz von Kitsch in einer, durch schnelle Reizverarbeitung vermittelten, intensiven emotionalen Reaktion liegt. Viele Autoren haben die allgemeine Zugänglichkeit und die Unmittelbarkeit des Effekts als Charakteristika von Kitsch bestimmt (Călinescu, 1987; Kulka, 1996). Interessanterweise bilden diese Aspekte – Eingängigkeit, Sentimentalität, Trivialität – zugleich die stärksten Einwände, die gegen Kitsch vorgebracht werden. Warum ist es verwerflich, wenn uns Kitsch auf einer emotionalen Ebene unmittelbar anspricht? Oder um es mit Burkhard Schmidt (1994) auszudrücken: Wenn Kitsch den kürzesten Weg zum Wohlbefinden darstellt, „warum soll man nicht den kürzesten Weg einschlagen?" (S. 14). Der Soziologe Pierre Bourdieu (1979/2012) hat in seiner Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft darauf hingewiesen, „daß die gesamte Sprache der Ästhetik von einer fundamentalen Ablehnung des Leichten befangen ist" (S. 757). Er spricht in diesem Zusammenhang von einer heftigen Abneigung (Ekel), die sich gegen alles richtet, was in ästhetischer Hinsicht „unmittelbar zugängliche und deshalb als ‚infantil' oder ‚primitiv' verschriene Freuden bietet (im Unterschied zu den aufgeschobenen Vergnügen legitimer Kunst)" (S. 758 f.). Die Ablehnung einer populären Ästhetik führt Bourdieu darauf zurück, dass sie den gesellschaftlichen Eliten keine Möglichkeit zur sozialen Abgrenzung und damit zur Legitimierung ihrer Privilegien bietet: Was allen Menschen aufgrund ihrer allgemeinen Lebenserfahrung – also unabhängig von Status, Einkommen oder Bildungsgrad – zugänglich ist, verspricht keinen Distinktionsgewinn und ist somit nicht geeignet, um soziale Ungleichheit zu rechtfertigen.[2] Der Kitschbegriff bringt den von Bourdieu (1979/2012)beschriebenen „Ekel vor dem ‚Leichten"' (S. 757) auf den Punkt: Nach Pazaurek (1912/2012) bildet Kitsch als Synonym für „geschmacklose[n] Massenschund [den] äußerste[n] Gegenpol zu künstlerisch durchgeistigter Qualitätsarbeit" (S. 249). Zugleich deuten Bourdieus Analysen auf einen Zusammenhang zwischen ästhetischen Wertungen und sozialen Interessenskonflikten hin.

[2] Die Doktrin des Sozialistischen Realismus von 1932 verlangte von Künstlern den Verzicht auf Abstraktion zugunsten einer allgemeinverständlichen, wirklichkeitsnahen Wiedergabe von Themen aus dem Alltagsleben. In einer klassenlosen Gesellschaft sollte Kunst für alle unmittelbar zugänglich sein. Diese Kulturpolitik brachte eine „billige Massenkunst" (Ligeti, 2010) hervor und zeigt einen der vielfältigen Bezüge zwischen politischen Ideologien und Kitsch auf (vgl. Kundera, 1984/1999).

4 Wie viel Kitsch verträgst du heute?

Der Gedanke, dass ein Zusammenhang zwischen dem ästhetischen Erleben und sozialen Bedürfnissen besteht, ist nicht neu. Der Philosoph Edmund Burke (1757/1989) hat dem Schönen bereits vor über 250 Jahren eine ,,soziale Qualität" (S. 76) zugesprochen. In seiner Abhandlung *Vom Erhabenen und Schönen* führt er aus, dass uns schöne Dinge ,,eine Gesinnung von Zärtlichkeit und Zuneigung [einflößen]" (S. 77), welche in uns den Wunsch weckt ,,sie nahe bei uns zu haben und [...] bereitwillig in eine Beziehung zu ihnen [zu treten]" (S.77). Ellen Dissanayake (2015) hat diese Vorstellung kürzlich wieder aufgegriffen: In *Art and Intimacy* führt sie die menschliche Sensibilität für ästhetische Erfahrungen auf jene Anlagen zurück, die uns von Geburt an für die Interaktion mit unserer sozialen Umwelt empfänglich machen.

Im Folgenden beschreiben wir ein Modell, welches Veränderungen im ästhetischen Erleben mit den verhaltensbiologischen Grundlagen der sozialen Motivation verknüpft. Diesem Modell liegt die Annahme zugrunde, dass zwei widersprüchliche Grundbedürfnisse für das menschliche Bindungsverhalten bestimmend sind: das Verlangen nach Nähe, Wärme und Zugehörigkeit einerseits und das Streben nach Unabhängigkeit und Selbstbestimmung andererseits. Aus diesem Spannungsverhältnis ergibt sich das Dilemma der sozialen Distanzregulation, welches Arthur Schopenhauer (1851) in seiner berühmten Stachelschweinparabel sehr anschaulich schildert: Wenn es kalt ist, nähern sich die Stachelschweine ihren Artgenossen auf der Suche nach Wärme und Geborgenheit. Je näher sie sich dabei kommen, desto schmerzhafter spüren sie ihre spitzen Stacheln. Sie streben also wieder auseinander, bis das Bedürfnis nach Wärme überhandnimmt und sie sich wieder aufeinander zubewegen. Dieser ,,Urkonflikt aus Autonomie und Intimität" (Bischof, 2001) ist bei allen Tierarten angelegt, die in geschlossenen, individualisierten Verbänden leben (z.B. Stachelschweine).[3] Beim Menschen gehen aus diesem Konflikt nicht nur allerhand Wahlverwandtschaften, Irrungen, Wirrungen, Kabalen und Liebesaffären hervor. Er liefert darüber hinaus auch den Herzschmerz für zahllose Liebeslieder, Groschenromane und Telenovelas.

Das *Zürcher Modell der sozialen Motivation* von Norbert Bischof (1975, 1993, 2001) ist ein systemtheoretisches Modell, welches die Dynamik der sozialen Distanzregulation auf das Zusammenspiel von drei homöostatischen Regulationssystemen und ein Hilfssystem zurückführt: (A) das *Erregungssystem*, (B) das *Sicherheitssystem* und (C) das *Autonomiesystem*. Diese drei Systeme bilden den Kern des Zürcher Modells. Ein zusätzliches Hilfssystem – das *Coping System* – wird nur aktiv, wenn die Aktivität der ersten drei Systeme durch eine Barriere behindert wird (Schneider, 2001). Alle vier Systeme des Zürcher Modells werden im Folgenden in der Reihenfolge vorgestellt, in der sie im Laufe der Ontogenese wirksam werden. Außerdem werden ihre möglichen Verbindungen zum ästhetischen Erleben untersucht.

Das **Erregungssystem** reguliert das allgemeine Aktivierungsniveau eines Organismus. Es beruht auf der Annahme, dass wir auf neuartige, erwartungsdiskrepante (soziale) Reize in unserer Umgebung mit einer zunehmenden Aktivität

[3] Ein *individualisierter Verband* bedeutet, dass sich die Gruppenmitglieder anhand individueller Merkmale erkennen (z.B. Aussehen, Geruch, Laute). Soziallebende Tiere, die in geschlossenen, individualisierten Verbänden leben, verhindern außerdem den Anschluss gruppenfremder Individuen.

des sympathischen Nervensystems sowie der endokrinen Stressachse reagieren: Wenn uns nachts auf einer ansonsten menschenleeren Straße die dunkle Silhouette einer großen unbekannten Person entgegenkommt, erhöht sich unsere Herzschlagfrequenz. Abgesehen von einer erhöhten Reaktionsbereitschaft bei unerwarteten Ereignissen oder potentiell bedrohlichen Begegnungen stellt das Erregungssystem eine gewisse Grundaktivierung her, die als angenehm empfunden wird. Ob uns das aktuelle Erregungsniveau angenehm ist, hängt von einem Sollwert ab, den Bischof (1975, 1993, 2001) als *Unternehmungslust* bezeichnet. Der aktuelle Grad der Aktivierung, wird mit diesem Wert fortlaufend verglichen: Liegt der Sollwert deutlich über dem aktuellen Aktivierungsniveau resultiert daraus ein Zustand der Erregungsappetenz (Neugier). Übersteigt die Erregung jedoch die Unternehmungslust, so liegt eine Erregungsaversion vor (z.B. Stress, Reizüberflutung). Für das Erregungssystem ist Unbekanntes – speziell fremde Artgenossen – mit Erregung assoziiert. Bei einer Erregungsaversion vergrößern wir die Distanz zu der unbekannten Person, indem wir zum Beispiel die Straßenseite wechseln. Wenn wir neugierig sind – also ein Erregungsmangel vorliegt – können wir diesen durch Annäherung an einen unbekannten Artgenossen ausgleichen. In diesem Fall gehen wir dem nächtlichen Passanten nicht aus dem Weg, sondern sprechen ihn an. Das Erregungssystem weist seine höchste Aktivierung auf, wenn wir uns in der Nähe eines fremden Artgenossen befinden und dieser durch sein Auftreten zu erkennen gibt, dass er einen höheren Rang beansprucht (Schneider, 2001). Heute lässt sich die Rangposition einer Person in vielen Kontexten meist nicht direkt an ihrem äußeren Erscheinungsbild ablesen. Abgesehen von physischer Überlegenheit (z.B. Kraftsport), Berufskleidung (z.B. weißer Kittel; schwarze Robe), Rangabzeichen (z.B. Militär) und Statussymbolen (z.B. Markenkleidung; exklusive Autos) werden die „feinen Unterschiede" auch an Umgangsformen und ästhetischen Präferenzen festgemacht (Bourdieu, 1979/2012). Wie wir bereits gesehen haben, knüpft Berlyne (1971) den ästhetischen Reiz eines Objektes an sein subjektives Erregungspotenzial: Je neuartiger, komplexer oder mehrdeutiger es sich vor dem Erfahrungshintergrund des Rezipienten ausnimmt, desto aufregender wirkt es. Ob dies bei dem Betrachter ein positives („spannend") oder ein negatives ästhetisches Urteil („irritierend") hervorruft, hängt maßgeblich davon ab, ob der Toleranzbereich des Erregungssystems durch den Erregungsanstieg überschritten wird. Die Vorerfahrung des Betrachters übt hier einen dämpfenden Einfluss aus: Je mehr Vergleichsmöglichkeiten er hat, desto seltener wird ihm ein Reiz neuartig oder überraschend erscheinen. Das Erfolgsrezept von Kitsch hat bereits Zweifel an Berlynes Theorie geweckt. Mit Blick auf das Zürcher Modell beschränkt sich ihre Gültigkeit auf die ersten Lebensmonate eines Menschen, in denen das Erregungssystem noch uneingeschränkt herrscht und einen großen Toleranzbereich aufweist. Säuglinge wirken daher noch erstaunlich furchtlos. Für ein Neugeborenes ist eine hohe Erregungstoleranz wichtig, denn abgesehen von vertrauten akustischen Reizen – zum Beispiel die Stimme der Mutter – ist für ihn alles neu und aufregend. Trotzdem sollte es sich nicht vor fremdartigen Umweltreizen verschließen, sondern sich ihnen aktiv zuwenden. Diese scheinbar grenzenlose Neugier der Säuglinge endet jedoch typischerweise kurz bevor sie sich aus eigener Kraft fortbewegen können (Bischof, 1996). Um den achten Lebensmonat herum reagieren sie auf unbekannte Personen „mit der sogenannten Achtmonatsangst" (S. 243). In dieser Entwicklungsphase tritt ein zweites Regulationssystem hervor, welches für unser Sicherheitsgefühl zuständig ist.

8

Das **Sicherheitssystem** verfügt über den Sollwert *Abhängigkeit* und funktioniert ansonsten genauso wie das Erregungssystem: Ist das aktuelle Sicherheitsgefühl nicht mindestens so hoch wie der Sollwert, so ist ein Sicherheitsbedürfnis gegeben. Im umgekehrten Fall liegt eine Sicherheitsaversion vor (Langeweile). Vertrautheit ist mit Sicherheit assoziiert. Die einfachste Möglichkeit, um ein Sicherheitsmangel auszugleichen besteht also in der Annäherung an eine vertraute Person. Gemäß dem Zürcher Modell ist eine maximale Aktivierung des Sicherheitssystems zu erwarten, wenn ein Kleinkind direkten Körperkontakt mit der Mutter oder einer anderen primären Bezugsperson hat (Schneider, 2001). Mit der Aktivität des Sicherheitssystems könnte die Beobachtung zusammenhängen, dass viele Kleinkinder eine eigentümliche Vorliebe für vorhersagbare Abläufe entwickeln und unduldsam auf kleinste Abweichungen von gewohnten Alltagsritualen reagieren. In den ersten Lebensmonaten sorgt die Mutter oder eine andere primäre Bezugsperson für optimal anregende Umweltbedingungen: Einerseits schirmt sie den Säugling von besonders intensiver Stimulation ab, andererseits stellt sie Blickkontakt her und regt ihn durch Berührungen (Kitzeln), einfache Laute oder Silben (Babysprache), eine übertriebene Mimik und Prosodie zu einer intensiven Kommunikation an (Dissanayake, 2015). In *Art and Intimacy* hat Ellen Dissanayake (2015) darauf hingewiesen, dass dieser besondere Modus, in dem Erwachsene mit Säuglingen kommunizieren, kulturübergreifende Ähnlichkeiten aufweist (z.B. Wiederholung, Rhythmisierung, Imitation, Übertreibung, Spannungsaufbau, Überraschung), die zugleich für Rituale und alle Formen künstlerischen Ausdrucks typisch sind (z.B. Lyrik, Musik, Tanz, Theater, Malerei). Dissanayake zufolge bilden die biologischen Voraussetzungen für das zärtliche, multisensorische Wechselspiel zwischen Mutter und Kind auch die Grundlage für unsere ästhetische Sensibilität im Erwachsenenalter.

Mit dem Beginn der Adoleszenz wird schließlich das **Autonomiesystem** aktiv. Es regelt den Freiheitsdrang eines Individuums. Wie intensiv dieser Wunsch nach Unabhängigkeit ist, zeigt der Sollwert *Autonomieanspruch* an. Er speist sich aus dem Vertrauen in die eigenen Fähigkeiten: Jedes Erfolgserlebnis, das wir uns selbst zuschreiben, stärkt unser Selbstvertrauen und damit unseren Autonomieanspruch. Das Autonomiesystem hat die Besonderheit, dass es die Sollwerte des Sicherheitssystems und des Erregungssystems beeinflusst (Bischof, 1975, 1993, 2001): Ein hoher *Autonomieanspruch* reduziert *Abhängigkeit* und steigert die *Unternehmungslust* (siehe Abbildung 4).

Die Pubertät ist bei weitem nicht nur eine Phase körperlicher Veränderungen. Der neuerwachte Autonomieanspruch führt vorübergehend zu einer Vermeidung von vertrauten Bezugspersonen (Eltern, Geschwistern). Im Gegenzug übt die soziale Umwelt außerhalb des Elternhauses eine große Anziehung aus. Typischerweise geht diese soziale Neuorientierung mit einer tiefgreifenden Veränderung von ästhetischen Präferenzen einher: Musikgeschmack, Haarfarbe, Kleidungsstil und Einstellungen zu Körperschmuck orientieren sich nun verstärkt an Idolen und anderen Gleichaltrigen. Der allzu vertraute Geschmack der Eltern wirkt dagegen zunehmend altmodisch, bieder, langweilig oder eben kitschig (Stemmle, 1931). Weitere Quellen belegen, dass der Kitschbegriff zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts explizit mit Intergenerationenkonflikten in Verbindung gebracht wurde: So berichtet Avenarius (1920), dass etablierte Künstler von Vertretern der jungen Künstlergeneration gerne als ,,Kitschiers" (S. 222) bezeichnet wurden.

Das **Coping System** ist ein Hilfssystem. Es greift nur ein, wenn ein Ausgleich von Erregungs- oder Sicherheitsbedürfnissen nicht durch Annäherung bezie-

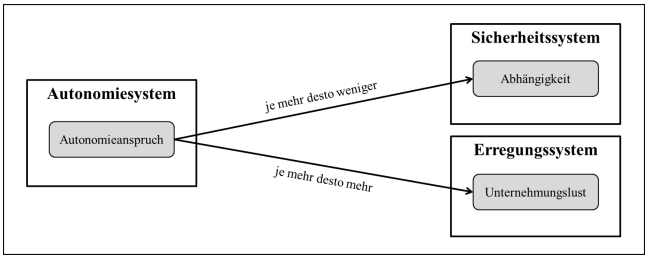

Abbildung 4: Sollwert des Autonomiesystems (*Autonomieanspruch*) nimmt Einfluss auf die Sollwerte des Sicherheitssystems (*Abhängigkeit*) und des Erregungssystems (*Unternehmungslust*) (Bischof, 1975; 1993; 2001).

hungsweise Vermeidung möglich ist, weil eine Barriere dies verhindert (Schneider, 2001). Eine Prüfung stellt eine potentiell selbstwertbedrohliche Situation dar, die wir gerne fliehen würden. Da Prüfungssituationen oft unausweichlich sind, versuchen viele Menschen ihre innere Anspannung und ihre akute Sicherheitsappetenz durch ein mitgebrachtes Stofftier oder andere Sicherheitssignale zu regulieren.
Im Folgenden wollen wir die Systemdynamik des Modells anhand von zwei Szenarien beispielhaft illustrieren. Das erste Szenario ist in Abbildung 5 dargestellt: Fühlt sich eine Person in einer ihr vertrauten Situation sicher und kompetent, erwarten wir, dass sich diese Person als unabhängig erlebt und einen hohen Autonomieanspruch erhebt. Gemäß dem Zürcher Modell ist der Autonomieanspruch positiv mit einer gesteigerten Unternehmungslust (Neugier) und einer erhöhten Erregungstoleranz assoziiert: Die Person wünscht sich einen Tapetenwechsel, d.h. sie sucht aktiv nach neuen Eindrücken auch wenn dies unter Umständen dazu führt, dass sie liebgewonnene Vorurteile aufgeben muss. Dieser Zustand der Neugier macht die Person auch im ästhetischen Bereich für neue, ambivalente und mehrdeutige Reize empfänglich, auch wenn sie zunächst fremd und rätselhaft erscheinen und ein Umdenken erfordern.

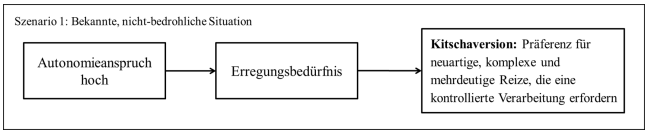

Abbildung 5: Kitschaversion bei hohem Autonomieanspruch.

Abbildung 6 illustriert die Systemdynamik für eine unbekannte Situation, die als potentiell bedrohlich wahrgenommen wird. Das Vertrauen in die eigenen Fähigkeiten ist hier eher gering, wodurch der Autonomieanspruch absinkt. Die Person ist der Situation nicht ganz gewachsen und fühlt sich von der Unterstützung und den Bewertungen anderer Personen abhängig. Folglich sucht sie nach Anschluss-

und Sicherheitssignalen, d.h. sie ist darauf bedacht, keinen Anstoß zu erregen und soziale Zurückweisung zu riskieren. Anders ausgedrückt: Die Person möchte sich in ihren Überzeugungen bestätigt sehen und sucht nach Rückversicherung. Im ästhetischen Bereich äußert sich diese Haltung in einer Präferenz für vertraute, positiv konnotierte Reize, die eine flüssige Verarbeitung erlauben.

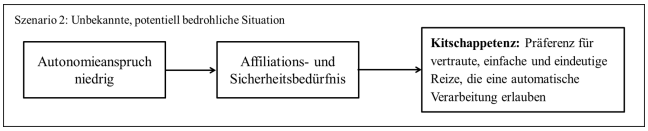

Abbildung 6: Kitschappetenz bei niedrigem Autonomieanspruch.

Abschließend bleibt noch zu klären, inwiefern Kitsch als eine anthropologische Konstante gelten kann. Äußerungen von Schmidt (1994) und Kundera (1984/1999) legen dies nahe wenn sie betonen, dass ,,[i]n jedem von uns ein Tropfen Kitsch [steckt]" (Schmidt, 1994, S. 14). Unser Modell knüpft an diese Überlegungen an, indem es eine Verbindung zwischen den biologischen Grundlagen des ,,Urkonflikts von Intimität und Autonomie" (Bischof, 2001) und dem Spannungsverhältnis von Kitsch und Kunst herstellt. Wenn sich das menschliche Grundbedürfnis nach Sicherheit und Zugehörigkeit tatsächlich in ästhetischen Präferenzen niederschlägt, sollte dieser Einfluss zeit- und kulturübergreifend nachweisbar sein.

5 Wie universell ist Kitsch?

> ,,Wir können ihn noch so verabscheuen, der Kitsch gehört nun einmal zum menschlichen Dasein."
>
> — Kundera, 1984/1999, S. 254

Kunstproduktion gilt als eine anthropologische Konstante (Dissanayake, 1992). Jede bislang bekannte Kultur hat Artefakte oder bildhafte Darstellungen hervorgebracht, die keinen direkten Nutzen für die Lebenserhaltung erkennen lassen. Die frühesten Zeugnisse für eine solche Praxis – Steine mit geometrischen Ritzungen – sind etwa 75.000 Jahre alt (Henshilwood, d'Errico, Yates & et al., 2002). Über die Motivation zu künstlerischer Betätigung in prähistorischen Gesellschaften und ihren adaptiven Wert lässt sich nur spekulieren. Feldbeobachtungen bei heutigen Naturvölkern legen nahe, dass die Künste in den Clangesellschaften der Vor- und Frühgeschichte vor allem soziale Funktionen besaßen (Dissanayake, 2015): Durch eine aufwändige bildnerische Gestaltung oder performative Inszenierung von bestimmten Ereignissen, Orten, Personen, Artefakten und Vorstellungen wurde deren besondere Bedeutung für das Wohlergehen der Gemeinschaft hervorgehoben (Dissanayake, 2015). Imitation, Wiederholung und Rhythmisierung (Tanz und Ritual), der Gebrauch von gebundener Sprache (Zauberformeln) in Kombination mit einer besonderen Prosodie (Gebetsgesang) dienten nach Ansicht von Dissanayake dazu, überliefertes Wissen für die Mitglieder einer Gemeinschaft salient und emotional erfahrbar zu machen. Als multisensorische Mnemotechniken sorgte künstlerische Elaboration

somit für eine nachhaltige Wissensvermittlung und stiftete darüber hinaus eine starke Verbundenheit mit der Vorstellungswelt der Gemeinschaft, welche die Grundlage ihres Zusammenlebens bildete (Dissanayake, 2015). Die affirmative Rolle, die den Künsten in prämodernen Gesellschaften hier zugeschrieben wird, ist dem Selbstverständnis der sogenannten ,,künstlerischen Avantgarde" auffallend fremd: Für ihre Vertreter ist gerade eine kritische Distanz zur Tradition kennzeichnend (Călinescu, 1987). Mit Selbstbewusstsein, Nonkonformismus und Originalität stellen sie überkommene Denkmuster infrage und versuchen weitverbreitete Seh- und Hörgewohnheiten zu überwinden. Eine unkritische Verherrlichung von Orten, Ereignissen, Personen und Weltbildern käme ihnen nicht in den Sinn. Eine solche Praxis erinnert eher an Heimatfilme, die pompösen Eröffnungsfeiern von internationalen Sportereignissen oder den Personenkult um politische und religiöse Führer; an Phänomene also, die eng mit dem Begriff *Kitsch* verbunden sind. Kitsch wird genau jenes unkritische und nostalgische Verhältnis zur Vergangenheit vorgeworfen, welches nach Ansicht von Dissanayake für die Künste in prämodernen Gesellschaften adaptiv war, weil es eine emotionale Verbundenheit mit der Gemeinschaft und ihren Werten stiftete.
Wenn ästhetische Präferenzen mit Bedürfnissen nach Sicherheit und Zugehörigkeit beziehungsweise Unabhängigkeit und Autonomie zusammenhängen, wie es unser Modell unterstellt, so müsste ein gesellschaftlicher Wertewandel zu Veränderungen im Verhältnis von Kitsch und Kunst führen. Gibt es hierfür Belege? Besteht in schweren Zeiten eine Tendenz zur ,,leichten Unterhaltung"? Seit ein paar Jahren beobachten Zukunftsforscher bei jungen Menschen eine Rückbesinnung auf traditionelle Werte. Manche sprechen sogar von einer ,,Neuen Generation Biedermeier" (Krüger & Grünewald, 2014), die ihren Autonomieanspruch weitgehend aufgibt und sich vor den Zumutungen einer dynamischen und globalisierten Arbeitswelt ins Private zurückzieht: ,,Man wünscht sich mehr Querdenker und Widerspruchsgeist [und beobachtet stattdessen] verwundert, dass junge Leute heute nicht mehr Karriere-fixiert sind, sondern anpassungsbereit und fügsam" (Krüger & Grünewald, 2014, S. 1). Parallel dazu scheinen sich auch die ästhetischen Wertmaßstäbe der Kunstwelt zu verändern: Chris Dercon, Direktor der Tate Gallery of Modern Art in London, stellte 2014 in einem Interview fest, dass die junge Künstlergeneration nicht länger schockieren oder polarisieren wolle, sondern nach verbindenden Elementen suche: ,,In einer immer komplexer werdenden Welt, in der sich niemand mehr wirklich auszukennen vermag, sehnen sich die Menschen nach Zugehörigkeit. Kunst bedeutet heutzutage, eine Form von Verbundenheit zu suchen, von Dazugehörigkeit" (Sebastian & Dercon, 2014, S. 2). Und mit Blick auf die zukünftige Aufgabe von Museen fügte Dercon hinzu: ,,Mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit werden wir nach Kunstwerken suchen, die uns helfen, uns zu erinnern. Das Alte wird vielleicht wichtiger werden als das Neue" (S. 2).

6 Zusammenfassung

Was ist Kitsch? Mit Kulka (1996) haben wir den Kitschbegriff an drei notwendige Bedingungen geknüpft, wobei keine für sich hinreichend ist, um von Kitsch zu sprechen: (A) ein gefühlsbetontes, (B) leicht identifizierbares Motiv und (C) einen Kontext oder eine Art der Darstellung, die nicht von gängigen Konventionen abweicht und nicht über den dargestellten Sachverhalt hinaus-

weist. Anders ausgedrückt: Je besser die eindeutig identifizierbare Wiedergabe eines gefühlsbetonten Sujets einem weitverbreiteten Klischee entspricht, desto wahrscheinlicher wird sie als kitschig empfunden. Der Vergleich von Kitsch und Kunst macht deutlich, dass hier zwei Formen des ästhetischen Erlebens im Spiel sind: Der Reiz von Kitsch beruht auf einer schnellen, unbewussten Reizverarbeitung, wie sie für unsere Alltagswahrnehmung typisch ist. In Kombination mit einem vertrauten, positiv besetzten Inhalt wirkt Kitsch somit affirmativ. Im Gegensatz dazu zielt Kunst darauf ab die Automatismen unserer Wahrnehmung zu durchbrechen (Shklovsky, 1917/2002), wodurch ein bewusster Reflexionsprozess angestoßen wird, der neue Einsichten verspricht (Muth, Hesslinger & Carbon, 2015).

Warum gilt Kitsch als wertlos? Kitsch ist vertraut, gefühlsbetont und leicht zugänglich. Daher wird er von Personen, die einen hohen Autonomieanspruch vertreten und bestrebt sind neue Einsichten zu entwickeln, als gefällig, nostalgisch, sentimental und trivial abgelehnt. Indem Kitsch sozial erwünschte, normative und klischeehafte Vorstellungen („Gemeinplätze") kritiklos bekräftigt, frustriert er unser Bedürfnis nach Autonomie und Abgrenzung. Statt eine kritische Distanz zu ermöglichen, wirkt Kitsch in diesem Fall aufdringlich.

Warum ist Kitsch so populär? Weil Kitsch vertraut, gefühlsbetont und leicht zugänglich ist, wird Kitsch von Personen als beruhigendes und tröstliches Sicherheitssignal geschätzt, die darauf bedacht sind ihr Weltbild zu schützen. Indem Kitsch also sozial geteilte Vorstellungen einer relevanten Bezugsgruppe bekräftigt, befriedigt er Bedürfnisse nach Sicherheit und Zugehörigkeit.

Wie viel Kitsch verträgst du heute? Weil unser Kompetenzgefühl und damit unser Autonomieanspruch situationsabhängig variieren, besteht ein ambivalentes Verhältnis zu Kitsch: Wenn wir uns unsicher und abhängig fühlen werden wir für seinen Zauber empfänglicher, während sich unsere Geringschätzung in dem Maße verstärkt, in dem wir uns als kompetent und selbstbestimmt erleben.

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A.7 Back to the Roots

BACK TO THE ROOTS

TOWARDS A NEW "AESTHETIC FROM BELOW"

Stefan A. Ortlieb[1,2,3] and Claus-Christian Carbon[1,2]

[1]Department of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg, Germany
[2]Research Group EPÆG (Ergonomics, Psychological Æsthetics, Gestalt) Bamberg, Germany
[3]Bamberg Graduate School of Affective and Cognitive Sciences (BaGrACS), Germany

Content-related associations are neglected by aesthetics

Image Source: www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Theodor_Fechner

Gustav T. Fechner

Das Associationsprincip in der Aesthetik.

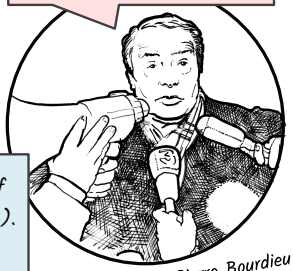
G. Th. Fechner

(1866)

Although an orange is never perfectly round with a rough surface, I prefer the image of an orange (A) to the impression of a perfectly round polished ball of the same color (B). Apparently, pleasant **content-related associations** override the fruit's formal deficits.

One hundred years later...

For popular aesthetics **content** is generally more important than style (Bourdieu, 1979)



Pierre Bourdieu

Take kitsch, for example:

Image Source: Ortlieb & Carbon (2019a, 2019b)

The aesthetic appeal of kitsch consists of...

- **content with a positive emotional charge**...
- which is immediately identifiable thanks to...
- a perfectly conventional manner of depiction.

(Ortlieb & Carbon, 2019b; Kulka, 1996)

... or premodern art.

(Dissanayake, 2015)

Meanwhile...

There is empirical indication, that **content is processed prior to style** (Augustin et al. 2008) and that **content-related associations make the best predictors of aesthetic liking** (Jankovic, 2015)

But still...

No worries, it's just another case for Hedonic Fluency!*

*Hedonic Fluency Model (Reber et al., 2004) accounts for the formal aspects of kitsch:

- **Immediate identifiability** means high perceptual fluency ("the ease of identifying the physical identity of the stimulus", p. 367)
- **Perfect conventionality** implies high conceptual fluency ("ease of mental operations concerned with stimulus meaning and its relation to semantic knowledge structures", p. 367)

What about emotionally rich content?!

Damn, I totally forgot about Fechner's Association Principle!

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Conclusion: Against Fechner's (1866) original idea of an ***aesthetic from below***, today's models of aesthetic liking—including fluency-based ones—exclude what is essential for popular taste and premodern art: **emotionally rich content.**

To be continued.

Contact: stefan.ortlieb@uni-bamberg.de

A.8 Coping with Kitsch

Coping with kitsch?

People with different coping-styles respond differently to decorative everyday objects

Uwe C. Fischer[1,2], Jelisaweta Vlasova[1], Claus-Christian Carbon[1,2,3], and Stefan A. Ortlieb[1,2,3]

[1]Department of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg, Germany
[2]Research Group EPÆG (Ergonomics, Psychological Æsthetics, Gestalt), Bamberg, Germany
[3]Bamberg Graduate School of Affective and Cognitive Sciences (BaGrACS), Germany

"Kitsch is the quickest means of reconciling oneself to circumstances" (Schmidt, 1994, p. 141)

According to Norman (2004) kitsch helps us to deal with uncertainty and negative emotions. As a consequence, we would expect people with different coping-styles to show specifically different reactions to kitsch: Sensitizers who are intolerant of uncertainty and highly vigilant about threatening information as they have little confidence in their abilities should find kitsch more likable than repressors who tend to overestimate their abilities and habitually avoid or deny threatening information to evade strong affect. Besides the classical types, there are also combinations possible with high cognitive defense and high vigilance (ineffective copers; see box below) which we expect in the beginning to react like sensitizers.

Sample

The sample comprised 56 participants (14 male; M_{age}=22.2 years; SD_{age}=5.4), mainly psychology students who attended for course credit.

Method

Initially, participants answered socio-demographical questions (e.g. gender, age, education) and completed a standardized coping-style inventory (ABI; Krohne & Egloff, 1999) prior to rating 208 images of decorative everyday objects from the *Bamberg Repository of Contemporary Kitsch* (BaRoCK) in terms of liking and kitschiness. For each rating a 7-point Likert-scale was used (1=*I do not like it at all*, 7=*I like it very much*; 1=*not kitschy at all*, 7=*very kitschy*).

For data analysis the sample was split into four groups based on cut-off values from the ABI-manual: sensitizers (n=17), repressors (n=19), ineffective copers who scored high on vigilance and cognitive defense (n=18), as well as non-defensive individuals with low scores on both dimensions (n=2; excluded from data analysis).

Due to the diversity of the 208 BaRoCK-images concerning liking and kitsch ratings, the stimuli are treated as separated units in an ANOVA with two repeated independent factors (coping group and rating item).

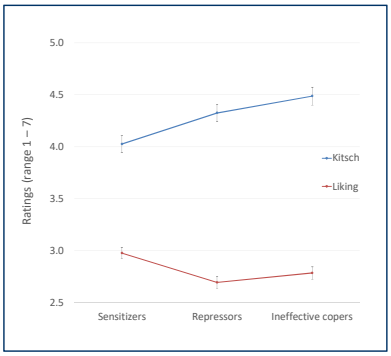

Fig. 1: Mean kitsch and liking ratings (k=208 images) for sensitizers, repressors and ineffective copers. Error bars indicate ± 1 SEM

Tab. 1: Results of the repeated measures ANOVA

Source	QS	df	MQS	F	p	η_p^2
Rating item (kitsch vs. liking)	665.89	1	665.89	145.61	<.001	.413
Error(Rating)	*946.66*	*207*	*4.57*			
Coping group (sensitizer, repressor, ineffective coper)	4.71	2	2.35	28.94	<.001	.123
Error (Coping group)	*33.71*	*414*	*0.08*			
Rating * Coping group	26.67	2	13.33	86.95	<.001	.296
*Error (Rating * Coping group)*	*63.48*	*414*	*0.15*			

Sphericity was given for all factors (ε>.90)

Tab. 2: Results of the specific interaction contrast analysis

Source	QS	df	MQS	F	p	η_p^2
Rating * Coping group (Sensitizers vs. repressors)	35.21	1	35.21	115.11	<.001	.357
Rating * Coping group (Sensitizers vs. ineffective copers)	44.27	1	44.27	117.18	<.001	.361
*Error (Rating * Coping group) (Sensitizers vs. repressors)*	*63.31*	*207*	*0.31*			
*Error (Rating * Coping group) (Sensitizers vs. ineffective copers)*	*78.20*	*207*	*0.38*			

We expected the following interaction hypothesis:

H_1: $\mu(\text{kitsch - liking})_{\text{sensitizer}} < \mu(\text{kitsch - liking})_{\text{repressor}}$

Results

A group-wise comparison of sensitizers, repressors and ineffective copers revealed complementary responses for the objects with regard to kitsch and liking: The different kitsch objects were rated from the sensitizer group as more likable and less kitschy than from the typical repressor group. Ineffective copers showed a similar response pattern as repressors (Fig. 1).

The general interaction of rating items and coping groups showed a great significant effect for the objects, $F(2,414)=86.95$; $p<.001$; $\eta_p^2=.296$. The specific contrast analysis for repressors and sensitizers showed a highly significant effect across all stimuli, $F(1,207)=115.11$; $p<.001$; $\eta_p^2=.357$).

A significant interaction effect was also obtained for ineffective copers and sensitizers, $F(1,207)=117.18$; $p<.001$; $\eta_p^2=.361$. However, this was not the case for ineffective copers and repressors.

Conclusions

On the whole, findings confirm the main hypothesis that repressors and sensitizers respond differently to kitsch stimuli. Unexpectedly, responses of so-called ineffective copers were similar to those of repressors. When ineffective copers deal with kitsch cognitive defense against an affective response seems to overrule vigilant coping. As kitsch is highly explicit, but usually not threatening, there is apparently no need for sensitization. In the end, 'keeping cool' for kitschy emotions seems to dominate the reception by different coping types.

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ABI: Anxiety-related coping styles

The anxiety-related coping inventory (ABI) by Krohne and Egloff (1999) is based on the two dimensions of cognitive defense and vigilance regarding reactions on threatening situations to represent the classical coping types of sensitizers and repressors as well as two other combinations (non-defensive and ineffective copers).

Vigilance \ Cognitive defense	low	high
low	Non-defensive copers	***Repressors***
high	***Sensitizers***	Ineffective copers

BaRoCK: Bamberg Repository of Contemporary Kitsch

The *Bamberg Repository of Contemporary Kitsch* (BaRoCK) is an image database which was created at the Department of General Psychology and Methodology (University of Bamberg) for the study of kitsch and related phenomena of everyday culture. At present, the BaRoCK database comprises 208 standardized high-resolution digital images of decorative and devotional objects as well as objects of daily use. In an ongoing validation process these stimuli are rated by students from different cultures in order to provide reference data for future research. For further information on the BaRoCK database and the cross-cultural validation project, please contact Stefan Ortlieb (stefan.ortlieb@uni-bamberg.de).

Contact: stefan.ortlieb@uni-bamberg.de

A.9 Home Sweet Home

HOME SWEET HOME

Is kitsch more popular with people who value security over arousal?

Jelisaweta Vlasova[1], Uwe C. Fischer[1,2], Claus-Christian Carbon[1,2], and Stefan A. Ortlieb[1,2,3]

[1]Department of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg, Germany
[2]Research Group EPÆG (Ergonomy, Psychological Æsthetics, Gestalt) Bamberg, Germany
[3]Bamberg Graduate School of Affective and Cognitive Sciences (BaGrACS), Germany

> "Something in kitsch refers to homeland and familiarity" (Schmidt, 1994, p. 143)

It is frequently stated that kitsch answers needs for security and belonging (e.g., Norman, 2004). If this is the case people with a pronounced security motif should rate potential kitsch objects as more likable and less kitschy than people with a low need for security. Regarding a complementary need for arousal this response pattern should be reversed (for detailed theoretical background see box below).

Sample

The sample comprised 56 participants (14 males; M_{age}=22.2 years; SD_{age}=5.4), mostly psychology students who participated for course credit.

Method

Initially, participants answered a set of socio-demographical questions (e.g., gender, age, education). Inter-individual differences in needs for security and arousal were assessed with the standardized *Motive Profile following the Zurich Model* (MPZM) by Schönbrodt et al. (2009). A total of thirty items were rated on a 6-point Likert-scale (1=*very untypical for me*, 6=*very typical for me*) measuring five basic motives from human attachment behavior: security, enterprise (i.e., need for arousal), power, prestige, and achievement. In the following only the results from the first two dimensions are reported. Finally, participants rated 208 images of decorative everyday objects from the *Bamberg Repository of Contemporary Kitsch* (BaRoCK) in terms of liking and kitschiness. For each rating a 7-point Likert-scale was used (1=*I do not like it at all*, 7=*I like it very much*).

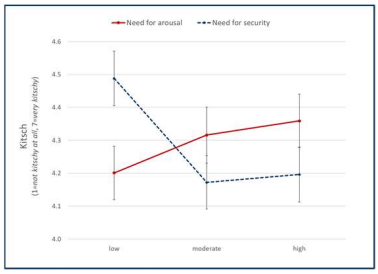

Figure 1: Mean kitsch-ratings for low, moderate and high scorers on the MPZM-scales for arousal (red line) and security (blue line). Error bars indicate ± 1 standard error of the mean.

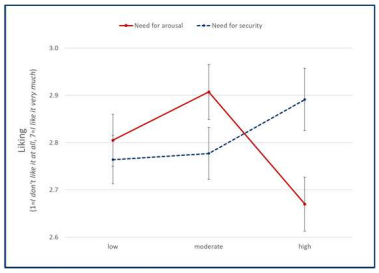

Figure 2: Mean liking-ratings for low, moderate and high scorers on the MPZM-scales for arousal (red line) and security (blue line). Error bars indicate ± 1 standard error of the mean.

Results

For data analysis the sample (N=56) was split into homogenous groups in terms of MPZM-scores for security and arousal: For each of the two scales participants with low scores (n_{sec_low}=19; n_{aro_low}=20), moderately high scores (n_{sec_mod}=20; n_{aro_mod}=21), and high scores (n_{sec_high}=17; n_{aro_high}=15) were grouped together according to their percentile rank. The 33rd and 67th percentile served as cut-off criteria.

On the arousal dimension average kitsch ratings increased monotonously across the three groups: mean kitsch ratings were lowest among the low scorers (M=4.20, SD=1.16) and highest among the high scorers (M=4.35, SD=1.16). Regarding need for security this trend was reversed. Here mean kitsch ratings were highest among low scorers (M=4.48, SD=1.20) and diminished among moderately high (M=4.17, SD=1.16) and low scorers (M=4.20, SD=1.20). A repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant interaction effect, F(2, 414)=47.12, p<.001, η_p^2=.185 (Fig. 1).

While mean liking ratings increased monotonously from low (M=2.76, SD=0.74) to high scorers (M=2.89, SD=0.95) on the MPZM-scale for security, appreciation of decorative everyday objects peaked among participants with moderately high arousal scores (M=2.91, SD=0.84). A significant interaction effect was obtained for liking ratings in a repeated measures ANOVA, F(2, 414)=17.78, p<.001, η_p^2=.08 (Fig. 2).

Discussion

In sum, our findings support the initial hypotheses that decorative everyday objects are perceived as less kitschy by participants who value security over arousal and vice versa. In terms of liking ratings, results were also in line with the assumption that people with a pronounced need for security/arousal should rate the BaRoCK-stimuli more/less likable. Surprisingly, participants with a moderately high need for arousal showed the same answer pattern as participants with a high need for security. It could be that kitsch plays different roles in arousal management: Possibly, it is not only liked for its capacity to ease tension ("calming down") but also for a mildly arousing effect ("cheering up").

Between nostalgia and curiosity: Linking aesthetic appreciation to basic needs for security and arousal

Hypotheses of the present study were derived from a functional model of kitsch and art (Ortlieb & Carbon, under review) that relates aesthetic liking to basic motives of social motivation (Fig. 3). It posits that the ideas of kitsch and art represent two complementary types of aesthetic experience: a fluent one that offers immediate emotional gratification (kitsch) and a disfluent one that requires cognitive elaboration (art). Besides, the model claims that preference for the one or the other is linked to conflicting needs for security and arousal. In accordance with the *Zurich Model of Social Motivation* (Bischof, 2001) it predicts that people with a high level of general self-efficacy feel less dependent on others. This results in a higher need for arousal (curiosity) that is likely to increase their interest in unfamiliar conspecifics as well as in innovative, cognitively challenging aesthetic objects (art). By contrast, people who feel vulnerable and dependent due to a low level of self-efficacy are expected to show a higher need for security (nostalgia). This attracts them not only to familiar individuals but also to conventional easy-to-process-stimuli that are charged with positive emotions (kitsch).

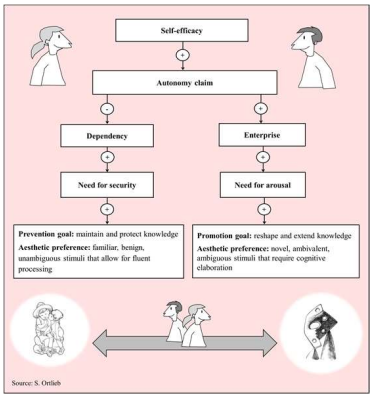

Figure 3: A functional model of kitsch and art that relates aesthetic appreciation to complementary motives of social motivation.

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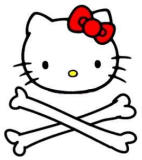
Contact: stefan.ortlieb@uni-bamberg.de



Mors certa kitsch incerta: How does mortality salience affect kitsch judgements?

Stefan A. Ortlieb[1,2,3], Fabian Gebauer[1,2,3], and Claus-Christian Carbon[1,2,3]

[1]Departement of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg, Germany
[2]Forschungsgruppe für Ergonomie, Psychologische Ästhetik und Gestalt (EPÆG), Bamberg, Germany
[3]Bamberg Graduate School of Affective and Cognitive Sciences (BaGrACS), Bamberg, Germany

Terror Management and Kitsch

> "Kitsch is to be found in every human being because kitsch seems to be the shortest way of becoming reconciled to the circumstances of one's life"
>
> (Schmidt, 1994, p. 136)

Terror management theory (TMT) states that art is valued for its ability to provide death-transcending meaning (Landau, Sullivan, & Solomon, 2010). Previous research shows that reminders of mortality amplify positive as well as negative aesthetic judgements: Artworks which affirm the beholder's worldview were rated more positively, while artworks which defy meaningful interpretation were rated more negatively. How do these findings relate to kitsch? As a derogatory term "kitsch" is used to contrast significant artistic achievements. Unlike art, however, kitsch offers a clear-cut and consoling message allowing for immediate understanding (Kulka, 1996). From a TMT perspective it is unclear how mortality concerns will affect kitsch judgments: On the one hand, kitsch is a derogatory term; thus, an aversion towards kitsch should intensify when mortality is salient. On the other hand, kitsch offers immediate comprehension; based on TMT it would therefore be equally plausible to assume that kitsch becomes more attractive when mortality concerns are triggered. Two studies were conducted based on the mortality salience paradigm to explore this issue: In both studies participants were either instructed to reflect on their own mortality or they were asked to imagine a situation of acute dental pain or disability prior to rating 21 images (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Selection of stimuli used in study 1 and study 2

Study 1

Method. In an online survey participants were randomly assigned either to a mortality salience (MS) or a dental pain condition (DP)—which is a standard control condition in MS-research. They were either instructed to reflect on their own mortality (MS) or to think about their feelings before seeing a dentist due to acute dental pain (DP). After a brief distraction task, participants rated 21 images of decorative objects on six-point rating scales for liking, acceptance, and kitsch.

Sample. 50 students who were naïve to the aim of the study participated in one of the two experimental conditions (44 female; M_{age}=21.0 years, SD_{age}=4.8). Another 50 students (45 female; M_{age}=23.7 years, SD_{age}=5.0) rated the stimuli without any previous treatment (control group).

Results. Ratings for kitsch, (M_{grand}=4.23, SD=0.70; Cronbach's α=.88), liking (M_{grand}=2.53, SD=.57; Cronbach's α=.81) and acceptance (M_{grand}=1.93, SD=0.45; Cronbach's α=.76) were compared using one-way ANOVAs. For post-hoc testing Bonferroni correction was employed. Neither liking nor acceptance differed across conditions (all ps>.094). For kitsch ratings, however, a main effect was detected, $F(2,97)=5.29$, p=.007, ηp^2=.10: Under the influence of mortality concerns (M=3.98, SD=0.64) kitsch ratings were reduced compared with the control group (M=4.45, SD=0.61), $t(76)=3.19$, p=.011 (Fig. 2).

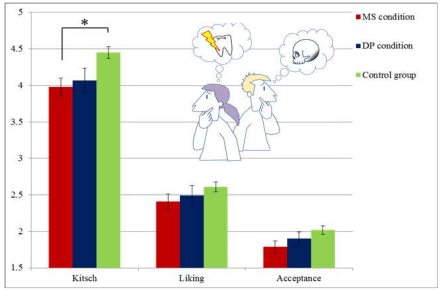


Figure 2. Results from study 1. Error bars indicate ± 1 standard error of the mean.

Study 2

Method. In a laboratory setting participants were randomly assigned either to a mortality salience (MS) or a car accident condition (CA). In the MS condition participants were tested solitarily (MS-solitary) or in groups of 3 (MS-group). Participants were asked to reflect on their own mortality (MS-group; MS-solitary) or their feelings about physical disability after a severe car accident (CA). After a brief distraction task, participants rated 21 images of decorative objects in terms of liking and kitsch.

Sample. 95 students (73 female; M_{age}=22.4 years, SD_{age}=4.4) participated. The control group from study 1 served as a control group (see study 1 for details).

Results. Ratings for kitsch (M_{grand}=4.15, SD=0.76; Cronbach's α=.90) and liking (M_{grand}=2.49, SD=0.58; Cronbach's α=.81) were compared using a one-way ANOVA (treatment condition). Bonferroni was used for post-hoc tests. Again there was no main effect for liking, $F(3,141)=1.86$, p=.139, ηp^2=.04. The one-way ANOVA (treatment condition), however, returned a main effect for kitsch, $F(3,141)=4.68$, p=.004, ηp^2=.09: As in study 1 kitsch ratings were diminished for participants in the MS-solitary (M=3.93; SD=0.76) and the MS-group condition (M=3.94; SD=.84) compared with the control group (M=4.45, SD=0.61), $t(76)=3.31$, p=.018, respectively $t(84)=3.28$, p=.010 (Fig. 3).

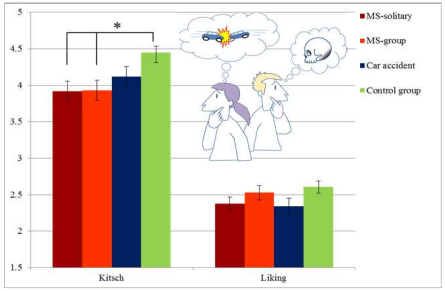


Figure 3. Results from study 2. Error bars indicate ± 1 standard error of the mean.

Conclusions. In both studies kitsch ratings were diminished whenever mortality was salient. Liking and acceptance, however, did not vary across conditions. We conclude that (1) kitsch judgements are particularly sensitive to mortality concerns and that (2) clear-cut stimuli appear less aversive (i.e. less kitschy) when mortality is salient. Maybe changes in kitsch judgements reflect the initial stage of an implicit adaptation process which precedes changes in acceptance and liking.

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Contact: stefan.ortlieb@uni-bamberg.de

A.11 Kitsch: Is It Better than Its Reputation?

Kitsch: Is it better than its reputation?

Comparing explicit and implicit aesthetic processing

Theresia K. Reiter[1,2], Stefan A. Ortlieb[1,2,3], and Claus-Christian Carbon[1,2,3]

[1]Department of General Psychology and Methodology, University of Bamberg, Germany
[2]Forschungsgruppe für Ergonomie, Psychologische Ästhetik und Gestaltung (EPÆG), Bamberg, Germany
[3]Bamberg Graduate School for Affective and Cognitive Sciences (BaGrACS), Bamberg, Germany

Introduction

Since its appearance in the late 19th century, the word *kitsch* has been used to scorn something as sentimental, simplistic and aesthetically worthless (Kulka, 1996). Today, commercial kitsch is pervasive and has found its way into the realm of art (see e.g. works by Jeff Koons). Nevertheless, it still has a strong negative and derogatory connotation and is often used as a synonym for bad taste.

Thus, we assumed that implicit and explicit attitudes towards kitschy objects may differ. As far as we know explicit and implicit attitudes coexist in the human mind (Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). These concepts, which are often associated with unconscious and conscious representations, can vary due to impression management, social desirability (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) and cognitive dissonances (Festinger, 1962). Discrepancies are said to be particularly likely for judgmental or controversial constructs.

Hypothesising that *kitsch* is such a controversial construct we predicted that participants would rate kitschy objects explicitly worse than implicitly. Further we wanted to test the suitability of implicit methods of measurement for aesthetic research. As an implicit measure an *md*-IAT was used (Gattol, Sääksjärvi, & Carbon, 2011).

What is an *md*-IAT?

The multi-dimensional IAT (*md*-IAT) is an extension of the classical *Implicit Association Test* (IAT) by Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998). The *md*-IAT allows to measure indirect attitudes on more than one dimension (Gattol, Sääksjärvi, & Carbon, 2011). This procedure yields more detailed information about implicit associations and attitudes and therefore allows to get an "implicit profile" of certain constructs.
In the current study we were interested in the implicit associations with regard to kitschy (and plain) objects by testing the participants on three dimensions (Fig. 1): *ugly-beautiful*, *kitschy-plain* and *valuable-worthless*.

Method

Participants. 31 subjects (17 females; M_{age}=27.0 yrs., SD_{age}=5.2; normal or corrected visual acuity) participated in the main experiment. All participants were naive to the purpose of the experiment and completed both the implicit and the explicit tasks.
Material. Visual stimuli used for both tasks were ten pictures of either richly decorated cups or plain bowls that were rated highly as kitschy or plain in a previous study (*n*=12), (Fig. 2). For its usage in the *md*-IAT three attributes were selected (*n*=9) for each pole of the three dimensions *kitschy-plain*, *beautiful-ugly* and *valuable-worthless* (Tab. 1).
Procedure. The experiment consisted of two computer-based parts measuring a) explicit and b) implicit attitudes towards kitschy and plain objects. Half of the participants completed the implicit part of the experiment first to prevent sequence effects.
The three IATs, each targeting one dimension, were defined by a Java-based IAT-tool (Raab, 2013). Three times in a row the participants were asked to match the randomized presented stimuli (pictures and attributes) according to the instructions to one of the four categories (*cup*, *bowl*, *kitschy*, *plain* or *ugly*, *beautiful* or *valuable*, *worthless*), (Fig. 1). Each IAT consisted of five blocks comprising as usual both practice- and test-phases.
For the explicit evaluation participants rated every picture on a 7-point Likert scale on each of the three dimensions (e.g. 1=*ugly*, 7= *beautiful*).

Figure 1. Screen-shot from the *md*-IAT

Figure 2. Stimulus material

Table 1. Attributes selected for the *md*-IAT

Category*	Attributes*
beautiful	aesthetic, positve, tasteful
ugly	repulsive, unaesthetic, unsightly
kitschy	vulgar, trashy, sentimental
plain	simple, unpretentious, unfussy
valuable	precious, upmarket, significant
worthless	poor, insignificant, dispendable

* Translation of the German attributes used in the study.

Table 2. *t*-tests of the three mean D-Measures

Dimension	*t*	*df*	*p*
D-Measure_ugly_beautiful	-.71	30	.485
D-Measure_plain_kitschy	2.49	30	.019
D-Measure_worthless_valuable	-.39	30	.698

Note. α < .05, test value = 0

Results

The IAT-test data was analysed per dimension using the improved scoring-algorithm proposed by Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji (2003). The resulting D-Measure provides information about the individual response behaviour during the two test phases.

Only on the dimension *kitschy-plain* the mean D-Measure showed a significant result, $t(30)=2.49$, $p=.019$ (Tab. 2).

This means that participants only showed differences in response time while matching the stimuli of the concepts *kitschy* and *plain* counterintuitively to the concepts of *cup* and *bowl* and vice versa (Fig. 2). This means that they had slower reactions while sorting the stimuli when the concepts "*kitschy* or *bowl*" and "*plain* or *cup*" were paired. The concepts of *ugly, beautiful, valuable* and *worthless* instead were matched in equal speed to both concepts *bowl* (plain objects) and *cup* (kitschy objects).

The explicit results show instead that there are significant differences on all three dimensions *kitschy-plain, ugly-beautiful* and *valuable-worthless* with large to medium effect sizes (Tab. 3). So cups (kitschy objects) were explicitly rated more kitschy, more ugly and less valuable than bowls (plain objects).

Table 3. Mean values per category and dimension, *t*-values and Cohen's *d*

Category and dimension	*N*	*M*	*SD*	M_{Diff}	SD_{Diff}	*t*	*df*	*p*	*d*
cup_ugly_beautiful	31	2.83	.99	-1.84	1.29	-7.98	30	<.001	-2.16
bowl_ugly_beautiful	31	4.67	.69						
cup_plain_kitschy	31	5.84	.59	4.00	.85	26.20	30	<.001	7.45
bowl_plain_kitschy	31	1.84	.49						
cup_worthless_valuable	31	2.90	.86	-.70	1.10	-3.60	30	.001	-.78
bowl_worthless_valuable	31	3.60	.89						

Note. α < .05, *t*-test for dependant samples

Intercorrelations between the implicit and explicit measures are very small ($r_{ugly\_beautiful}$= -.097, $r_{plain\_kitschy}$ = -.107, $r_{worthless\_valuabe}$=.143). See Hofmann, Gawronski, Gschwendner, Le, and Schmitt (2005) for details on low implicit-explicit correlations and their variance.

Discussion

Both *beautiful* and *valuable* seem to be implicitly associated equally with both object categories (kitschy cups or plain bowls) whereas the explicit rating shows a clear distinction. We assume that these differences between the implicit and explicit ratings can be due to two reasons:

1. Participants were not consciously aware of their equal attitude towards both plain and kitschy objects (e.g. due to the negative concept of kitsch).

2. Participants were reluctant to admit that they felt susceptible to kitschy objects.

Using the (*md*)-IAT brings along several limitations which have to be considered carefully and experiments using a wider range of stimuli are necessary to ensure the findings of this study. The differences between implicit and explicit judgements found in the present study, might indicate that kitsch is better than its reputation.

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Contact: Correspondence should be addressed to Theresia Reiter: theresia_reiter@web.de

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