

# The Transformation of Kitsch Culture in Hungary: From the Pre – and Post – Communist Era to EU Accession\*

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## 〈Abstract〉

Kitsch culture is a type of popular culture. In Hungary, kitsch culture emerged in the late 19th century and became increasingly popular in the early 20th century. In Hungary, kitsch culture was especially popular among the working class and peasants. Kitsch culture offered a way to escape the drudgery of life and imagine a better world, and it provided a sense of community and belonging. Of course, kitsch culture was also popular among the bourgeoisie, but they saw it as a way to express their patriotism and loyalty to the Hungarian state. The period from the late 1950s to the early 1970s is considered the golden age of Hungarian kitsch culture. This was due to the rise of socialist realism, the official art style of the communist regime after World War II. Socialist realism is characterized by realism and a focus on social issues, and the Hungarian communist regime used art as a means of propaganda, encouraging artists to create works that promoted socialist ideals and values, such as collective farming and industrialization. As such,

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Hungarian kitsch art was often used to promote the ideology of the communist regime and glorify party leaders. Kitsch culture in Hungary began to decline after the fall of communism in 1989, as the country's political and social landscape changed: Hungary began to move away from Soviet influence, and the government became more open to Western ideas and culture. Kitsch culture became popular again in Hungary in the 2000s, partly because many Hungarians felt nostalgic for the communist era, and partly because kitsch culture provided a way to express individuality and creativity in a society still in transition. In other words, Hungarian kitsch culture was revived by a number of factors, including nostalgia, globalization, and Hungary's accession to the European Union, and it has continued to evolve and adapt to changing cultural and social trends. An important aspect of kitsch culture during this period was the rise of nostalgia for the communist era. This growing nostalgia for the past has led to a renewed interest in the socialist era, including kitsch culture. Therefore, this article examines the history and development of Hungarian kitsch culture and how it continues to shape the self-identity of Hungarians today after Hungary's accession to the European Union.

**Key words:** kitsch, culture, communism, propaganda, nostalgia, identity

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I. Introduction

In the first half of the 20th century, kitsch<sup>1)</sup> as anti-art and anti-aesthetics was

1) 'The word "kitsch" comes from the German word "Kitsch," which means "trash" or

reinterpreted in the field of art due to the skepticism of human reason and rational worldview during the two world wars, along with the negation of traditional art and aesthetic systems and the subsequent search for new ones, and the formative and aesthetic values of kitsch began to be actively embraced. The social background of kitsch can be explained by focusing on the industrial revolution and the establishment of capitalism based on mass society.<sup>2)</sup> Mass society is closely associated with the rapid industrialization of Western capitalism in the late 19th century, which had already created the social, political, and ideological conditions necessary to trigger the establishment of a modern society based on the masses. The development of the capitalist division of labor, the organization of large factories and the mass production of goods, the concentration of the population in cities, urbanization, the development of extensive and complex communication systems, and the rise of mass movements with the expansion of the franchise became the main characteristics of mass society.<sup>3)</sup>

In this mass society, kitsch culture is a kind of popular culture that crosses the boundary between high culture and popular culture.<sup>4)</sup> Kitsch culture is often cheap, childish, and sensational, but it still appeals to many people. In Hungary, kitsch

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"junk." Kitsch is often considered a form of low art, and is sometimes dismissed as being in bad taste. However, kitsch can also be seen as a form of folk art, and can be appreciated for its simplicity and charm. Kitsch can be found in many different cultures around the world, and is often used to express a sense of nostalgia or whimsy. In modern culture, kitsch is often used in advertising and fashion to create a sense of excitement or glamour.

- 2) According to Abraham Moles, although kitsch exists in every age, the historical development of kitsch has a climax: the rise of the bourgeoisie and the triumph of consumerism. Abraham A. Moles, *A gíz, a boldogság művészete*. Ford. Orosz Magdolna, Albert Sándor. (Budapest: Háttér Kiadó, 1996), p.65.
- 3) A. Swingewood. *The Myth of Mass Culture* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1977), p.24.
- 4) High culture also borrows from popular culture, so the fact that different cultures borrow from each other is not really a problem. Shusterman doesn't see this as a particular problem either, because he believes that borrowing can enrich cultural traditions. Shusterman Richard, *Pragmatista esztétika*, Ford. Kollár József. (Budapest: Kalligram, 2003), p.322.

culture emerged in the late 19th century and gradually gained popularity in the early 20th century. Especially among the working class and peasants, kitsch culture was very popular in Hungary. It provided a way to briefly forget the hardships of life and imagine a better world, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Of course, kitsch culture was also popular among the bourgeoisie, but they saw it as a means of expressing patriotism and loyalty to the Hungarian nation. The late 1950s to early 1970s are considered the golden age of Hungarian kitsch culture, due to the rise of Socialist Realism, the official art form of the communist regime after World War II. Socialist Realism emphasized realism and social issues, and the Hungarian communist regime used art as a propaganda tool, encouraging artists to produce works that promoted socialist ideals and values, such as collective farming and industrialization.

The popularization of the esoteric word kitsch can be attributed to Czech novelist Milan Kundera. Kitsch is the keyword that runs through his novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which has sold more than 1 million copies in South Korea alone. In this novel, Kundera redefines kitsch by criticizing the attitude of denying the reality behind it and believing only in ideals or moving images. In Kundera's novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, it is the politicians who dramatize the world of kitsch. Any political ideology or slogan is actually kitsch. Thus, Hungarian kitsch art was often used to promote the ideology of the communist regime and to glorify party leaders. In Hungary, kitsch has been used to express many things: Hungary's communist past, its post-socialist present, and nostalgia for a lost golden age. During the communist era, kitsch was often used to promote the ideology of the regime, and there were many kitsch paintings and sculptures that portrayed communist leaders in a positive light.

After the fall of communism in 1989, Hungary's kitsch culture began to decline as the country's political and social landscape changed. As the country began to move away from Soviet influence, the government became more open to Western ideas and culture. After the fall of communism, kitsch was often used to express

nostalgia for the past. This was partly because many Hungarians felt nostalgic for the communist era, and the growing nostalgia for the past led to a resurgence of interest in the socialist era, including kitsch culture. In some ways, it was also because kitsch culture provided a way for Hungarian society, still in transition, to express its individuality and creativity. Many kitsch souvenirs depicting scenes from the communist era were sold, and kitsch was used to express a variety of things, including humor, patriotism, and creativity. In addition, many kitsch art galleries sprang up in Hungary, showcasing the work of local artists. Kitsch culture became popular again in Hungary in the 2000s. Influenced by various factors such as nostalgia, globalization, and Hungary's accession to the European Union, Hungarian kitsch culture has made a comeback and continues to evolve and adapt to changing cultural and social trends.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to examine the history and development of Hungarian kitsch culture, and how current kitsch culture shapes the identity of Hungarians after EU membership. In this way, we can understand how kitsch culture has developed in Hungary and how it responds to changes in cultural and social trends. Kitsch culture is constantly developing in Hungary. Kitsch is becoming a way for Hungarians to express their identity, communicate with others, and understand the world around them.

## II. Kitsch communism in Hungary

"Kitsch Communism" refers to a specific aesthetic style and cultural trend that manifested itself during the communist era, particularly in the Soviet bloc countries, including Hungary. The term integrates "kitsch", a term originally from the German language that often refers to art, objects, or design that is considered in bad taste because of excessive gaudiness or sentimentality, with the period of communism. In the context of "kitsch communism," the aesthetic forms and cultural products

produced under state sponsorship often conveyed an idealized, simplified, and sentimental portrayal of life under communism that did not necessarily reflect reality. This convergence of propagandistic messages and artistic expression was often perceived as "kitsch" because of its oversimplified, mass-produced, and emotionally manipulative qualities. The phenomenon was particularly pronounced in Socialist Realism, a state-sponsored art movement in which artworks were expected to depict society according to communist ideology. However, the art often presented an oversimplified, idealistic, and sentimental image, and was therefore referred to as "kitsch". Therefore, "Kitsch Communism" articulates this critical view of the art and culture of the communist era. However, studying this phenomenon is a complex issue, because it requires taking into account the diversity of art and culture, as well as the interrelationships among society, politics, and ideology.

And during the communist era, the ruling socialist parties sought to promote a distinct socialist identity and ideology among the population. This included the propagation of certain visual and material symbols intended to embody the values of socialism. These symbols often manifested themselves in a kitschy and exaggerated manner, combining grandiose architectural designs, ostentatious monuments, and propagandistic artwork. A notable feature of kitsch communism was the proliferation of monumental and grandiose architecture. Socialist regimes invested heavily in the construction of imposing structures designed to symbolize their power and progress. These buildings often featured monumental sculptures, oversized facades, and large public spaces. Examples of such architecture include the Palace of Parliament in Bucharest, Romania, and the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, Poland. Another aspect of kitsch communism was the emphasis on mass-produced consumer goods and the promise of a better life for the working class. While true luxuries were often inaccessible to the majority of the population, socialist states produced a wide range of affordable consumer goods that were available to the masses. These items, such as cheaply made furniture, brightly colored clothing, and kitschy home decor, became emblematic of the aesthetics of

kitsch communism. The aesthetics of kitsch communism also extended to the propaganda artwork, that was prevalent in public spaces, schools, and workplaces. Posters, murals, and statues depicted idealized images of workers, peasants, and party leaders, often in heroic poses or engaged in productive activities. These artworks often used bold colors, simplified forms, and romanticized depictions to convey a sense of optimism and unity. While kitsch communism aimed to create an alternative visual and cultural identity, it also reflected the inherent contradictions and shortcomings of the socialist system. The kitsch aesthetic was seen by many as a superficial attempt to mask the underlying realities of economic and political oppression. The grandiose buildings and consumer goods often stood in stark contrast to the scarcity and rationing experienced by the majority of the population.

“Where today a political regime establishes an official cultural policy, it is for the sake of demagoguery. If kitsch is the official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else. The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects.”<sup>5)</sup>

Kitsch communism was most prevalent in Hungary during the communist era, from 1949 to 1989. The period from the late 1950s to the early 1970s is also considered the golden age of Hungarian kitsch culture. During this time, Hungary was under Soviet influence, the Hungarian communist regime enjoyed relative stability and prosperity, and there was a renewed emphasis on traditional values and culture.<sup>6)</sup> The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP: Magyar Szocialista

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5) Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p.19.

6) Clement Greenberg argues that where there is an avant-garde, there is usually a rearguard. It is true that simultaneously with the arrival of the avant-garde, a second new cultural phenomenon appeared in the industrial West, a product of the industrial revolution that urbanized the masses of Western Europe and America and established what was called

Munkáspárt) used art as a propaganda tool, encouraging artists to create works that promoted socialist ideals and values, such as collective farming and industrialization. As such, Hungarian kitsch art was often used to promote the ideology of the communist regime and glorify party leaders.

Some of the most popular forms of kitsch art in Hungary during this period included paintings, sculptures, posters, and ceramics. These works often depicted scenes of everyday life in Hungary, such as workers in the fields, peasants in the villages, and children at play. Images of communist leaders such as Mátyás Rákosi<sup>7)</sup>, János Kádár<sup>8)</sup>, and Imre Nagy<sup>9)</sup> also appeared frequently.

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universal literacy, and a substitute culture for the cultural appetites of these masses. Greenberg also points out that the promotion of kitsch is just another of the cheap ways in which totalitarian regimes try to ingratiate themselves with their subjects. Since these regimes cannot raise the cultural level of the masses even if they wanted to - short of a surrender to international socialism - they will flatter the masses by bringing all culture down to their level. Ibid, pp.3-21.

- 7) Mátyás Rákosi was the leader of the Hungarian Workers' Party (Magyar Dolgozók Pártja) from 1949 to 1956. He was a Stalinist who ruled Hungary with an iron fist. He was often portrayed in propaganda posters as a wise and benevolent leader.
- 8) János Kádár was the leader of Hungary from 1956 to 1988. He was known as the "Gentle Dictator" because he was more moderate than Rákosi. He was often portrayed in propaganda posters as a kind and caring leader.
- 9) Imre Nagy was a Hungarian communist who served briefly as prime minister of Hungary in 1956. He was a reformer who wanted to loosen the Soviet Union's grip on Hungary. He was executed by the Hungarian government in 1958. He was often depicted in propaganda posters as a martyr for Hungarian freedom.



### <Hungarian Communist-Era Propaganda Images>

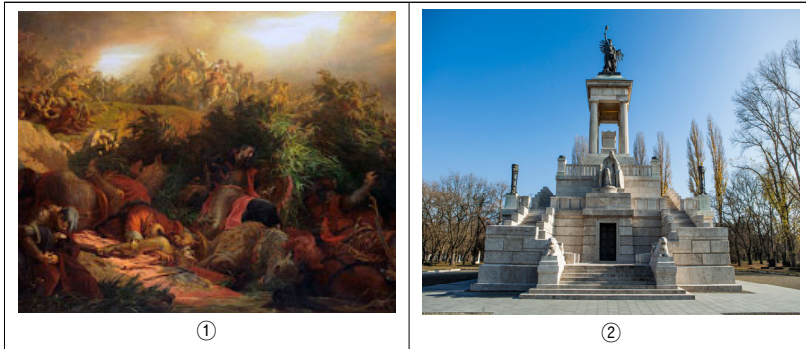


Source: ① Budapestposter, ② Nlc

Kitsch communism was also used to create a sense of national pride and unity among Hungarians. For example, there were many kitsch paintings and sculptures depicting scenes from Hungarian history, such as the Battle of Mohács (1526) and the Hungarian Revolution of 1848.

- 10) ① The Battle of Mohács (1526): This painting by Bertalan Székely is a classic example of kitschy Hungarian art. It depicts the decisive battle in which the Ottoman Turks defeated the Hungarian army, leading to the Ottoman occupation of Hungary. The painting is full of bright colors, bold patterns, and simple shapes. It also shows idealized images of Hungarian soldiers and civilians.
- ② The Hungarian Revolution of 1848: This sculpture by Alajos Stróbl is another example of kitschy Hungarian art. It depicts the Hungarian national hero, Lajos Kossuth, giving a speech to the Hungarian people during the revolution. The sculpture is located on Kossuth Square in Budapest, Hungary. It was created in 1894 and is made of bronze. The sculpture depicts Kossuth, a Hungarian statesman and revolutionary leader, giving a speech to the Hungarian people during the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. The sculpture is full of patriotic symbolism, such as the Hungarian flag and Kossuth's hat. It is also idealized, depicting Kossuth as a larger-than-life figure. The sculpture is a popular tourist destination and is often used

<Kitschy painting and sculpture depicting scenes from Hungarian history><sup>10)</sup>



Source: ① Wikimedia, ② Fiumeiutisirkert

These are just two examples of the many kitschy paintings and sculptures depicting scenes from Hungarian history. These artworks are often characterized by the use of bright colors, bold patterns, and simple shapes. They also often feature idealized images of Hungarian heroes and events. While some people may find these works of art kitschy or outdated, they can also be seen as a reflection of Hungarian national identity and pride.

Kitsch art was not without its critics. Those who saw kitsch art as a form of communist propaganda criticized it for its simplistic and unrealistic depiction of Hungarian life. Others saw it as a means for the communist regime to control the thoughts and feelings of the people, and took the clichés and stereotypes associated with kitsch and used them to create works that were both humorous and critical of the regime. For example, the popular Hungarian band Illés<sup>11)</sup> wrote a song called

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as a symbol of Hungarian nationalism.

11) The Hungarian band Illés, one of the most influential groups in Hungarian music history, wrote and performed the song "Naplemente". Illés were active in the 1960s and 1970s and had a significant impact on the Hungarian music scene. "Naplemente" is one of their iconic songs, released in 1971 on their album "Add Már Uram Az Esőt!".

"Naplemente" (Sunset), which featured a sentimental melody and lyrics describing a romantic evening on the beach. But the song also satirized the government's attempts to control popular culture, as evidenced by the lyrics that even sunsets are regulated by the state.

<The hungarian band Illés, and their album>



Source: ① MNG, ② Soundcloud

Hungarian kitsch culture in the 1960s and 1970s also reflected the country's growing interest in Western popular culture. As a socialist country under the influence of the Soviet Union, art in Hungary was controlled and monitored by the Communist Party and forced to conform to an official artistic style called socialist realism. Socialist realism was an art that praised and defended the ideals and values of socialism, while realistically depicting reality without distorting it. However, this art was considered boring and monotonous by the masses, and conversely, there

was a growing interest and desire for images and products of popular culture from the West. Western movies, music, fashion, magazines, and more were smuggled into Hungary and perceived by Hungarians as symbols of freedom and dreams. However, the consumption of Western culture was opposed and suppressed by the Communist Party, and it was also economically inaccessible. In this situation, Hungarians began to create their own kitschy art and products by imitating or transforming Western culture. For example, famous Western brands and logos were often copied or modified in Hungary and sold on cheap clothing and bags. In this way, during the socialist era in Hungary, admiration and envy of Western culture, as well as criticism and resistance to one's own reality, motivated the creation of kitsch art and products. Hungarian artists were exposed to Western music, art, and film and incorporated these influences into their work. For example, Károly Makk's 1971 film *Love* (Szerelem)<sup>12)</sup> depicts a love triangle set in Budapest's bohemian art scene. Inspired by the French New Wave, the film is considered a classic of Hungarian cinema.

Despite criticism, kitsch art was very popular in socialist Hungary. Kitsch communism was a way for people to cope with the harsh realities of life under communism, and it was also a way for Hungarians to express their patriotism and loyalty to the regime. However, it is important to remember that kitsch communism was also used to promote the regime's ideology and to control the population. Matei Calinescu<sup>13)</sup> divides all kitsch into two categories: kitsch produced for propaganda and kitsch produced for entertainment. He divides propaganda into

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12) "Love" (Hungarian: "Szerlem") is a 1971 Hungarian drama film directed by Károly Makk. The film is known for its exploration of love, desire, and social expectations in a repressive political environment. It tells the story of a woman named Luca, played by Lili Monori, who is torn between her love for her husband and her attraction to a fellow worker. "Considered a classic of Hungarian cinema, "Love" has received critical acclaim both at home and abroad. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love\\_\(1971\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love_(1971_film)) (검색일: 2023.06.15.)

13) Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Bloomington and London: Indian Univ. Press, 1977), p. 293.

political kitsch and religious kitsch. Political kitsch is associated with "bad politics, bad policies or at least dictatorship,"<sup>14)</sup> as Dorfles puts it. Of course, such politics cannot be kitsch per se. We speak of political kitsch when aesthetic objects bear political labels. Political kitsch is possible "whenever art has to bow to politics-or, more generally, to any kind of ideology, even religious ideology". It was not until postmodernism that politics and art began their unfortunate marriage, according to Dorfles. Since modernity, the masters of bad politics have become increasingly desperate to enlist the help of bad hobbies to dazzle their subjects. While kitsch in general serves to conceal our conformity and subservience to the world in the dimension of the private sphere we inhabit, political kitsch is inserted "to draw people out of their private sphere once again, to make this little world ready to absorb new ideologies.

### III. The decline of kitsch culture in Hungary

After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Hungary began to move away from Soviet influence, and the Hungarian government became more open to Western ideas and culture. And as Hungary's political and social landscape changed, the country's kitsch culture began to decline. Kitsch communism became a nostalgic and somewhat ironic symbol of a bygone era. Today, however, you can still find kitsch communism in Hungary's souvenir shops and tourist attractions. Kitsch communism can be seen as a way for people to remember the communist era and connect with the past. It can also be seen as a way for people to express their nostalgia for the communist era. Today, kitsch communism is often remembered as a cultural reference or celebrated as a form of retro aesthetics that reminds people of the past. It is important to recognize that

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14) Gillo Dorfles, "Politics", *Kitsch-The World of Bad Taste* (New York: Universe Books, 1969), p.113.

several factors have contributed to the perceived decline of kitsch culture in Hungary. Some of these factors are:

- A changing political environment: Kitsch culture was closely associated with the communist regime, and its decline was inevitable after the fall of communism in 1989. The Hungarian political landscape has undergone significant changes since the end of the socialist era, and as a result, kitsch culture, which emerged as a form of resistance or subversion to strict artistic and ideological constraints, no longer has the same resonance or relevance.
- Change in artistic focus: Postmodernism is a cultural movement that rejects the traditional values and aesthetics of kitsch culture. Interest in kitsch culture may have waned as Hungarian artists have been exposed to various international influences and explored new forms of artistic expression. The increasing emphasis on contemporary art and global trends has led to a diversification of artistic styles and practices, which may obscure the importance of kitsch culture.
- Cultural homogenization: Since 1989, Hungary's transition to democracy and a market economy with the collapse of the communist system has led to an expansion of cultural freedoms. This has led to greater exposure to Western culture and global trends, creating an environment receptive to different styles and inspirations. Hungarians were enthusiastic about the new consumer culture, and kitsch became a part of it. However, globalization and increased interconnectedness have raised concerns about cultural homogenization, where local and unique cultural expressions are at risk of being diluted by global influences. In this process, Hungarian kitsch culture may lose its prestige and distinctiveness.
- Generational change: As a younger generation of artists and audiences comes to the fore, there may be less direct connection to the historical and political context that gave rise to kitsch culture. This generational shift may result in a diminished emphasis on kitsch culture and its significance.

- The commercialization of kitsch: As Hungary becomes more integrated into the global economy, its culture becomes more diverse, and the commercialization of kitsch, both in Hungary and globally, raises concerns that the subversive and critical intentions of kitsch may be lost. Kitsch culture is closely linked to the mass media. In Hungary, the increasing influence of mass media since the country's accession to the European Union has further facilitated the spread and diffusion of kitsch culture. Kitsch has been disseminated to the public through a variety of media, including television programs, music, and advertising, and Hungarian society tends to enjoy and accept this cultural phenomenon. As kitsch has become more mainstream and commercialized, its cultural meaning and influence has been diluted, and kitsch may be perceived as declining.

Despite these factors, it is important to note that kitsch culture continues to have a place in the Hungarian artistic landscape, with artists revisiting and reinterpreting kitsch elements through nostalgia, irony, or social commentary. Although not as prominent as in its heyday, kitsch culture remains an important aspect of Hungarian art and culture, reflecting the country's complex history and ongoing interest in its past.

#### **IV. Aspects of Hungarian kitsch culture in the 2000s**

In the 2000s, Hungarian kitsch culture experienced a resurgence influenced by a variety of factors, including Hungary's accession to the European Union, globalization, and nostalgia, and it has continued to evolve and adapt to these changing cultural and social trends. Since joining the European Union, Hungary's economy has gradually grown, which has led to an expansion of the public's purchasing power and consumer culture. Economic development has encouraged

this consumer culture and increased the demand for kitsch art and products. Emerging as a response to social changes following Hungary's transition to a market economy and integration into the European Union, Hungarian kitsch culture in the 2000s encompasses various aspects of popular culture characterized by excessive emotionality, exaggerated aesthetics, and a preference for the ostentatious. First, in terms of music, the Hungarian music scene saw the emergence of catchy, pop-oriented songs with simple lyrics and upbeat melodies. These songs often featured sentimental themes, romantic love stories, and theatrical performances. These songs aimed to reach a wide audience and arouse emotions. In terms of television and media, Hungarian television in the 2000s embraced a kitschy aesthetic, colorful sets, and flashy production values. Reality shows, talent contests, and melodramas became very popular. They emphasized dramatic storylines and exaggerated characters, providing a form of escapism and entertainment. In terms of fashion and style, the kitsch fashion trend emerged, featuring bold colors, flashy accessories, and excessive embellishments. People embraced colorful clothing styles and accessories that mixed different patterns and textures. This expressive fashion sense was influenced by both global trends and the desire to stand out. And when it came to interior design and home decor, 2000s home trends leaned toward maximalism and eclecticism. People decorated their homes with bold colors, mismatched furniture, and decorative items that showcased different themes and styles. This reflected a desire for individuality and self-expression. And an important aspect of kitsch culture during this time was the rise of nostalgia for the communist era. The growing nostalgia for the past led to a renewed interest in the socialist era, including kitsch culture. As a result, people began to collect and appreciate objects, memorabilia, and art from the period, associating them with their historical and cultural identity. This nostalgia was reflected in popular music, fashion, and design, where retro elements such as Soviet-style hats, red star motifs, and hammer and sickle symbols often appeared.

Another notable aspect of Hungarian kitsch culture in the 2000s was its embrace



of irony and self-awareness. Artists and designers used kitsch as a means of social commentary, creating works that were both humorous and critical of contemporary Hungarian society. Hungarian artists continued to engage with kitsch culture as a means of expressing political and social commentary. These artists used kitsch elements to explore issues such as national identity, consumerism, and the impact of globalization on Hungarian society. The kitsch culture of the 2000s also reflected Hungary's growing interest in global pop culture, including music, movies, and television programs from the United States and the United Kingdom. Today, we live in the digital age. The advent of the digital age has touched every aspect of our lives through the rapid development of information and communication technologies, giving rise to new cultural trends. The main driving force of this change is the domestication of the Internet, and people use communication with an indeterminate number of people through virtual reality in the network, which is another living space different from real life, to satisfy various needs of the self that are difficult to achieve in reality. In addition, at a time when the standards of aesthetic objects are becoming blurred due to the unique tastes of individuals, modern people are rejecting the binary division of “beauty” and “ugliness” and showing a tendency to accept diverse cultures. This has led to the rise of kitsch. The realm of kitsch, once considered negative, is now being used to suit the consumer's buying psychology rather than being rejected.<sup>15)</sup> With the widespread use of digital technology and the Internet, global pop culture and media have begun to have a significant influence on kitsch culture in Hungary. This influence has manifested itself in the form of kitsch-inspired design, fashion, and visual arts that incorporate elements of mass-produced consumer goods, advertising, and popular icons. Hungarian artists and musicians incorporated these influences into their work, creating a unique blend of local and global elements. Hungarian artists also experimented with fusions of traditional and contemporary styles to create unique and thought-provoking works. These fusions often included kitschy elements,

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15) 고재성, 「잡지광고의 키치적 디자인 분석」, 『한국과학예술포럼』, 1권(2005), 4쪽.

demonstrating the artists' ability to reinterpret cultural heritage in a contemporary context.

The 2000s saw the rise of urban art and street culture in Hungary, which embraced the kitsch aesthetic. Street artists incorporated kitsch elements into their work, using bold colors, everyday objects, and humorous or ironic messages to connect with the public and challenge traditional art forms. The growing interest in retro and vintage styles also influenced Hungarian kitsch culture. These trends led to a revival of fashion, design, and art inspired by the past, and kitschy elements were reimagined and reused in new and creative ways. Overall, Hungarian kitsch culture in the 2000s was characterized by an eclectic mix of local and global influences, irony and self-awareness, and an embrace of nostalgia and traditional craftsmanship. Despite the changes that occurred in the 2000s, Hungarian kitsch culture remains an important form of cultural expression that reflects Hungary's complex history and identity.<sup>16)</sup> The various aspects of Hungarian kitsch culture during this period demonstrate the adaptability and continued relevance of kitsch culture despite social, political, and cultural changes.

Considering that cultural trends are constantly changing and influenced by a variety of factors, the likely future development of Hungarian kitsch culture may include a shift toward minimalism and simplicity, in line with changing tastes and global design trends over time. People may embrace cleaner lines, neutral color palettes, and understated aesthetics. And as the world becomes more interconnected, there may be a fusion of different cultural influences in Hungarian kitsch culture. This may result in a unique hybrid style that blends traditional Hungarian elements

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16) The essay by Lilla Vörös - The relationship between kitsch and art - was published in Art and Criticism, issue 2/2004. In her essay, Lilla Vörös explores the concept of kitsch and its relationship to art. According to Lilla Vörös, kitsch is a work of art that is both attractive and repulsive, in which beauty and ugliness are present at the same time. Kitsch is often humorous and based on everyday life. According to Lilla Vörös, kitsch plays an important role in society because it can help Hungarians understand their own culture and identity. Vörös Lilla, "A giccs és a művészet viszonya", *Művészet és Kritika*, 2004/2., pp.46-57.

with international trends. Furthermore, cultural trends are cyclical in nature, and nostalgia often plays an important role. Elements from the past are revisited and reinterpreted, which can lead to a resurgence of retro aesthetics and a renewed interest in vintage styles. Also, as younger generations grow up in an era of global connectivity, an individualistic approach to kitsch culture may develop. They may seek to create their own unique aesthetic identity, drawing inspiration from a variety of sources and expressing their individuality through eclecticism. It is important to note that predicting cultural trends is difficult, and the future development of Hungarian kitsch culture may depend on a variety of factors, including social change, global influences, and personal preferences.

The globalization of culture in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has led to a blending of different artistic styles and influences. Kitsch culture has evolved to incorporate elements from various cultural traditions. The result is a mixture of aesthetics and symbols that can be considered kitsch. By instilling new values in Hungarian society in the 21st century, kitsch culture makes Hungarian society more diverse and open. Moreover, with the advent of the Internet and social media in the 21st century, kitsch culture has become more accessible than ever, allowing Hungarians to find kitsch objects online, share and remix them widely through online platforms, and participate in their creation and dissemination. Recently, kitsch has become more about the positive aspects of self-expression. It is a playful way for people to show their individuality, and as long as there are people who "reinvent" ready-made culture in new and fresh ways, kitsch will continue to be present in all areas of Hungarian life. The development of kitsch culture is dynamic and will likely continue to change in the future, influenced by a variety of factors, including social values, artistic movements, technological advances, and individual interpretations.

## V. Conclusion

Given that traditional high art was appropriated by the ruling class and used as a tool of domination, kitsch can be seen as a promise of a new age. Some argue that kitsch culture is a form of cultural appropriation and trivializes the communist past. It has also been associated with an ethical category when kitsch means "falsehood", a political category when kitsch means "mass manipulation", and an aesthetic category when kitsch is associated with "bad taste".<sup>17)</sup> As such, the term kitsch has been applied to a wide variety of objects and phenomena, and has been defined in a variety of ways. When Vilem Flusser said that "academic, political, ethical, and aesthetic categories do not encompass kitsch,"<sup>18)</sup> he was perhaps paradoxically pointing to this composite nature of kitsch. The concept of kitsch-communism in Hungarian cultural history provides a profound insight into the complex relationship between art, politics, and society during and after the communist era. It shows how culture can be manipulated for political purposes, but also how it can subtly resist and critique dominant ideologies. Today, this form of kitsch continues to serve as a lens through which we can explore the lasting effects of communism on Hungarian culture, society, and identity.

Despite the best efforts of theoretical and academic disciplines, kitsch has flourished; not only that, but it has become so popular that there is now a change in attitude towards it. Hungarian kitsch culture has undergone significant changes over time, evolving from a fictional subjectivity to a cultural self-identity. In the early stages, kitsch was considered a fictional subjectivity, often dismissed as a low-brow or trivial form of art. It was seen as an imitation or counterfeit of high

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17) While the characterization of kitsch is generally seen as merely "bad taste," it's worth noting that for those who actually incorporate kitsch into their lives, there is a certain earnestness to it, as if it gives them an "aura of richness, elegance, or sophistication. Curtis Brown, *Star-Spangled Kitch* (NY: Universe Books, 1975), p.9.

18) Vilem Flusser, "Kitsch", *Kitsch*, Gespräch, Gerede & Harry Pross ed. (München: Paul List Verlag, 1985), p.47.

culture, and was generally not considered a legitimate form of artistic expression. This perception was largely influenced by Hungary's historical relationship with the West, as well as the broader European artistic landscape. Over time, the culture of kitsch began to gain more recognition and acceptance in Hungary, in part due to socio-political changes in the country. As Hungary transitioned from a socialist to a democratic state, a newfound sense of freedom and individualism emerged. This allowed artists to explore kitsch as an alternative form of expression, free from the strict constraints and ideologies of the previous era. The growing appreciation of kitsch in Hungary led to a shift in cultural self-identity, with many artists and citizens embracing the distinctiveness and uniqueness of this artistic style. Kitsch became a symbol of cultural pride, representing a break with traditional norms and an opportunity to create a new, distinct artistic identity. This transformation was reinforced by the emergence of local artists who incorporated elements of kitsch into their work, making it an integral part of Hungary's contemporary art scene.

It is important to note that cultural trends are constantly changing and influenced by a variety of factors. Seen as a self-projection and an attempt to find a cultural self-identity from a socio-economically shaped fictional subjectivity within a cultural environment and ecosystem, Hungarian kitsch culture is a way for Hungarians to express their national identity, come to terms with their communist past, and have fun. Abraham Mollo characterizes the modern era as the age of neo-kitsch. In the 19th century, it was called kitsch to pretend the fake was real; in the 21st century, it's called kitsch to pretend the real is fake. In this era, objects are no longer judged solely by their utility value or basic functionality. Kitsch culture has been massively and indiscriminately consumed by the public and has led to the emergence of art and design styles developed with a new perspective, changing the spirit of the times. Kitsch culture in Hungary has evolved from a fictional subjectivity to an important aspect of Hungarian cultural self-identity. This transformation can be attributed to a variety of historical, socio-political, and artistic factors that have shaped the Hungarian perception and understanding of this unique form of artistic expression.

"Kitsch is increasingly becoming a typical manifestation of our time"<sup>19)</sup>, writes Gillo Dorfles in the preface to his book on the subject. It is not only typical, but increasingly widespread, a defining phenomenon of modernity, and art is not entirely free of it.

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19) Gillo Dorfles, "A giccs", *A magyar nyelv és irodalom antológiája* Ford. Schéry András (Budapest: Gondolat, 1986), p.9.

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## 〈국문초록〉

## 헝가리 키치 문화의 변용: 공산주의 전후 시대부터 유럽연합 가입까지

이 상 동\*

키치 문화는 대중문화의 한 유형이다. 헝가리에서 키치 문화는 19세기 후반 등장했으며 20세기 초에 점점 인기를 얻게 되었다. 헝가리에서 키치 문화는 특히 노동 계급과 농민들 사이에서 인기가 높았다. 키치 문화는 고단한 삶을 잠시 잊고 더 나은 세상을 상상할 수 있는 방법을 제공했으며, 공동체 의식과 소속감을 제공했다. 물론 키치 문화는 부르주아지들 사이에서도 인기가 있었다. 하지만 그들은 키치 문화를 애국심과 헝가리 국가에 대한 충성심을 표현하는 수단으로 여겼다. 1950년대 후반부터 1970년대 초반까지는 헝가리 키치 문화의 황금기로 여겨진다. 2차 세계대전 이후 공산주의 정권의 공식 미술 양식인 사회주의 리얼리즘이 부상했기 때문이다. 사회주의 리얼리즘은 사실주의와 사회적 주제에 중점을 두는 것이 특징이며, 헝가리 공산주의 정권은 예술을 선전의 수단으로 활용하여 예술가들에게 집단 농업과 산업화 등 사회주의적 이상과 가치를 홍보하는 작품을 제작하도록 장려했다. 이에 헝가리 키치 예술은 공산주의 정권의 이데올로기를 홍보하고 당 지도자를 미화하기 위해 자주 사용되었다. 헝가리의 키치 문화는 1989년 공산주의가 붕괴된 후 헝가리의 정치 및 사회 환경이 변하면서 쇠퇴하기 시작했다. 헝가리가 소련의 영향력에서 벗어나기 시작했고, 정부는 서구의 사상과 문화에 더욱 개방적이 되었기 때문이다. 헝가리에서 키치 문화는 2000년대 들어 다시 인기를 얻었다. 이는 부분적으로는 많은 헝가리 사람들이 공산주의 시대에 대한 향수를 느꼈기 때문이며, 키

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치 문화가 아직 과도기에 있는 사회에서 개성과 창의성을 표현할 수 있는 방법을 제공했기 때문이기도 하다. 말하자면, 헝가리 키치 문화는 향수, 세계화, 헝가리의 유럽연합 가입 등 다양한 요인에 영향을 받아 다시금 부활했으며, 변화하는 문화 및 사회 트렌드에 맞춰 계속 진화하고 적응하고 있다. 이 시기 키치 문화의 한 가지 중요한 측면은 공산주의 시대에 대한 향수의 부상이었다. 과거에 대한 향수가 커지면서 키치 문화를 비롯한 사회주의 시대에 대한 관심이 다시 높아졌다. 때문에 이 글에서는 헝가리 키치 문화의 역사와 변화, 그리고 유럽연합 가입에 따른 오늘날 키치 문화가 헝가리인들의 자아 정체성을 어떻게 형성해 가는지 살펴볼 필요성을 제기하고 있다.

**주제어:** 키치, 문화, 공산주의, 선전, 향수, 정체성

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