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Moonlight, Nightingales and Dreams of Hawaii – Referential systems of “Kitsch” in the German Musical Cabaret of the late Weimar Republic*

Mesečina, slavci in sanje o Havajih – Referenčni
sistemi »kiča« v nemškem glasbenem kabaretu
pozne Weimarske republike

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IZVLEČEK

Kabaret in popularna kultura weimarske republike sta dokaz o popolnoma sodobnem odnosu do kiča, ki zasenči slabšalne eseje o degeneracijskem vplivu kiča. To je prikazano na primeru dela »Kitsch-Tango« Friedricha Hollaenderja, napisanega za kabaretsko revijo, in referenčnih sistemov, na katere se nanaša pesem – na svet popularne kulture in znanje o vrednotenju določenih klišejev, ki jih je akademski svet takrat označeval kot kič.

ABSTRACT

Cabaret and the popular culture of the Weimar Republic are evidence of a thoroughly modern attitude towards kitsch, which outshines pejorative essays about the degenerating impact of kitsch. This is shown by the example of Friedrich Hollaenders “Kitsch-Tango”, composed for a cabaret revue, and the referential systems, the song refers to – the world of popular culture and the knowledge about the evaluation of certain clichés as “kitsch” by the academia then.

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In 1932 a gramophone record named “Kitsch Tango” was published in Berlin and quickly became a hit song on the dance floors of the clubs and cafés in the city. In this song, Curt Bois, famous German actor and cabaret artist, whispered “the whole sweet kitsch of love” in the ear of his beloved. The dance floor hit originated from a show named “Frankensteins unheimliche Geschichten” (“Frankenstein’s scary stories”), staged in the big cabaret theatre “Kabarett der Komiker” (Cabaret of the Comedians) in November 1932. It was a grotesque one-act play, parodying the theatre- and film-scene of that time, including references to genres (e.g. gothic movies) or actual films, like the name giving “Frankenstein”, which premiered in the US in 1931 with Boris Karloff playing the monster.¹

One of the authors of “Frankensteins unheimliche Geschichten”, Kurt Robitschek (with co-author Friedrich Hollaender), sketched the intentions of the parodist play in the cabaret’s program magazine:

“The form of parody, the form of grotesque gives the opportunity to turn everything that we take seriously in life into absurdity two minutes before becoming a tragedy. [...] We want to find out if it’s possible, to put all the caricatures about the small and big absurdities of the stage, of the world, of life, randomly side by side, so that they will suddenly form a whole, that can be taken seriously again, because it is so absurdly ridiculous.”²

The things “we take seriously in life” and the “absurdities” of the stage and the world form the background knowledge which the audience needs in order to understand the humour and the satiric potentialities of the parody. It forms a referential system which authors refer to in different ways.

In the “Kitsch Tango” for example, as one hit song of the cabaret play, the system referred to is the world of “Kitsch”, as it is presented mainly in the songs of the recently invented sound films, but also in the world of operetta. The authors avail themselves of numerous clichés which are suspected to be kitsch and use various keywords, obviously picked from real talkie songs. But used out of context and in great accumulation, they turn into meaningless verbal gestures, revealing their function as pure catchwords without any deeper sense. By using these catchwords (like “moonlight”, “red roses” or “Hawaii” for example) the authors evoke a set of possible associations in the listener, all linked to the notion of “Kitsch”. In addition, the only purpose of Kitsch is revealed in the text, i.e. to seduce women, who seem to be especially susceptible to this kind of fake sugary aesthetics:

1 The libretto of the show seems to be lost. In 1931 the first sound film of “Frankenstein”, directed by James Whale, premiered in the cinemas. There was also an earlier silent film directed by J. Searle Dawley (1910). In Germany “Frankenstein” was shown in the cinemas in May 1932, thus the parody show was quite up to date.

2 „Die Form der Parodie, die Form der Grotteske gibt Gelegenheit, all das, was wir im Leben ernst nehmen, zwei Minuten vor Abfahrt in die Tragödie ins Lächerliche umzubiegen. [...] wir wollen versuchen, ob es möglich ist, die Karikaturen über die kleinen und großen Lächerlichkeiten des Bühnenbetriebes, des Weltbetriebes, des ganzen Lebensbetriebes sinnlos nebeneinander zu stellen, damit sie plötzlich ein Ganzes sind, das ernst genommen werden kann, weil es so unsinnig lächerlich ist“, Kurt Robitschek, “Klamauk”, in *Die Frechheit. Ein Magazin des Humors* (Potsdam: Plock, Oct. 1932), 2–4, here 2.

„Wie erobert man die Frauen in der ganzen Welt?
Einesteils als Held mit Geld...
Oder wenn man gar in Liebessachen weit gereist,
tut man es zumeist mit Geist.
Fliegt sie aber weder auf den Geist noch auf das Gut,
weil zu kühl ihr Blut, nur Mut!
Sing ihr nur den letzten Tonfilmschlagler schmelzend vor,
zärtlich im Tenor ins Ohr...

„Sing mir den ganzen süßen Kitsch der Liebe ins Ohr
Ist's auch nur Talmi und Flor
Ach Liebling, mach mir was vor, mach mir was vor!
Sing mir von Nachtigallen und vom Taubenpaar
und ist auch nichts dran wahr -
Es klingt so wunderbar!
Sing mir vom weißen Tarragona
und von der wilden roten Rose
und von der Nacht in Monte Carlo
ach du, gib mir Honig, Honig, recht viel Honig...
Sing mir den ganzen süßen Kitsch der Liebe ins Ohr
und lass mich träumen dabei
von Hawaii...'

Selbstverständlich braucht man immer wieder Mondenschein
und den Vater Rhein voll Wein.
Oder man nimmt zwanzig Meter Sternspracht von Wien,
da liegt alles drin, mein Wien!
Außerdem empfiehlt sich eine Sommernacht in Rom
lächelnd steht ein Gnom am Dom
oder der Señora in Madrid singt der Señor
einzeln und im Chor ins Ohr:

„Sing mir den ganzen süßen Kitsch der Liebe ins Ohr
Ist's auch nur Talmi und Flor
Ach Liebling, mach mir was vor, mach mir was vor!
Sing mir von Nachtigallen und vom Taubenpaar
und ist auch nichts dran wahr -
Es klingt so wunderbar!
Sing mir vom roten Tarragona
und von der blauen weißen Rose
und von dem Tag in Monte Carlo
ach gib mir Zucker, Zucker, recht viel Zucker...
Sing mir den ganzen süßen Kitsch der Liebe ins Ohr
und lass mich träumen dabei
von Hawaii...“³

„How do you win the hearts of women all over the world?
On the one hand with money...
Or if you are experienced in matters of love
you do it with esprit.
But if she's crazy neither about esprit nor property
because she's cold-blooded, be brave!
Just sing the latest sound film hit into her ear,
in a mellow, tender tenor voice...

„Sing the whole sweet kitsch of love into my ear
even if it's just fake and gauze,
Sweetheart, please fool me, fool me!
Sing about nightingales and the couple of doves
even if nothing's true about it -
it sounds so wonderful!
Sing about the white Tarragona
and of the wild red rose
and of the Night in Monte Carlo
oh give me sweet honey, honey, lots of honey...
Sing the whole sweet kitsch of love into my ear
and in doing so, let me dream
about Hawaii...

Naturally you need moonlight time after time
and Father Rhine full of whine.
Or you take twenty lots of starlight from Vienna,
everything is in there, oh my Vienna!
Furthermore a summer night in Rome is warmly recommended
a gnome smiles at the cathedral's dome
or in Madrid the Señor sings to the Señora
solo or chorusing:

Sing the whole sweet kitsch of love into my ear
even if it's just fake and gauze,
Sweetheart, please fool me, fool me!
Sing about nightingales and the couple of doves
even if nothing's true about it -
it sounds so wonderful!
Sing about the red Tarragona
and of the blue white rose
and of the Day in Monte Carlo
oh give me sugar, sugar, lots of sugar...
Sing the whole sweet kitsch of love into my ear
and in doing so let me dream
about Hawaii...“

For more than one of Robitschek's text references concrete examples can be considered as models. By looking at popular culture or hit songs on gramophone records

³ The German text was transcribed from the gramophone disc recording from 1932, republished on the CD *Reizend: 100 Jahre Curt Bois; sämtliche veröffentlichte Schallplatten 1908–1932* (Berlin: Duo-phon, 2001) (Edition Berliner Musenkinder), Duo-phon 05263. Curt Bois is accompanied by the Paul Godwin Tanz-Orchester. English translation by the author.

of that time, it becomes obvious that there are several possibilities as to what certain allusions may refer to. Some examples:

- The term “white Tarragona” may refer to the Tango “Zwei rote Lippen und ein roter Tarragona” (“Two red lips and a red Tarragona”), which was published on record in 1930 in several German versions.⁴
- The “red rose” appears in several songs. Still popular in 1932 were for example the hit songs “Blutrote Rosen” (“Bloody red roses”) by Hermann Hünemeyer, text Alfred Krönkemeier (a Slowfox originating from 1929)⁵, Robert Stolz’s “Rosen, flammend rote” (“Roses, flaming red”) from the operetta “*Eine einzige Nacht*” (1927)⁶ or the foxtrot “*Zwei rote Rosen*” (“Two red roses”) by Walter Kollo from 1926, for which Robitschek himself had written the text⁷.
- „My Vienna“, a term where “everything [lies] inside“, can be associated with numerous operettas, e.g. *Gräfin Mariza* by Emmerich Kálmán („Grüß mir mein Wien“) or Léhars *Land des Lächelns* („Ich liebe dich, und du liebst mich, / und da liegt alles drin“, “I love you, and you love me / and there lies everything inside“). But the listener may also think about Robert Stolz’s hit song “Im Prater blühen wieder die Bäume“, because evokes a very popular and stereotyped picture of Vienna.
- „Eine Nacht in Monte Carlo“ (“One night in Monte Carlo“) cites the tango of the same name by Werner Richard Heymann from the film “Bomben auf Monte Carlo”⁸, which was the second most successful film in the year 1931 (after “Der Kongress tanzt“) and featured several stars.
- After the premiere of Paul Abraham’s operetta “Die Blume von Hawaii” (1931) the alien world of Hawaii with exotic accessories was very much en vogue.⁹ Several hit songs toyed with the exotic dreams of the South Pacific, Honolulu or Hawaii, often by using the clichéd sound of the Hawaiian Guitar¹⁰, e.g. Walter Kollo’s “Grüß mir mein Hawaii” (1930), which was sung by Richard Tauber.¹¹ Robitschek links his lyrics to this exoticism with the term “dreams of Hawaii“, but also alluding to other exotic regions with keywords like Rome or Madrid.

The examples show, that the models for allusions in the “Kitsch-Tango” remain (purposefully) unclear, leaving the listener a wide space for association to link his own experiences to the song.

⁴ The original *Adios muchachos* was composed by the Argentinian Julio César Sanders in 1927. Some versions on old gramophone records were published by collectors on youtube, for example (all references dated June 27, 2011): the Fred Bird Rhythmicans with Luigi Bernauer singing (Homocord 4-3515-I, Matr. H-62451), www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJdRauAmKMw; Saxophon-Orchester Dobbri with Max Mensing (BEKA B 6942-II, Matr. 38226), www.youtube.com/watch?v=_LSloY0oCG4; and, likewise from the year 1930, the Paul Godwin Tanz-Orchester and Leo Monosson (Grammophon B 51759-I, Matr. 2573 1/2 BR II), www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsD6jAqEbl8&feature=related). A further version by Dajos Béla (Odeon O-11229, Matr. Be 8849) is not yet accessible on the internet.

⁵ Versions e.g. by Saxophon-Orchester Dobbri with Max Mensing (Parlophon 22579 or Beka B 6837), by Paul Godwins Orchester with Leo Monosson (Grammophon 22603), by Odeon Tanz Orchester (Odeon O-11065), the Orchester Marek Weber with Austin Egen (Electrola EG 1486) and by a “Jazz-Orchester” with refrain singing (Phonycord 125 mx. 3768). The recordings by Odeon (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dj1VXWgRwhs&NR=1), Beka (www.youtube.com/watch?v=M35O9mH7oKY), Phonycord (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zf8HRnViNHw>) and Marek Weber (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmTj0AGaNU&feature=related>) can be found on youtube (all June 27, 2011).

⁶ Recordings by Tanz-Orchester Dajos Béla (Odeon O-2360, Matr. Be 6509), Saxophon-Orchester Dobbri (Beka B 6365, Matr. 34668), the Homocord-Orchester with Luigi Bernauer (Homocord 4-3345, Matr. H-62149), by the Paul-Godwin-Tanzorchester (Grammophon 22029-II/B 50764, Matr. 1306 BH IV) and the Jazz-Sinfonie-Orchester (Artiphon 3043).

⁷ In the catalogue of historic records of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek are listed 45 recordings for this title. On youtube: Kapelle Merton (Beka B 6090-I) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-jOLvEad0I), Fred Bird und The Salon Symphonie Jazzband (Homocord 4-2382/M 19366 3), recording from 1927 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hV1WCC9kwc&feature=watch_response), Tanz-Orchester Dajos Béla (Odeon O 2087 b) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_aMcri9PGg&feature=related), Saxophon-Orchester Dobbri with the Steier-Quartet (Beka) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=dC-o1hOiWUo&feature=related) and Paul Godwin with his “Jazz-Sinfoniker” (Grammophon 21028/B 41 808) (all accessed June 27, 2011).

⁸ On CD: *Das gab’s nur einmal: Werner Richard Heymann – ein musikalisches Porträt in Originalaufnahmen* (edel 0014612TLR).

In the film played Hans Albers, Anna Sten, Heinz Rühmann, Peter Lorre, Kurt Gerron, Ida Wüst or Otto Wallburg

⁹ Numerous songs from the operetta were successfully merchandised in sheet music and on gramophone record.

¹⁰ See Mantle Hood, “Musical Ornamentation as History: The Hawaiian Steel Guitar“, in *Yearbook for Traditional Music. East Asian Musics* 15 (1983): 141–148.

¹¹ Richard Tauber and the Dajos Béla Künstlerorchester (Odeon O-4959a).

Robitschek's text was set into Tango music by Friedrich Hollaender. He used a musical style that had an expressive and emotional image and was therefore closely linked to kitsch. By referring to the Tango as a form of dance music, which was brimming with sexual meaning, Hollaender used a musical reference beyond the text to add to the irony of the content. As early as 1922, Heinz Pollack had named the Tango a "deep prayer of the body"¹² in his essay about radical change in ballroom dance (*Die Revolution des Gesellschaftstanzes*) using an accumulation of emotional adverbs to describe it:

*"There has never been and will never be a rhythm, which like the Tango gives the body so much room to softly hint at colourful dreams or subdued pleasures of love or tearful grief or overflowing joy or feverish longing or wistful renunciation"*¹³

By using the exaggerated connotation of Tango, Hollaender added an ironic flavour to the text.

Thus both, Hollaender and Robitschek, used (musical and textual) clichés for evoking connotations of kitsch, and subversively caricatured it by means of overblown images and accumulation. The stereotypes used by the authors were also common in contemporary and later aesthetic essays about kitsch, which were, however, void of any ironic level. For example, Fritz Karpfen's "Der Kitsch. Eine Studie über die Entartung der Kunst"¹⁴ ("Kitsch. A Survey of Degeneration in the Arts"), published in 1925, places "exotic kitsch", similar to Robitschek's allusion to Hawaiian dreams, beyond other forms of "kitsch". Karpfen mentions the carvings of "South Pacific Indians" as an example for the degenerating influence of European tourists and colonialists to originally unspoiled crafts: "It [the exotic kitsch] was brought about by the whites, originally it wasn't known. [...] Only as the antipodes [the natives] recognized the superficial minds of the aliens, they produced the worthless trash for them."¹⁵ Thus, the production of kitschy artisan products was motivated by, or almost invented for, a degenerated European wish for triviality.

One characteristic for "Kitsch", according to Karpfen, is the industrial production and marketing of the products:

*"In China, whole urban districts have come into existence, where residents live exclusively from the fabrication of 'antique' artwork. There are temples of Fo in the central regions of Asia, whose statue of Buddha was sold to eager Europeans a hundred times. The procedure is always the same: [...] The compliant merchant in Shanghai, who gives the tourist a hint, the captain of the junk, the monk and prior of the monastery make up a registered corporation [...] The company members sneeringly rake in the money of the white chump."*¹⁶

¹² Heinz Pollack, *Die Revolution des Gesellschaftstanzes* (Dresden: Sibyllen-Verlag, 1922), 20.

¹³ „Nie hat und nie wird es wieder einen Rhythmus geben, der gleich Tango dem Körper so viel Spielraum gibt, bunte Träume hauchend anzudeuten oder verhaltene Liebesglut oder tränenge tränkte Trauer oder sprudelnde Freude oder fiebergeschüttelte Sehnsüchte oder wehmütiges Verzichten." Ibid., 27.

¹⁴ Fritz Karpfen, *Der Kitsch: Eine Studie über die Entartung der Kunst* (Hamburg: Weltbund, 1925).

¹⁵ „Durch die Weißen entstand er, ursprünglich kannte man ihn nicht. [...] Erst als die Antipoden den seichten Sinn der Fremden erkannten, schufen sie für sie den wertlosen Kitsch", ibid., 34.

¹⁶ „Längst schon sind in China ganze Stadtviertel entstanden, deren Bewohner ausschließlich von der Erzeugung ‚alter‘ Kunstwerke leben. Es gibt Tempel des Fo im Innersten Asiens, deren Buddhahild zum hundertstenmal an gierige Europäer verkauft worden ist. Der Vorgang ist immer derselbe. [...] Der gefällige Händler in Schanghai, der den Tip [sic] gibt, der Kapitän der Dschunke, Mönch und Prior des Klosters bilden eine registrierte G.m.b.H. [...] Die Gesellschafter streichen hohnlächelnd das Geld des weißen Gimpels in die Kasse", ibid., 25ff.

The mass production and the organized sales strategy imply something soulless, a “fake”¹⁷, which is played off against something “original”, authentic, unique. Although Karpfen even concedes a certain artistry to the imitations, he does not consider them as „real artwork“¹⁸: “Because art is something that is created with the lifeblood of the creator, who endows it with all the spiritual vibrancies of his time, raised to highest rank.”¹⁹ Karpfen draws a line to distinguish between art and industrial (mass) production (“Kitsch”) on the one hand, on the other hand he distances both from a sort of unspoiled folk handcraft: “Not the poorest soul in areas not yet contaminated by Europeans would consider to have his simple, pretty goods replaced by useless rubbish”.²⁰ Thus imitations of foreign origin especially designed for Europeans would come under “exotic kitsch” in Karpfen’s sense of the word. Furthermore, any imitation of exotic objects of European origin – for example a “Hawaiian”-like song – or any copy of an exotic style – like the Argentinian Tango – would be kitsch: it’s not an “original”, but a fake.

Thus Karpfen and the “Kitsch Tango” share a fundamental definition of kitsch: it is the distinction between original and fake, between “true” art and “false” kitsch. If Robitschek uses the words “Talmi und Flor”²¹ (“fake and gauze”) he signalizes, that kitsch is nothing authentic or real, but deception. The phrase “und ist auch nichts dran wahr, / es klingt so wunderbar“ (“even if nothing’s true about it – it sounds so wonderful!”) further underlines this. But while Karpfen discredits the consumers of kitsch as an “army of naive and careless people”²², Robitschek sees them as intentionally calling for and enjoying kitsch: „Ach Liebling, mach mir was vor“ (“Honey, please fool me”). For them, kitsch is an aesthetic play with a special attraction of ambiguity, because it is not known, if they deal with it consciously or naively. Although Robitschek and Hollaender implicitly criticize kitsch in the “Kitsch Tango”, they are far away from any “kulturkritik” opinion, which sees Kitsch as a degenerated and harmful variety, like Karpfen or later Hermann Broch (“Das Böse im Wertsystem der Kunst”²³). Instead, the authors even seem to enjoy a witty play with the subject of kitsch and have a relaxed attitude towards it.

This attitude, shown in the song of 1932, resembles an approach to kitsch, which was referred to as “postmodern lifestyle”²⁴ by Ute Dettmar and Thomas Küpper in the editorial to the reader “Kitsch. Texte und Theorien“ (2007). They closely link it to Gerhard Schulze’s concept of an “Erlebnisgesellschaft” (“adventure society”) and the “deverti-

¹⁷ Ibid., 9. The connection between mass produced goods and kitsch is not only topic of this chapter but through the whole book of Karpfen.

¹⁸ Ibid., 28f.

¹⁹ „Denn Kunst ist etwas, was mit dem Herzblut des Schöpfers geschaffen wird, der in sein Werk die geistigen Ausstrahlungen seiner Zeit, zur höchsten Potenz erhoben, hineinträgt“, *ibid.*, 32f.

²⁰ „In den noch nicht von Europa durchseuchten Gebieten fällt es dem ärmsten Kuli nicht ein, seinen einfachen, schönen Hausrat durch sinnlosen Schmarren verdrängen zu lassen“, *ibid.*, 34. See also *ibid.*, 100f.: „Es gibt eine Kunst, die aus dem Volke ganz ursprünglich aufsteigt und es gibt den Kitsch, der, fabrikmäßig erzeugt, vom Volk verdaut wird.“

²¹ Talmi is a term, also used by Karpfen, *ibid.*, 8.

²² „Heer von Leichtgläubigen und Gleichgültigen“, *ibid.*

²³ Hermann Broch, “Das Böse im Wertsystem der Kunst” [1933], in: Broch, *Geist und Zeitgeist: Essays zur Kultur der Moderne*, ed. by Paul Michael Lützeler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 7–42.

²⁴ Ute Dettmar, Thomas Küpper, “Einleitung”, in Dettmar, Küpper, *Kitsch: Texte ...*, 9–16, here 10.

calisation” (“Entvertikalisierung”²⁵) of social space in the second half of the twentieth century, which manifests itself in it:

*“Nowadays, Kitsch is in many people’s homes– putting a garden gnome in one’s front yard, or decorating one’s living room with a belling stag, does not necessarily mean being narrow-minded, bourgeois or over-sentimental. Such a person might simply master the playful dealing with kitsch, lead a ‘postmodern’ lifestyle and does not expect dismissive, but rather approving comments about his taste preferences. [...] – as a bogeyman, Kitsch had its day.”*²⁶

Thus, the dealing with kitsch as described above is not only a “postmodern” attitude, but is already indicated in the Cabaret of the twenties and thirties, in songs like the “Kitsch Tango” or in Robitschek’s foreword to “Frankensteins unheimliche Geschichten”. Therefore, it is quite convincing when Wolfgang Ruttkowski transfers the concept of “camp” on performance in Cabaret, as early as in the Weimar Republic:

“In cabaret songs, and especially in prostitute songs, we notice again and again a basic attitude of the writer as well as the performer of the text, which can only be described by the aforementioned term ‘camp’. It is reflected in witty puns, innuendos, and asides; in exaggerations, which are not meant to be taken seriously; and in pathos, which nobody believes in, neither the performers nor the audience. In short, ‘camp’ involves the exaggerated use of stylistic elements, which previously had been taken seriously, for the purpose of entertainment.”

Being aware of using kitsch, dealing with it consciously, is thus the crucial point for Ruttkowski, too. Only self-consciousness makes a performance “camp”:

*“It is the ‘decadent’ ennui (boredom) with social seriousness and the socialist agenda that produces the ‘camp’ attitude. Sentimentality? Yes! But the camp performer always knows that s/he is being sentimental and enjoys the indulgence.”*²⁷

There are many examples of this conscious dealing with kitsch respectively camp in the staging of chansons in cabaret, not only in the genre of prostitute songs. Ruttkowski sees the “attitude of ‘camp’”²⁸ already unfolded in Yvette Guilbert. As one of the most significant figures of “camp” he states the prototype of the Vamp, first in Cabaret, later in films: “In her grotesque attire, make-up, and behaviour she is also always ‘camp’ in Sontag’s and Ruttkowski’s understanding of the word.”²⁹ According to this picture of a seducing, man-eating woman, Marcellus Schiffer wrote a chanson titled „the Vamp“ (from the operetta *“100 Meter Glück“*), which exaggerates the attributes, thereby ironizing it:

²⁵ „Im mehrdimensionalen Raum ist oben und unten nicht mehr eindeutig bestimmbar. Gruppen, die sich an verschiedenen Stellen in diesem Raum zusammenklumpen, könnten sich nur dann gegenseitig in einer Hierarchie wahrnehmen, wenn es ein privilegiertes alltagsästhetisches Schema gäbe. [...] Statt auf einer gemeinsamen Leiter stehen die sozialen Gruppen auf einem Podest, jede für sich, und jede stellt sich auf die Zehenspitzen, um auf die anderen herabschauen zu können. Die Entvertikalisierung der Alltagsästhetik ist Teil einer umfassenden Entvertikalisierung des Verhältnisses sozialer Großgruppen.“ Gerhard Schulze, *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2005), 167.

²⁶ „Kitsch ist heutzutage bei vielen zu Hause – wer sich einen Gartenzweig in den Vorgarten stellt, das Wohnzimmer mit einem röhrenden Hirsch schmückt, weist sich nicht unbedingt als kleinbürgerlich, spießig, oder übermäßig sentimental aus. Möglicherweise beherrscht er den spielerischen Umgang mit dem Kitsch, pflegt einen ‚postmodernen‘ Lebensstil und rechnet ob seiner Geschmacksvorlieben nicht mit abschätzigen, sondern aner kennenden Blicken. [...] – als Feindbild hat der Kitsch weitgehend ausgedient.“ Dettmar, Küpper, “Einleitung”, 10.

²⁷ Wolfgang Ruttkowski, “Cabaret Songs”, in *Popular Music and Society*, 25, nr. 3 (2001): 45–71, here 59.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁹ Ruttkowski is referring to Susan Sontag, “Notes on, Camp”, in *Against interpretation and other essays* (London: Penguin Book, 2009), 275–292, hier 275; Ruttkowski: “Cabaret Songs”, 59f.

„Ich bin das Gift der Medici,
bin eine Hexe wie Jeanne d'Arc;
ich trag den Strumpf der Dubarry,
ich bade nackt in einem Sarg.
Ich bin ein Vamp!
Ich bin ein Vamp, ich bin halb vertiert!
Ich saug' die Männer an und aus!
Ich mache Frikassee daraus!
Ich bin ein Vamp!“³⁰

“I'm the poison of the Medici,
I'm a witch like Jeanne d'Arc;
I wear the stockings of the Dubarry,
I'm bathing naked in a coffin.
I'm a vamp!
I'm a vamp, I'm half animal!
I suck men in and suck men out!
I'm making mincemeat out of them!
I'm a vamp!”

The music, which Mischa Spoliansky composed for the text, also uses the style of Tango to put the song in an appropriate mood.

In the “Kitsch Tango” and also in the exaggerations of the chanson “The Vamp” the conscious application of elements of “kitsch” in cabaret and closely related art forms becomes apparent. Two reference systems can be detected, which make the allusions and the irony work for the listeners. Firstly the reference system of popular culture of the time, like films, songs and operettas, which must be known to be associated with the texts of the chanson. Second it is the knowledge about the evaluation respectively condemnation of certain clichés as “kitsch” by art reviewers or other people, who dominated the discourse in arts journals, academia and schools.

The playful but reflected dealing with elements which were stigmatised as kitsch, gains a particular aesthetic attraction by flirting with a bourgeois cultural lifestyle and simultaneously turning it into ridicule. Thus, the cabaret and the popular culture of the Weimar Republic are evidence of a thoroughly modern attitude towards kitsch, which outshines pejorative essays about the degenerating impact of kitsch. The authors recognized the wish of the audience to laugh about themselves through the mirror of caricature and to “be fooled” in a carefully pleasant, not too harmful way. Or, as Robitschek puts it:

*“But we want to see the lunacy around us in the distorting mirror. We couldn't stand all the festivities, excitements, the slapstick comedies of our existence, if we didn't see from time to time, how ridiculously we behave even in this slapstick world.”*³¹

³⁰ Marcellus Schiffer, Mischa Spoliansky, *Ich bin ein Vamp! Lied und Tango aus der Operette „100 Meter Glück“* (Wien: Doblinger, 1932 (sheet music)).

³¹ „Aber wir wollen doch den Irrsinn um uns herum im Zerspiegel der Karikatur sehen. Wir könnten ja diese Festlichkeiten, diese Aufregungen, diesen Klamauk unseres Daseins gar nicht ertragen, wenn wir nicht von Zeit zu Zeit sähen, wie ulkig wir uns selbst in dieser Welt voll Klamauk benehmen“, Robitschek, “Klamauk”, 2.

POVZETEK

Leta 1932 sta Friedrich Hollaender in Kurt Robitschek v Berlinu izdala gramofonsko ploščo z naslovom »Kitsch-Tango«, ki je postala uspešnica na plesiščih klubov in lokalov v mestu. Pesem, ki je bila najprej del kabaretske predstave, se je nanašala na dva različna referenčna sistema:

Najprej je občinstvo moralo poznati popularno kulturo tistega časa, zlasti film, opereto in popularne pesem, da je lahko razumelo namigovanja v besedilu. S krilaticami, kot so »mesečina«, »rdeče vrtnice« ali »Havaji« sta avtorja v poslušalcu zbudila komplet možnih povezav, ki so bile vse povezane s pojmom kiča. Z nanašanjem na tango kot glasbeno obliko, nabito s seksualnim pomenom, je skladatelj povečal ironijo vsebine, ki je govorila, da je edini namen kiča zapeljevanje žensk.

A poleg tega so morali biti poslušalci seznanjeni z diskurzom o kiču in njegovem degenerativnem učinku, da so lahko dešifrirali satirični pomen pesmi. Robitschek in Hollaender se v svojem opisu kiča kot »Talmi und Flor« (»ponaredek in koprena«) strinjata s konceptom, ki ga je Fritz Karpfen skiciral v svoji knjigi „Der Kitsch. Eine Studie

über die Entartung der Kunst“ (»Kič. Študija o izrojenosti umetnosti«, 1925). Karpfen je razlikoval med izvirnim in ponarejenim, »pravo« umetnostjo in »ponarejenim« kičem. A medtem ko Karpfen porabnike kiča diskreditira kot »vojsko naivnih in brezskrbnih ljudi«, jih Robitschek vidi kot množico, ki namerno zahteva kič in uživa v njem, ter tako kaže svoj prefinjeni um. S kičem se ukvarjajo zavestno, zavedajo se, da ga uporabljajo.

Z zasledovanjem obeh referenčnih sistemov in pregledov drugih primerov kabareta se pokaže povsem sodoben odnos do kiča v kabaretu pozne weimarske republike: kič je estetska igra s posebnim dodatkom dvoumnosti, domiselna igra, v kateri uživajo avtorji in porabniki kiča, ki imajo do njega sproščen odnos. Na ta način je funkcija kiča podobna odnosu, ki so ga pripisovali »postmodernemu« življenjskemu slogu avtorjev, kot sta Ute Dettmar in Thomas Küpper, in je močno povezana s konceptom Gerharda Schulzeja o »družbi doživetij«. A kot kaže ta članek, zavestno ukvarjanje s kičem, kot je opisano zgoraj, ni samo »postmoderen« odnos, saj je nakazan že v kabaretu dvajsetih in tridesetih let.