

## New Beauty: Between Hipsters and Folklore

If we today take search Google, then the entry “hipster” returns 128 millions hits (“the aesthetics” 125 millions) and this phenomenon attracts now not only journalists, bloggers and laymen but also the academic sphere. The entire category arose in 1940 and was connected with the black jazz culture. Later Norman Mailor used the term in his *The White Negro* (1957), describing white middle-class males having predilection for the lifestyle of black jazz scene. The term was reborn in the late 1990s in New York. If we go through the current definitions, we usually find these expressions: young, skinny, tall, ironic, snobbish, vintage-style clothing, tattoos, facial hair, thick glasses, using bikes as the preferred way of transport, biological food, craft beer, authentic wine, collectors and connoisseurs. A typical hipster studied at the humanities, works in the creative industry, in cafés or fashion stores.

The often mentioned sign of a hipster is the following: the real hipster never identifies himself as a hipster, because he or she used to be a hipster before it was cool and popular. The rejection of this label as a category of self-identification seems to be part of the hipster identity discourse, real hipsters do things “years before they become mainstream” (Maly and Varis 2016, 640). There is a certain level of snobbery in this statement and that can be the reason why the hipster culture is often treated in a negative view. According to it hipsters are only wannabe-connoisseurs because in seeking authenticity and individuality they in fact imitate and follow each others (Schiermer 2014, 169; Michael 2015, 167-168). Many descriptions mention their uniformity of the culture which presents itself as strongly individualised. This is also connected with the fact that they don’t publish any manifestos, something that will be elaborated upon later in this text. An another problem is that the hipster culture is no real subculture because it is “characterised by a lack of generational distinction and by a genuine veneration of certain cultural expressions and objects of the previous generations” (Schiermer 2014, 168). Their predilection for collecting forgotten objects (the favourite examples are wall antlers, the sailor figure or the roaring deer at the forest lake) is not understandable, especially for previous generations who wanted to change the society and were opposed to their ancestors. Hipsters don't fight against their fathers, which is often interpreted as a form of nostalgia or a lack of a creative force. They are not seen as a radical political revolutionaries (which they really are not), but as postmodern dandies; for them “the style is all that matters” (Reeve, 2013). If Susan Sontag wrote her *Notes on Camp* today, the hipsters would definitely get their own (at least one) paragraph. If Arthur Danto wrote his *The End of Art* today, he could use hipster culture as an example of his vision of the post-historical world.

Hipsters usually operate in big cities, they are associated with urban spaces and gentrification. There are studies speaking about so called gentrification aesthetics - "a form of objectified cultural capital that gentrifiers appropriate through the decoration or renovation of their homes" (le Grand 2018, 4). The hipster focus on good living style transforms the cities visibly, they open new bars, cafés, food trucks and fashion places (e. g. in the area around Krymská street in Prague or around the Gorkého and Grohova streets in Brno). Other texts show how this process changed the life of working class who are not able now to live their former ordinary lives because their living areas were transformed into something cool, fancy, visited by many tourists, Airbnb and expensive localities (for more about this topic aptly explained on the example of the city of Berlin see Slobodian and Sterling 2013). Although the hipsters adore the pre-digital, analogue medias (e. g. the conventional film camera and the "old-school" photograph development) which counter the up-to-date aura-less age of digital reproduction, their culture is widespread (and unified) because of the new "2.0" media, especially online social networks. But still there are local differences between them (e. g. predilection for a different type of music - in the US they are associated with the indie scene, in Belgium it is also hip hop and r&b), therefore they can be presented as an example of what is called "micro-populations" which Maly and Varis explain as follows: "The hipster is a perfect instantiation of this: a translocal, polycentric, layered and stratified micro-population that is not only visible in style and (both local and translocal, and online and offline) infrastructures, but also constantly (re)produced through identity-authenticity discourses" (Maly and Varis 2015, 650). I would like to present one such local Czech (more precisely Moravian) hipster particularity – their inspiration by local folklore, or rather by elements of folklorism.

Wiktionary defines folklorism as: "Invention or adaptation of folklore; including any use of a tradition outside the cultural context in which it was created".<sup>1</sup> This definition follows on the best known formulation used by Hans Moser in 1962: "a second-hand mediation and presentation of folk culture" (1962, 180) and also that one by Hermann Bausinger 22 years later: "The use of material or stylistic elements of folklore in a context which is foreign to the original tradition" (Šmidchens 1999, 52). Moser distinguished between three forms of folklorismus: the performance of folk culture away from its original local context, the playful imitation of popular motifs by another social class, and the invention and creation of folklore for different purposes outside of any known tradition (Moser 1962, 4; Newall 1987, 131). From the beginning, the term was connected with the problem of authenticity and the discussion was led by two opposite groups of scholars: the first rejected this "spurious tradition" and labelled it as "fakelore", the other defended it. But as the Czech folklorist

Oldřich Sirovátka argues, folklorism as such is a neutral phenomenon and cannot be neglected, avoided or rejected (Sirovátka 1992, 13). According to me, today the crucial question is if the real, genuine folklor really does exist today. If so, what would it look like? Country women using local folklore costumes as a daily or festive dress? People singing folklore songs working in the fields? People cooking traditional food on the furnace? Since Moser published his definition there were also another two geopolitical views formulated: "Scholars west of the Iron Curtain usually identified folklorism in a commercial context, while those to the east identified folklorism in government-sponsored cultural programs" (Šmidchens 1999, 53). The Western theories labeled it as a form of escapist theory because it offers a vision of simple and genuine life from the good old days. The civilizations long for it since ancient times, see for example Virgil's *Eclogues* praising the life of shepherds, Alan de Lille who in the 12th century complained about bad moral of his contemporaries and yearned for the old good behavior and the Arts and Crafts movement which was based on the admiration for the Middle Ages. Yearning for the simple life has always been connected with travelling and tourism. Tourists want to experience real rural life, but what they get is in fact never folklore but folklorism (the different situation is the one of the ethnographers who try for example to record original habits etc. but there is always a doubt whether their presence as so called "unconcerned" observers doesn't interfere with the possibility to experience a real folklore). The tourists want to eat genuine food, see the traditional costumes, listen to folklore songs. And they usually get it. In some form. They can go to the Zittertall in the Austrian Alps to visit a festival Ursprung Buam Fest of some music based on folk roots, they can participate in a Greek evening which is the very same in every summer resort in Greece, they can see the Amerindian rituals and they play in their casinos or in Prague they can taste a "genuine" trdelník – a kind of pastry having in fact the roots in Hungary.

As I mentioned above, folklorism was due to government support in the Socialist countries. Especially the spectacular parades of folklore music and dances were very popular and professional folklore ensembles have shown the picture of a big happy Socialistic family, proud of their political system. But on the other hand many of these companies are still in existence and 30 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain they are still highly professional performers. I would like to describe the situation in the Moravian region and its capital Brno, the second largest city in the Czech republic. Moravia is more influenced by and following folklore culture and there are still many places in the countryside which are devoted to folklore/folklorism. There are many customs alive which are not conserved only in museums, but you can meet them in everyday life, especially connected with festive days. The eastern part of the Czech Republic was always quite rich because of the fertile

countryside and people here are also more hospitable and proud of their traditions (and also of showing it off). There is still an honour for families to organize so called “hody”, traditional fests connected with the end of harvest or with a certain saint – a patron of the place. Let us mention Vlčnov, a small town with 3000 inhabitants, which is a significant cultural centre supporting folklore art and folklorism. The so called Jízda králů (Vlčnov Ride of the Kings), a celebration which is held on the last Sunday in May, is famous, not only in the Czech Republic, but also worldwide and was in 2011 listed in the UNESCO register.<sup>2</sup> The other town, Kyjov, organizes every 4th year a big folklore costume march called Slováký rok (The Slovakian Year).<sup>3</sup> There was 3000 participant in traditional folklore costumes and about 25 000 visitors this year. Many families own original costumes and treat them carefully, and there are rigid rules on how such a dress may look, you cannot fix or sew it according to your own fantasy. But back to the hipsters. Influenced by this vivid folklore tradition, the hipster culture adopted and implemented some folklore influences, elements and motives. We can see it especially in tattoos, fashion and food. I think that this connection between hipsters and folklorism mirrors the phenomena mentioned above – the hipsters preserving the experience of the former generations, the romantic (and naive) yearning for the good old days and the vivid folklore tradition in the Moravian region.

There is also a third phenomenon connected with hipsters and folklorism. In the last 20 years we can observe the boom of the contemporary art and crafts tendencies. Hipsters are connected with fashion stores and cafés/hand crafted bakeries/bio food shops and a part of these workshops in a way follow John Ruskin’s theories about beauty and moral and Arts and Crafts movement, which stood for traditional craftsmanship (and adored a time long gone). Let me present some of these places in Brno focusing on the sphere of clothing and hand-crafted bakeries and sweet shops.

Brno, also called the Moravian Manchester, was very famous due to its massive textile industry in the period between 1800 and World War II. Because most of the owners of these factories were Germans, they left or were expelled from the city after the war and their factories were put under the state control and decayed afterwards. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and the fall of communism only a few of these former places had been maintained. Therefore the current fashion designers in Brno cannot follow up on this tradition, but they seem to rather follow the Arts and Crafts movement’s ideas based on connection between beauty, handcraft, aesthetics and social aspects.

First I would like to mention the workshop called Zašivárna (A Stitch Workshop) whose owners – two women - are devoted to embroidery. They teach the techniques, they also design patterns by modifying old folklore patterns or producing completely new ones (geometric animals).<sup>4</sup> They also follow an aforementioned social aspect, as in the Czech crowdfunding online portal HitHit they run a project to support so called stitching grandmothers - women in retirement or with some health problems who are sewing for them their patterns, because : “These ladies are often alone or feel abandoned and in this workshop - place for them - they could meet each other and also their clients.”<sup>5</sup> This campaign resembles the activities of Tereza Hoppe Teinitzerová, an active Czech follower of Arts and Crafts movement, who in 1920 founded a textile workshop in southern Bohemia which gathered local weavers. Teinitzerová, who studied the art of weaving in Prague, Vienna, Berlin and in the Scandinavian countries, but also frequented lectures concerning Arts and Crafts, also strived to create some place where “the old ladies could work next to the orphans” ((Hubatová-Vacková 2011, 161). This magnanimous project was unfortunately not implemented because of the Czech political situation after 1948. Next I would like to introduce the anonymous guerilla knitting association called Užaslé (The Astounded) which creates and displays their works of art – the knitted clothes – reacting to the Czech political situation. After the last parliamentary election they placed some decorations on the statue of the first Czechoslovak president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk – the first one with the embroidered statement “Žasnu” (I am amazed) which was followed after some months by another one “Mizím” (I am escaping).<sup>6</sup> Their artefacts, placed illegally in public space, are usually displayed only for few hours, but attract the interest of media (and police). Both mentioned fashion groups, in some way, follow the tradition, but primarily they reflection and react to current social needs and political life. They are not cheap imitators of folklore misusing tradition for an effect (and gain). Both are also quite active in social platform, in their case it is Facebook where they regularly present their works.

In the culinary area it is about the return to traditional recipes and ingredients (hand made yeast bread, traditional cakes – for ex. “frgály”) on one side, and using new technologies and media on the other. The handcraft bakery Laskominy od Maryny (Dainty by Maryna)<sup>7</sup> is famous for the handmade yeast bread which is popular in Brno because it tastes deliciously and lasts long. The owner works with two part-time assistants and they make 30 pieces of bread of different kinds (with potatoes, caraway, rye etc.) a day. Especially on Fridays it is difficult to buy it after 11 a.m. Besides this, she also bakes cakes and pies, quiches and baguettes. Every morning around nine, she posts her current daily offer on Facebook and people can call and book what they want. This system is a bit old-fashioned but quite helpful. This direct daily communication with clients is also a part of her success.

According to Forbes journal, this bakery belongs to the top ten in the Czech Republic. The owner – Maria Matuszek – also leads courses on how to bake bread and other kinds of bakery and she (because she graduated in ethnology) is also a specialist of traditionally bakery connected with the liturgical calendar – like e. g. Boží milosti (God's mercy) for Eastern and Vánočka (Christmas cake) for Christmas. A use of fantasy, but not becoming kitsch – can characterize the design sweetshop Sorry, pečeme jinak (Sorry, we bake differently). The owner, Šárka Divácká, describes her small business as “a combination between goulash and macrons”, which sounds terrible but tastes great and her cake called “Buď mech” (Be a moss) containing a moss, pistachio, spinach and a (dead) cricket is a legend now.<sup>8</sup> Her place is also famous for marmor rainbow glaze cakes. This place offers something really extraordinary. Patient and honest hard work, a small company, ingredients of high quality – these are all characteristics of these two mentioned places. They have one more thing in common – they are not raw, vegan nor vegetarian.

My survey aims also to find out whether this connection between tradition and up-to-date form has something to do, not only with aesthetics (beauty, originality etc.) and moral (social aspects, honest work) qualities, but also with political reasons (nationalistic tendencies and movements). After the year 1989 the Czech Republic quickly opened up to foreign influences. This time of a new, unknown liberty brought a lot of good things (and they prevailed) but the Czech Republic was like a too trusting child leaving an orphanage – everything on offer was accepted. In the next ten years fast foods, fashion chains, MTV, kung-fu movies, a lot of glitters, big screens, door-to-doors sellers was introduced and it was sometimes difficult to distinguish the truth from an illusion. But after the year 2000 people started to revise and evaluate more and the year 2000 is a milestone for what I call The Arts and Crafts 2.0. The people started to look back to their traditions, handcrafts, local food, but in that time not because it was necessary because of a lack of goods as they were used to from the communism, but because they wanted back the good things which existed in their history. And in the last twenty year we can observe a development of some kinds of applied arts, design and handcrafts which combine traditional contents and forms with new technologies that serve production and promotion. As John Ruskin and The Arts and Crafts movement, the new authors follow an aesthetical and social vision of the quality of handcraft, but these new tendencies are not organized nor united (at least yet), although they cooperate and support each other to a certain extent (these handicraft makers usually know each other because their environment including their clients – not only hipsters - is a kind of micro-population). They also do not publish any manifestos (unlike Ruskin but like hipsters). John Ruskin and his followers fought against industrialism “without heart” and The Arts and Crafts 2.0 - which is a phenomenon of course not existing only in Moravia

but in the whole first world nowadays - according to me has also an enemy – the profanation of the terms “traditional, tradition, home-made etc.”. On one hand these labels are misused in advertisements offering traditional “home, like-by-mother” products which are in fact produced in big factories and sometimes even out of the country,<sup>9</sup> or by sellers of the kitch-folklore-like-souvenirs cheating the tourists in major towns and dishonouring the good Czech (not only folklore) tradition and on the other hand, the term “traditional” can be used and misused by the populist voices invoking a fear of anything unknown, foreign, extraordinary, exceptional which is a topical theme not only in the European Union but worldwide nowadays. The Arts and Crafts 2.0 people take inspiration from their tradition and restore it, but also follow up on new domestic and foreign trends, work hard, learn from failures and try to succeed because of a good reputation, not through false advertisement. And they would never call themselves to be a member of this movement which does not exist.

In a small case study of the city of Brno, I tried to show that even if there are maybe no great narratives or manifestos anymore - as Arthur C. Danto pointed out - the relationships and connections between the micro-population of the hipster culture (however snobbish or ironically treated), folklorism (however naive and dreaming about old good days) and followers of Ruskin’s and Arts and Crafts’ ideas (with whatever lack of organisation but yet groping) in some way contribute to the fulfilling and spreading of Plato’s vision and appreciation of “to kalon” and “to agathon”, rudiments not only of aesthetics but of the entire human society.

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