AGAINST HISTORICISM AND AESTHETICISM:

WALTER BENJAMIN'S CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF FILM

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Thesis Abstract

Cihat Arınç, "Against Historicism and Aestheticism:

Walter Benjamin's Critical Philosophy of Film"

When 'aesthetics' emerged in the eighteenth century, there was no advent of different theories for various branches of art. In the nineteenth century, philosophical aesthetics literature deepened along with works written on various branches of art. Along with the birth of cinema as a new art form in the twentieth century, new questions and problems concerning the nature of art, the ontological status of artwork, the conditions of art practice and aesthetic experience, the role of the artist in society, and the position of the audience appeared. Cinema, which was born in the cultural atmosphere of Continental Europe grappling with fascism, had an influence on the constitution of mass culture as a technically reproducible art form and on the production of propaganda within political discourse to some extent. Benjamin puts the Surrealist principle of montage at the very center of his argument: Firstly, he challenges Kant's continuous conception of space-time and Hegel's progressive conception of history while discussing temporal bases of film. Secondly, he criticizes the autonomous and auratic conception of art while discussing spatial bases of film. Thirdly, he, as a reply to Adorno, shows how mass art can have a revolutionary function. Is cinema a degenerate art for the masses? Or is it a revolutionary practice that can be used as a means to reach the ideal of the classless society by dissolving class differences and something that democratizes art by rendering it accessible to all? Is it a perfect imitation of a dark world? Or is it the door to a 'possible world' which points to alternative realities? This thesis seeks an answer to this fundamental problem and examines the argument of Walter Benjamin, who stands for the optimistic wing of this debate.

Tez Özeti

Cihat Arınç, “Tarihselciliğe ve Estetizme Karşı:

Walter Benjamin’in Eleştirel Film Felsefesi”

‘Estetik’ 18. yüzyılda kurulduğunda sanatın çeşitli dalları için birbirinden farklı teoriler henüz ortaya çıkmış değildi. 19. yüzyılda sanatın çeşitli dalları üzerine kaleme alınmış eserlerle birlikte bu alandaki literatür derinlik kazandı. 20. yüzyılda sinemanın bir sanat dalı olarak doğuşuyla beraber, sanatın doğasına, sanat eserinin ontolojik statüsüne, sanat pratiğinin ve estetik tecrübenin şartlarına, sanatçının toplumdaki rolüne ve izleyicinin konumuna dair yepyeni sorular ve sorunlar da gündeme geldi. Faşizmle pençeleşen Kıta Avrupası’nın kültürel ortamı içine doğan sinema, teknoloji yoluyla yeniden-üretilebilir bir sanat dalı olarak kitle kültürünün yerleşmesinde ve politik söylemlerin propagandasında belli bir ölçüde etkili oldu. Benjamin, Sürrealist montaj ilkesini argümanının merkezine yerleştiriyor. İlk olarak filmin zamansal temellerini tartışırken Kant’ın sürekli/kesintisiz mekân-zaman tasavvuruna ve Hegel’in ilerlemeci tarih anlayışına meydan okuyor. İkinci olarak, filmin mekânsal temellerini tartışırken özerk ve auratik sanat anlayışını eleştiriyor. Üçüncü olarak ise, Adorno’ya cevaben, kitle sanatının nasıl devrimci bir rol üstlenebileceğini gösteriyor. Acaba sinema yozlaştırıcı bir kitle sanatı mı, yoksa sınıf ayrımlarını ortadan kaldırarak sınıfsız bir toplum idealine kapı aralayan ve sanatı herkesin erişimine açık hâle getirerek demokratikleştiren devrimci bir pratik mi? Var olan karanlık dünyanın birebir taklidi mi, yoksa alternatif gerçekliklere işaret eden bir ‘mümkün dünya’ mı? Bu tez, bu temel soruna cevap arıyor ve bu doğrultuda tartışmanın iyimser tarafında duran Walter Benjamin’in argümanını inceliyor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Walter Benjamin was a thinker who aimed at understanding the very structure of modernity from the perspective that focused on the change in the nature of art and artworks. For him, one had to know the new language of unprecedented 'images', the new signs showing themselves through the products of modern times, in order to understand and explain accurately the radical change that emerged. Therefore, he was a radical thinker who renounced the way of thinking through the canonical philosophy, but instead, applied an independent method which makes use of the torn notions and concepts from the heritage of different traditions of philosophy, literature, and religion in an eclectic way. In accordance with his style of thinking, Benjamin offered to reconsider the nature of art and ask a quintessential question whether the influences of technological developments had transformed the entire nature of art. Once this question is answered 'yes,' then, for Benjamin, it would be impossible to grasp this 'transformation' through the concepts of traditional philosophy. Thus, we must create new concepts for a new 'world', but in this creation period, we can reevaluate the current heritage from a new perspective if necessary.

The eclectic thinker Benjamin does not content himself with criticism of the art of film as opposed to Theodor W. Adorno. He seems to give a great effort to create a philosophical theory of this new art form. Cinema includes both spatiality and temporality as opposed to the arts which include merely temporality such as music or merely spatiality such as painting and sculpture. To found a critical philosophy of film, Benjamin begins with criticizing the progressive conception of

history and puts the montage principle, which gave rise to the conception of discontinuous time, at the center of his critique. Secondly, he criticizes traditional art's conception of auratic space and inquires into the possibilities of a disenchanted artworld. This eclectic philosophy is analysed and criticized in the first and the second chapters of the thesis. The third chapter, on the other hand, includes Adorno's critique of this philosophy and Benjamin's responses to those criticisms.

CHAPTER 2

THE TEMPORAL BASES OF BENJAMIN'S PHILOSOPHY OF FILM: A NEW CONCEPTION OF 'HISTORY'

After the First World War, the Enlightenment project has been deeply criticised by many intellectuals and philosophers from various perspectives, and the number of those criticisms has increased with the impact of the catastrophic effects of the Second World War. Scientific and artistic ideals of the Enlightenment have been questioned, and disastrous results of the effort to reach those ideals gave rise to protest movements in social, political and artistic arenas. Of course, the definition of 'The Enlightenment', or the Age of Reason, has always been a tricky business since the age of Enlightenment includes different experiences in different geographical and national contexts—French, German, English, Scottish, Irish, Spanish, American—as pointed out by Porter,[1] May,[2] and Pocock.[3] The German philosopher Immanuel Kant,[4] made the first effort to give an account of the term itself in his short article entitled "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'". Cassirer,[5] Adorno and Horkheimer,[6] Gay,[7] Darnton,[8] Foucault,[9] Jacob,[10] Hof,[11] Outram,[12] Munck[13] and

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[1] Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment,* 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2001); see also *The Enlightenment in National Context,* ed. Roy Porter and Mikuls Teich (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[2] Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[3] J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764* (Cambridge; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[4] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" In *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. H. Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 54-60.

[5] Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment,* trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

[6] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

Israel[14] also gave various definitions from different critical and socio-historical perspectives.

The German scholar Ernst Cassirer argued that even though there exist different geographical and national contexts in the age of Enlightenment, the Enlightenment was essentially a united and self-reflexive intellectual movement concerned with understanding the very process of thought. He holds the view that despite their various philosophical, geographical and national positions, the great Enlightenment thinkers, or *philosophe*s, constituted an essentially homogeneous formative power, or a pan-European consciousness of tremendous force, that broke with the transcendental and systematic philosophy of the seventeenth century. For Cassirer, this unity of Enlightenment was based upon a preoccupation with reason, the elaboration of historicity and teleology, descriptive natural science, empiricism, tolerance, the development of civil rights, and the beginnings of aesthetic theory. Walter Benjamin, like other members of the Frankfurt school (e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer), adopts this 'unity of Enlightenment' picture in his criticism. Among

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[7] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* [2 volumes: *The Rise of Modern Paganism* and *The Science of Freedom*] (New York: Norton Paperbacks, 1996).

[8] Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

[9] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader,* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 32-50.

[10] Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[11] Ulrich Im Hof, *The Enlightenment,* trans. William E.Yuill (Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).

[12] Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[13] Thomas Munck, *The Enlightenment: A Comparative Social History, 1721–1794* (London: Arnold, 2000).

[14] Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

those basics Cassirer confirmed, two are the most problematic for Benjamin: (i) *philosophy of history:* historicity and teleology depending on the idea of progress,[15] and (ii) *philosophy of art:* aestheticism depending on the idea of autonomous art.[16] According to Benjamin, the first one, the idea of progressive history, is a key legitimizing instrument of totalitarianism; whereas the latter, the idea of autonomous art, is at the disposal of fascism—through these two, every kind of violence and all class differences can be *justified*.

Benjamin re-inteprets the notions of 'progress in history' and 'autonomy in art' from a critical point of view and defends the negative side—that is, 'dehistoricization of history' instead of the principle of progressive history (*historicism*—teleology, progress, linearity), and 'emancipation of the artwork from aura' instead of the principle of autonomous art (*aestheticism*—illusion, phantasmagoria, aura). To put it another way, Benjamin's new conception of history depends on the ideas of ruination and construction whereas his aesthetics depends on the ideas of disintegration and montage. As Hanssen pointed out, emancipation of the artwork from aura is very related to the dehistoricization of history.[17] Benjamin looks for an expression of a real emancipation and freedom in the field of arts: an artwork which is 'non-progressive' (fragmentary, discontinuous) and 'non-auratic' (no magic

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[15] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 253-264.

[16] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 217-252.

[17] Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 9-11.

effect). In Radnóti's words, "Benjamin propagated a new concept of culture and art, but one matched by an adventurous historical method."[18]

The Idea of Progress: A Teleological History

The idea of progress emerged in 17th century Europe through the rapid developments in science. It is in strong contradiction to the classical conceptions of history which depend on either the mythological conception of 'cyclicity' or the theological conception of 'decline' (e.g. the Fall of Man, the legend of Golden Age). The notion of *progress* (Fortschritt, Progressus), on the other hand, was firstly used in the writings of Turgot and developed later by various thinkers such as Hegel and Marx.[19] Turgot's idea of progress depends on the construction of history as a universal history and on the explanation of all intellectual and social acquisitions, or rises and falls, with reference to the idea of scientific progress. For the people who were living in the mythological atmosphere of the ancient world, history was considered as a cyclic succession of identical phases which eternally repeats itself and which has no transformation directed toward a definite goal in the future (the myth of the 'eternal return'). Nevertheless, some primitive reflections of the idea of progress can be found in the works of Greek philosophers. For instance, Xenophanes said, "The gods did not reveal all things to men at the start; but, as time goes on, by searching, they discover more and more." Plato's Book III of *The Laws* depicts humanity's progress from a state of nature to the higher levels of culture, economy,

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[18] Sándor Radnóti, "Benjamin's Dialectic of Art and Society," in *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History,* ed. Gary Smith (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 135.

[19] For a historical and philosophical interpretation of the idea of progress, see Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

and politics. Plato's *The Statesman* also outlines a historical account of the progress of mankind. But we must underline that none of these examples refers to a systematic idea of progress similar to that of the 18th and 19th centuries or any kind of teleology in history.

With the rise of Judaism and Christianity, a conception of linear time and teleological history ('salvation'), with which the ancient men were not familiar, commenced to develop. The foundations of the understanding of linear history and the providence-centric theology of history were laid firstly by Augustine. Augustine influenced all of the Middle Ages, during which the idea of progress was taken up again as a personal duty focused on improving not only the conscience but especially moral, religious and spiritual behavior. According to Thomas Aquinas, "it seems natural to human reason to advance gradually from the imperfect to the perfect."[20] With the emergence of the Enlightenment, the idea of providence was profoundly criticized by the *philosophe*s such as Proudhon, Comte, Condorcet and Turgot, and then ultimately transformed into a progressive philosophy of history via a secular re-definition. The dialectical theology of history, founded around the 5th century by Augustine with reference to the conflict between the *Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Terrena*, was conveyed to a philosophical stage and altered to a teleological and progressive conception of history which was based on the conflict of reason with nature.[21] The precursors of this conception were the enthusiastic supporters of the 'experimental-scientific thought' in the 17th century, as said earlier. For instance, F. Bacon, the

[20] Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas,* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, reprinted 2ª ed. (Westminster [Maryland]: Christian Classics, 1981), vol. 1, I-II, q. 97, a. 1, pp. 489-492.

[21] For more detailed information about the evolution of the concept (*progress*), see Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1949), "Chapter 5: Progress versus Providence," pp. 61-103, and "Chapter 9: Augustine," pp. 160-173.

author of *Novum Organum*, saw experimental knowledge as cumulative and capable of useful employment. Another example: The very title which Descartes first thought of giving to his famous treatise (*Discourse on Method,* 1637) was *Project of a Universal Science Capable of Raising Our Nature to the Maximum Level of Perfection*. As is understood from these examples, the identity of nature and the cumulative character of knowledge became the basis of the theory of human progress.

The French Enlightenment promoted an ideological unquestioning belief in progress, very utopian and abstract, viewed as the driving force in history and the destiny of humanity. In the second half of the 18th century, the golden age of Enlightenment, 'faith in progress' permeated every field and provoked much interest and enthusiasm. It was spread in France by Voltaire, Diderot, Turgot and Condorcet, in Germany by Lessing, Herder and Kant. For the majority of the authors, progress was continuous, homogenous and cumulative (linear vision) and guaranteed by the power of reason. Only a few recognized the alternating cycle of 'progress and decadence' (undulating vision). In modern times, Condorcet's line of thinking, which theorized an experimental science of progress, prevailed. In his "Universal History"[22] and "Perpetual Peace"[23] essays, Kant developed a theory of human progress and a law for human civilizations which depend on an historicist and evolutionary view of humanity. According to Kant, intellectual progress facilitates overcoming the limits and shortcomings of the present and takes humanity toward its ultimate end. The task

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[22] Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose." In *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. H. Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 41-53.

[23] Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. H. Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 93-130.

of practical-theoretical knowledge was to predict and orient destiny, while philosophy strengthened scientific thought and technical capacities with which human beings dominate nature and fulfil their freedom. History, therefore, was a continuous progression toward greater human freedom, while practical-political reason facilitated advancement toward necessary progress.

Dialectic of Spirit: Hegelian Conception of Universal History

The most systematic example of this progressive-universalistic conception of history, which was criticized by Benjamin, was undoubtedly espoused by Hegel. Hegel's teleological philosophy of history has often been viewed as a philosophical version of the Christian idea of providence.[24] In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1837) Hegel emphasized the value of the historical conscience, indicated its directions and meaning, and legitimized the progress of humankind through natural sciences, technology and juridical institutions. These spheres of progress are the same ones indicated by French *philosophe*s, from Turgot to Comte. By inheriting the "Fichtean three-step 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' model,"[25] Hegel's own model begins with an existing element, or thesis, with contradictions inherent in its structure. These contradictions unwittingly create the direct opposite of the thesis, or antithesis, bringing about a period of conflict between the two. The new moment, or synthesis, that emerges from this conflict then discovers its own internal contradictions, and starts the process anew.

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[24] Löwith, *Meaning in History,* p. 54.

[25] Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G.W.F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 215.

The reason Hegelian dialectic is termed 'progressive' is because each new thesis represents an advance over the previous thesis, continually until an endpoint, or final goal, is reached. inheriting the dialectical model from Fichte, Hegel's view of world history represents the manner in which the Spirit develops gradually into its purest form, ultimately recognizing its own essential freedom. For Hegel, "History in general is therefore the development of Spirit in *Time*, as Nature is the development of the Idea in *Space*."[26] The roots of this 'universalist-idealist philosophy of history' trace back to Plato's *Timaeus* ("moving image of eternity" at 37d). A dialectical, teleological and progressive conception of history which was based on the conflict of reason with nature thus virtually defines the meaning of history for Hegel. Hegel aims at reconciling the fundamental differences between philosophy and history. Philosophy deals primarily with 'universals' (rules, meanings, substances) as opposed to history which generally applies itself to 'particulars' (definite periods of change or unrest). Philosophy sees all things as essentially the same (identity, substance); history, on the other hand, engages events as particular products of their time and space (difference, accidence). Hegel, in his philosophy of history, is caught in the middle of this gap. Let me give a brief outline of his argument for a 'universalist-idealist philosophy of history':

1. Spirit is self-conscious reason, or consciously rational, and is the agent of history.
2. Nature is unconscious reason, or rational but not conscious, and then has no history.

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[26] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p. 72.

3. Freedom is self-consciousness of *reason* and self-consciousness is the necessary condition for having a history.
4. History has not only an agent (spirit) but also a purpose or goal which is described in three ways: (i) spirit's *self-consciousness*, (ii) spirit's consciousness of its freedom, (iii) spirit's actualization of its freedom.
5. Since spirit is the agent of history, and its essence is freedom, freedom, the idea of spirit, is the purpose or goal of history.
6. Historically significant occurences display an intelligible progress because spirit is rational and actualizes its freedom in history.
7. Therefore what is rational is actual, what is actual is rational.

Benjamin Against the Idea of Progress: A Critique of the Hegelian Conception of Time

As Adorno points out, this argument inspired "Benjamin's polemic against the coupling of progress and humankind in his theses on the concept of history."[27] This "myth of automatic historical progress"[28], which was created by the Enlightenment *philosophe*s instead of 'providence', has collapsed after the Second World War, and the experiences of totalitarianism and the holocaust undermined many scholars' confidence in progress and the whole idea of modernity. These events seem to support Benjamin's critical position: Since it confirms all the deeds of totalitarian

[27] Theodor W. Adorno, "Progress." In *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History,* ed. Gary Smith (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 85.

[28] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), p. 87.

sovereigns, or "the agents of the World-Spirit,"[29] by assuming that "*their* deeds, *their* words are the best,"[30] *historicism*, or the idea of progress in history, is against the free will (of 'others'). "Great men have formed purposes to satisfy themselves, not others."[31] On the other hand, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, the separation of art from the effects of social reality brings a privileged position in its train for the upper class members. They have their own collections of artworks as private property in their magnificent houses and harvest a political power by exhibiting them to their noble guests. Even in the case of expropriation of those collections (e.g. art museums), *artworks* turn into the indicators of, and *art* turns into the symbol of, unjust class differences. Therefore, *aestheticism* is against free society.

First of all, for Benjamin, "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]."[32] Hence he neither gives an account of history as bygone events nor evaluates history in an empty schema of time. Beyond these two, he deals with history by ascribing the "now" a central role. The events in history should be understood by reconfigurating them in accordance with the present in every new period, because "the *present*, . . . as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgment …"[33] This idea (recognition of the meaning and unity of the past, only in the present, through the eye-glasses of *Now*) is dealt with in a mythical way in Thesis IX:

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[29] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* p. 31.

[30] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* p. 30.

[31] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* p. 30.

[32] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 261.

[33] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 263 [italics are mine].

> *My wing is ready for flight,*
> *I would like to turn back.*
> *If I stayed timeless time,*
> *I would have little luck.*
> —Gerhard Scholem, "Angelic Greetings"

> A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. *His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.* The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[34]

At this point, we should emphasize that even though Benjamin challenges Hegel's conception of history, he also inherited many essential elements from Hegel. For instance, his *Angelus Novus* whose "face is turned toward the past," is another version of Hegel's *Owl of Minerva* which "takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering":

> A further word on the subject of *issuing instructions* on how the world ought to be: philosophy, at any rate, always comes too late to perform this function. As the *thought* of the world, it appears only at the time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its complete state. This lesson of the concept is necessarily also apparent from history, namely that it is only when actuality has reached maturity that the ideal appears opposite the real and reconstructs this real world, which it has grasped in its substance, in the shape of an intellectual realm. When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; *the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.*[35]

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[34] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 257-258 [italics are mine].

[35] G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 23 [italics are mine].

After reading Thesis IX, one can think that Benjamin's conception of history seems to accept linearity rather than cyclicity. He says in Thesis V, "the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again."[36] Then, for Benjamin, time is not a self-repeating cyclical process. Nevertheless, it would not be accurate to say that he argues for a linear conception of time with reference to his former sentence, since in a linear conception of time, event-A comes before event-B and it is not true to claim that there is a gap between these two events. In such a case, A triggers off B, namely it is the cause, or at least one of the causes, of B. In short, the linear conception of time has a tendency to construct a causal relation between historical events. On the other hand, Benjamin severely rejects such an understanding. To him, the events actualized in history are independent from each other just like Leibniz's monads; therefore not totality but fragmentary structure is at work in history. He says in Thesis XVII, "Materialistic historiography … is based on a constructive principle. … A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad."[37]

Of course Benjamin is not a sophist. Nevertheless he adopts an antifoundationalist position about historical knowledge. Similar to Gorgias' (5th century BC) argument about being and non-being, Benjamin thinks our knowledge about history is always incomplete and contingent upon some questionable assertion. After reading the "Theses", one can easily think that for Benjamin, (i) a causation between historical events does not exist, and (ii) if it does exist, we cannot know it, and (iii) if it does exist and we can know it, we cannot communicate it, namely we cannot infer anything from a causal relation between past-event-A and past-event-B

[36] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 255.

[37] Benjamin, "Theses," pp. 262-263.

about a possible causal relation between present-event-C and a probable future-event-D.

A problem emerges at this point: Is Benjamin's approach regarding causation in historical events an expression of an ontological distinction, or an epistemological one? To put it another way, does Benjamin want to say that "historical events are actually and certainly disjointed", or that "since we cannot be the eyewitnesses of the whole history, as historical subjects, we cannot know the true nature of the relations between the historical events"? The answer is concealed in Benjamin's following sentence: "A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad."[38] That means, a historical materialist does not question whether there is causation between events or even though there is, it is unknowable as well what kind of causation there is. Or even though there is a causal relation between event-A and event-B, we cannot derive a general law of causality from that relation-C since "the 'causal' relations a researcher in a given field has to establish for that field should not be defined in terms of a general concept or law of causality, but rather must be 'specific' to every particular field."[39]

As is seen, Benjamin adopts an agnostic attitude towards causation in the context of history. Briefly speaking, Benjamin has a sceptical attitude towards causation in history which is parallel to Hume's scepticism towards causation in nature. If it is unknowable to us whether there is causation between historical events, and even though there is, it is unknowable as well what kind of causation it is, then it would be ridiculous to speak of progress in history. Indeed, the idea of progress

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[38] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 263.

[39] Walter Benjamin, "N: Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress." In *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History,* ed. Gary Smith (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 44.

consists of a speculative and unjustifiable claim. Benjamin opposes the idea of progress from the very beginning point: "The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself."[40] For Benjamin, there is no teleological causation and no necessary linear continuity in history. Here we must also add that Benjamin has "no belief in periods of decline", so he rejects the idea of decline improved by Spengler and Toynbee as well as the idea of progress. To him, "there are no periods of decline (*Verfallszeiten*)."[41] This is so, because 'progress' and 'decline' depend on the same hypothesis—"there is causality in history"—therefore, "overcoming the concept of 'progress' and the concept of 'period of decline' are two sides of one and the same thing."[42] He argues that there are only disjointed events or torn 'images', we construct the relations dialectically between events (images) according to the 'actual now', and realize the revolutionary transformations in 'possible now' in the light of those events and as a result of the relations we constructed between those events. Since the *principium contradictionis* is not the principle that governs history, "history itself seems to do away with philosophy's old conceptual games, and transform concepts into images which spoil the promise of security offered by logic: identity and the absence of contradiction."[43]

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[40] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 261.

[41] Benjamin, "N: Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," p. 44.

[42] Benjamin, "N: Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," p. 48.

[43] Rolf Tiedemann, "Historical Materialism or Political Messianism? An Interpretation of the Thesis 'on the Concept of History'." In *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History,* ed. Gary Smith (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 176.

As Buck-Morss points out, "the images are not subjective impressions, but objective expressions."[44] The relations between them, on the other hand, are *subjective constructions* for exploring the possibilities, or other contingencies, of 'now'. Benjamin's 'now' is a Messianic now and it is a Messianic gate which opens to revolution because "every second of time was the strait gate through which Messiah might enter."[45] As is understood from this last sentence of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History", Benjamin's historical subject is not a passive one who postpones the revolution and relinquishes every amelioration to Messiah who will come in an unknown future. Rather, his historical subject is one who makes great efforts for the revolution waiting for Messiah right 'now' and every moment. Benjamin declares the basic principle of historical materialism to be "not progress, but actualization."[46] The idea of progress legitimizes the unjust current situation by regarding it as a phase in a long historical process—Now is the inevitable *effect* of Past, and merely a passive circle between Past and Future in the temporal chain of history. The *telos*, or goal, of history resides in the unknown Future, and Now certainly can be sacrificed to the actualization of that goal in the Future.

Benjamin's Messianic reinterpretation of 'historical materialism' was strongly attacked by Gershom Gerhard Scholem, a scholar of Jewish mysticism. Scholem made critical remarks on Benjamin's intellectual position and described Benjamin's 'distorted' picture of historical materialism as "self-deception", and came to the conclusion that Benjamin "would not be the last but perhaps the *most*

[44] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p. 27.

[45] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 264.

[46] Benjamin, "N: Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," p. 47.

incomprehensible victim of the confusion between religion and politics."[47] He argued that Benjamin cannot take any place among materialists with his eclectic philosophy which shuttled between revolution and revelation: "In their own camp the materialist cannot use you, because there the purely abstract identification of your spheres is bound to collapse at the first steps toward the center."[48]

Actually, there is an important issue which differentiates Benjamin from both Marx and the orthodox Marxist tradition. Hegel was a philosophical idealist who believed that we live in a world of appearances, and true reality is an ideal (Reason vs. Nature). Marx accepted this notion of the dialectic, but rejected Hegel's idealism because he did not accept that the material world hides from us the 'real' world of the ideal; on the contrary, he thought that historically and socially specific ideologies prevented people from seeing the material conditions of their lives clearly (Material World vs. Ideology). As Rockmore points out, even though Marx inverted Hegel's philosophical system and adapted Hegel's metaphysical dialectic of history to a materialist framework, "like Hegel, Marx is concerned with progress."[49] In other words, he continued and preserved the idea that history dialectically progresses through the clash of opposing forces, and argued that his dialectical model really works in history.[50] He explains his model of historical materialism in the *Capital*:

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[47] Gershom Scholem, "Correspondence Concerning Historical Materialism: Gerhard Scholem to Walter Benjamin, Jericho, March 30, 1931." In *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship,* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: New York Review Books, 2001), p. 288.

[48] Scholem, "Correspondence Concerning Historical Materialism: Gerhard Scholem to Walter Benjamin, Jericho, March 30, 1931," p. 287.

[49] Tom Rockmore, *Marx After Marxism: The Philosophy of Karl Marx* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 170.

[50] A teleological and progressive picture is exactly true for Marx's early writings. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, he speaks of "the goal of … historical movement" (p. 99). In *Society and Economy in History*, he says, "the social history of men is never anything but the history of their individual development, whether they are conscious of it or not" (p. 137). In *The German Ideology*, after explaining communism as "the *real*

> My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, *i.e.*, the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.[51]

Of course, we cannot reduce Marx's argument to an 'automatic progress' in which one mode of production necessarily leads to another, in a linear movement of law-governed progress by historical stages. But we should also keep in mind that human history, for Marx, is not a probabilistic chaos, but a process governed by *necessary* relations of cause and effect which are knowable, and to some extent at least predictable. Marx considers those relations to be knowable because human beings created and perpetuated them, and because human beings are capable of understanding themselves and their relations sufficiently to change them consciously. That's why we are justified in saying that Marx has a progressive understanding of history.

In his reinterpretation of historical materialism, Benjamin rejects any necessary/causal relation between historical events. For him, since the *principium contradictionis* is not the principle that governs history, we cannot treat history as a logical process similar to the 'temporality of thinking' and grasp the historical events as premises of a deductive reasoning. If the historical events are not premises of an argument, then we cannot derive any conclusion from the earlier events because

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movement which abolishes the present state of things," he adds, "[t]he conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence" (p. 162); for him, "history does not end by being resolved into 'self-consciousness' as 'spirit of the spirit,' but … in it at each stage there is found a material result [as opposed to the Hegelian picture]" (p. 164). Lastly, he refers to "revolution" as "the driving force of history" (p. 164). See Robert C. Tucker, ed. *The Marx-Engels Reader,* 2nd ed. (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978).

[51] Karl Marx, "Capital, Volume One." In *The Marx-Engels Reader,* p. 301.

there are no *necessary* relations of cause and effect between them. Even though there is causation between historical events, thinks Benjamin, it is unknowable to us what kind of causation it is. Although human beings self-consciously create and perpetuate their relations, it does not necessarily follow that they can know the causal relations between events. Such an approach neglects the *sui generis* structure of the human will and regards the individuals as identicals. However, human beings are not controlled by the same universal mind or cannot be reduced to their class identities. Even though one can understand himself sufficiently this does not guarantee that he can also sufficiently understand others and explain his relations to them sufficiently. In conclusion, Marx's epistemic claim concerning the causal relations in history is weak. As a result, Benjamin "could no longer be convinced [by the Marxist explanation] that every historical event derives from another by necessity and that all events together constitute a progressive motion."[52]

Scholem holds the view that if a person denies the basic principles of an idea, then he or she cannot be a representative of that idea. Therefore, there is no necessity to regard Benjamin as a materialist thinker: "I deny completely that there has been anything that, as you claim in your letter to Rychner, has led you to apply materialistic thought, to which your production really makes no genuine contribution; I also fully understand that you have arrived at the self-deception that the introduction into metaphysics of a certain slant and terminology—in which there is reference to classes and capitalism but hardly their opposite—make your reflections materialistic."[53]

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[52] Tiedemann, "Historical Materialism or Political Messianism?" p. 177.

[53] Scholem, "Correspondence Concerning Historical Materialism: Gerhard Scholem to Walter Benjamin, Jericho, March 30, 1931," pp. 287-288.

Benjamin inverted Marx, and claimed that there is no dialectical model working in history but we demand such models in order to understand and interpret history which is constituted by separated events between which no causal connection exists. Just as Marx says, "My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite,"[54] Benjamin's *not concept- but image-oriented dialectic* is also not only different from the Marxian, but is its direct opposite. Marx believed in 'necessary relations of cause and effect' in history, which is rejected by Benjamin: what rules in history, for the critical thinker, is not necessity but 'contingency'. But this fact does not justify Scholem's view. Benjamin redefined historical materialism and transformed Marx's objectivist model into a subjectivist one.[55] For him, the idea of progress is nothing but a reductionist construction from a subjective point of view. As S. H. Rigby explains, Marxist historiography has two poles, pluralism versus reductionism:

> … pluralism is an insoluble problem for any brand of Marxism which rejects reductionism [e.g. historical event A_1 is the cause of historical event B_1 – C.A.] and which seeks to explain historical change in terms of the interaction of a variety of historical forces [e.g. the interactions of the historical events A_1, A_2, A_3, A_4, … A_n are the causes of historical event B_1 – C.A.]. As philosophers in the tradition of John Stuart Mill have argued, it is impossible to claim an objective explanatory primacy for any of the multiple factors which bring about a particular event. Causes have an objective existence in the real world, but which we choose to emphasize and which we take as given will largely depend upon our own subjective purposes, upon the knowledge which we think we can assume on the part of our audience, or on some new piece of the historical jigsaw which we have identified and to which we wish to draw attention.[56]

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[54] Marx, "Capital, Volume One," p. 301.

[55] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 263.

[56] S. H. Rigby, "Marxist Historiography." In *Companion to Historiography,* ed. Michael Bentley (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 915.

According to this picture, Benjamin seems to adopt a pluralist historiographical tendency to avoid reductionism. We put independent events (Benjamin names them 'images') in a dialectical order just to reconstruct today and to make revolution possible through struggle and comprehension of the unnecessity (or contingency) of the unjust system. Those events inherently stand as a constellation or as Leibniz's monads.[57] We demand history for a 'revolution', which is not the glorious fulfillment of history but a messianic break-out from the catastrophic progress. But it is also true that history is meaningful only in terms of its power to support a revolution. Various dialectical models of history can be created in accordance with the conditions of different periods; and it should be emphasized that each model, as the materialistic historiography adopted, "is based on a constructive principle."[58] The 'real' relations of events can be exactly and accurately known only by Messiah; and he will put every dialectical image (historical event) in its true place. Our job is to be ready as if Messiah appears at this moment ('Now') and produce our dialectical models that make revolution possible. Briefly speaking, Benjamin constructs a new historical conception through the combination and elaboration of parts of the Platonic theory of Ideas, the Hegelian philosophy of history, and the Leibnizian monad.

Benjamin is undoubtedly coherent in transferring the materialist history into a subjective realm. For the idea of progress legitimizes the period in which fascism prevails as a certain stage of historical progress and even regards it as a norm.[59] This is a passive attitude which postpones the revolution to an unknown future, and definitely a very foolish fatalism. Moreover, historical experience demonstrates to us

[57] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 263.

[58] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 262.

[59] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 257.

that the acceptance of the myth of progress brought numerous unjust acts directed to both nature and human beings. The ideology of progress that developed in the period of Europe between 1450 and 1750 underpins human mastery and domination over nature and over ‘other’ human beings (e.g. the civilizing mission of the ‘noble’ Westerners in the colonial period). The eminent German biologist Ernst Haeckel, who provided the Nazi biopolicies, had biological deterministic ideas such as that lower races “such as the Vedahs or Australian Negroes—are psychologically nearer to the mammals—apes and dogs—than to the civilized European” and that “therefore [we must] assign a totally different value to their lives.”[60] He was also supporting a “morality” of natural selection in order to *correct the errors* in human society through being inspired by social Darwinism. As a result, the Jewish people were accused, by him, of polluting the breeding pool. In this way, in the 1920s, concrete programs of euthanasia, sterilization, and other methods of artificial selection were proposed by very respected scholars to “revitalize the genepool” (a kind of racial progress).[61] These facts find their excellent depiction in Benjamin’s famous sentence: “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”[62]

According to the Hegelian idea of progress, a totalitarian sovereign can be regarded as a genius who grasped the goal of history and treated in accordance with that direction: “They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their

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[60] Cited in Gisela Kaplan and Lesley J. Rogers, “Race and Gender Fallacies: The Paucity of Biological Determinist Explanations of Difference.” In *The Gender and Science Reader,* ed. Muriel Lederman and Ingrid Bartsch (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 329 from G.J. Stein, “Biological Science and the Roots of Nazism,” *American Scientist* (January-February 1988), pp. 50-57.

[61] Kaplan and Rogers, “Race and Gender Fallacies,” p. 330.

[62] Benjamin, “Theses,” p. 256.

purposes and vocation, not from the calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order, but from a concealed fount."[63] Since these Geistic heroes, who are directed to the goal of history on their horses, are "the agents of the World-Spirit,"[64] their privileged status with respect to other people and all of their deeds can be seen as legitimate, so they cannot be criticized. Their doings are morality itself, because only they can know through foresight what is good and what is bad: "World-historical men—the Heroes of an epoch—must, therefore, be recognized as its clear-sighted ones; *their* deeds, *their* words are the best of that time. Great men have formed purposes to satisfy themselves, not others."[65] What all these sentences whisper to us is: Even though some commentators, such as Houlgate, rejects the view that "Hegel's political philosophy is a direct precursor of corporate fascism and ... proto-Hitlerian German nationalism" by reminding us that "the concept of freedom lies at the heart of Hegel's philosophy", I think the reality is that the idea of progress can serve to fascism rather than to a liberatory practice of revolution.[66] To put it another way, "fascism is the political child of Hegelian dialectics."[67] Benjamin constructs a counter-argument against the Hegelian conception of history, the outline of which is as follows:

1. Fascism is at work at *this* moment of history (here, *this* refers to the epoch of

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[63] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* p. 30.

[64] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* p. 31.

[65] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History,* p. 30.

[66] Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth, and History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 181-182.

[67] Abdul Hameed Siddiqui, *A Philosophical Interpretation of History* (Lahore: Kazi Publications, 1979), p. 71.

the Third Reich, namely the years from 1933 to 1945) and is both irrational and against freedom.

2. If freedom is the essence and goal of the consciously rational spirit, and if there is a moment (Nazi period) in history in which unfreedom and irrationality are actualized, then since it is impossible to think an entity which exists without its essence, the spirit, as the agent of history, does not exist.
3. Since the spirit is prior to its goal, then it would be absurd to speak of the goal of the spirit unless the spirit firstly[68] exists. That is, there is no purposefulness in history.
4. Progress necessitates rationality and purposefulness, and because there is no rationality and purposefulness in history, progress is just a myth.
5. Therefore it is not true that what is rational is actual, what is actual is rational.
6. Instead, the true dictum is: What is actual is irrational, what is rational is *possible*!

In conclusion, for Benjamin, history is not a river which gradually progresses towards a certain goal; it has no purpose. A history progressing in the direction of a purpose and a past which necessarily prepares today makes a subject who participates in history by his acts passive. History must be understood not as a total structure which prepares today in a deterministic way and includes purposefulness, but as being in a permanent state of emergency, where identities emerge only through isolated and contingent acts of struggle. History is not a process of progress but a 'constellation' of danger constituted by fragmentary images which were dialectically reconfigured by the active historical subject in order to make the

[68] This word ("firstly") should be understood with reference to the priority of the necessary condition and not to any kind of temporality.

revolution possible at the moment ('Now').[69] That's why Benjamin, from a particularistic-realistic point of view, was profoundly criticizing the Hegelian universalistic-idealistic view of history which regards the "development of the history of the world" as a "rational process."[70] If the development of history is an intelligible, rational and teleological process, then, for Hegel, it would not be inaccurate to claim that "What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational."[71]

History as Dialectical Images: The Art of Film as the Pattern of Benjamin's Philosophy of History

Benjamin, under the fascist sway of Hitler, was exclaiming the anti-thetical aphorism: "What is actual is irrational and what is rational is possible!" Let us interprete this alternative dictum: (i) *What is actual is irrational:* Fascism is irrational and if there were a necessary accord between reality and rationality, then *Auschwitz* could not exist. (ii) *What is rational is possible:* Even though a rational process is not at work at this moment, it is possible for it to be in the future—and we can remember that possibility through the art of film. That is: in contrary to Plato's opposition to the art of painting, the art of film, for Benjamin himself, does not

[69] As Eagleton points out, Benjamin's concept of *constellation* "is perhaps the most strikingly original attempt in the modern period to break with traditional versions of totality. It represents a determined resistance to the more paranoid forms of totalizing thought on the part of thinkers who nevertheless set their faces against any mere empiricist celebration of the fragment. By revolutionizing the relations between part and whole, the constellation strikes at the very heart of the traditional aesthetic paradigm, in which the specificity of the detail is allowed no genuine resistance to the organizing power of the totality." See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1990), p. 330.

[70] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), vol. 3, § 13.

[71] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* p. 20.

present us a faint copy of this world, but rather a dynamic Form which has not been actualized in the world yet. And the subversive truth of that Form "resides in its capacity to create a world which has no actuality."[72] As for the assertion that film has an illusory power, it should be emphasized that the images it projects are not straightforward illusions since film as a technological art is itself alienated from an alienated social order—in Marxian terms, "negation of the negation."[73] It is only through 'illusion' and 'alienation effect'[74] that technological art opens the established

[72] David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 85.

[73] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844." In *The Marx-Engels Reader,* p. 99; Herbert Marcuse, "The Foundations of Historical Materialism." In *Essential Marcuse: Selected Writings of Philosopher and Social Critic Herbert Marcuse,* ed. Andrew Feenberg (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2007), pp. 72-114.

[74] The notion of 'alienation' was inherited by Marx from the thinkers such as Hegel, Feuerbach and Moses Hess. Feuerbach uses this term in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) and argues that the idea of God posed by the spiritualistic religion has alienated all the properties of human being since the nature of man is not spiritual but sensuous. On the other hand, Hegel defines this term as the self-objectification of the Spirit in history. To put it another way, for Hegel, man is self-alienated God, whereas for Feuerbach, God is self-alienated man. Marx's theory of alienation principally refers to some estrangement (*Entfremdung*) between persons and their human nature. According to Marx, when people's being does not correspond to their essence they are alienated, while self-actualisation (the opposite of alienation) is the extent to which the human being as species being, as a human being, has become himself and grasped himself. At this point, the notion of *Gattungswesen*, human essence/nature or species being, should be defined in terms of Marx's use. With this notion, Marx mainly refers to human capacities, namely the productive or essential powers. Marx is also a sensualist like Feuerbach, and his theory of alienation is compatible with Moses Hess', who elucidates the alienation of human essence through the sense of 'having'. Private property restrains the fountain of creativity in arts and directs it into the crude *sense of having* and evaluates a work of art in terms of its exchange value, and through this way, it alienates rather than constitutes the productivity of the artist. But art should not be judged solely by its production of mercantile value because economic profit cannot be the criterion or measure of the productivity in arts. At this point, Benjamin sees a positive aspect in the 'alienation effect'. In order to emancipate from one's self-alienation in a capitalist society, the only thing we need is the 'alienation of the alienation'. Technically reproducible artwork can contribute to the emancipation from the crude *sense of having*—no cultural capital without unique original; no priviliged status for its possessor; accessible to all, therefore no symbol of class difference.

reality to alternative visions and possibilities.[75] The essential role of technological art is to close the gap between art and reality/life.

For Hegel, "the ultimate aim and the business of philosophy is to reconcile thought or the Concept (*Begriff*) with reality."[76] For Benjamin, on the other hand, it would be more accurate to say that "the ultimate aim and the business of *critical* philosophy is to reconcile reality with thought or the Concept (*Begriff*)." According to Benjamin, in this reconciliation, the most active role will be that of the seventh art—*cinema*, or the revolutionary art of dialectical images! As Gilgen explains, Benjamin gives full credit to cinema while constituting his own philosophy of history: "The history Benjamin has in mind relies on both the visuality and the tactility of a filmic image rather than the discursivity of narrative which, of necessity, would depend on voluntary—that is, willful, selective, and purely subjective—memory."[77] His philosophy of history also has a deep impact on his aesthetic views: that is, interdependence of philosophy of art and philosophy of history.

Benjamin's conception of history "is intimately linked to that of montage."[78] For Benjamin, 'montage' is a key term in understanding the very notion of history because history depends partly on 'what occurred' and partly on 'what we are interested in'. Even though events and actions happened in the past, organizing them into a narrative inevitably imposes an interpretive structure on them that depends inherently on the observer's interests. Since there is no such thing as 'perspective-

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[75] Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory,* p. 86.

[76] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* vol. 3, p. 545. *"Begriff"* is translated as "Concept" rather than "Notion."

[77] Peter Gilgen, "History After Film." In *Mapping Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Digital Age,* ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Michael Marrinan (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 61.

[78] Benjamin, "N: Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," p. 45.

free history', it would not be a bold claim that history is constructed by historical interpretation through the montage principle. According to Benjamin, on the way that goes to the realization of historical materialism, the first stop will be "to carry the montage principle over into history."[79] The montage principle emphasizes the expressive or performative aspects of our relationship to the past in addition to the cognitive one and supports the idea of dialectical images. Benjamin defines the notion of 'dialectical images' as "constellations of alienated things and thorough-going meaning, pausing a moment in the undifferetiation of death".[80] For him, "an image is that in which the Then (*das Gewesene*) and the Now (*das Jetzt*) come into a constellation like a flash of lightning. In other words: an image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of the Then to the Now is dialectical: not of a temporal, but of an imagistic nature."[81] Benjamin considers his method as dialectical, but it is not a similar dialectic to that of Hegel. In the place of the progress of history he puts the actualization of an image. Instead of the relation between past (*Vergangenheit*) and present (*Gegenwart*) he talks about the what-has-been (*Gewesene*) and the now-time (*Jetztzeit*). While the former establishes a pure time relation, the latter establishes a dialectical one: not of timely but of visual nature. Instead of a phenomenological entity (*Wesenheit*) he introduces images with an 'historical index' that defines the time at which they are *readable*. Film is a form of art in which all of these components of Benjamin's new historical conception are included.

[79] Benjamin, "N: Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," p. 48.

[80] Benjamin, "N: Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," pp. 54-55.

[81] Benjamin, "N: Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," pp. 49, 50.

Cinema is favourable for taking a position against the conception of progressive and linear time. There is neither temporal nor spatial continuity in cinema. Different spaces can be arranged in film, and different time slices can also cluster. A linear continuity is not necessary in the spatial assemblage just as a progressive time is not in the temporal assemblage. Just as in Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000), we can watch the flow of the events from the end back to the beginning. As for spatial discontinuity, in the case of the adjoining pieces of space S_1, S_2, S_3, … S_n, it is necessary to visit S_2 while going from S_1 to S_3. We cannot bounce from one piece of space to the other which is not near. On the other hand, film enables us to do this; we can go around separate pieces of space through bouncing. A scene is not necessarily tied to the next one with a spatial continuity since "the camera that presents the performance of the film actor to the public need not respect the performance as an integral whole."[82] The montage appears at this point. The temporal discontinuity shows itself not only in the montage process but also in the shooting phase. "A sequence of separate shootings" can independently be produced in different times: "The stage actor identifies himself with the character of his role. The film actor very often is denied this opportunity. His creation is by no means all of a piece; it is composed of many separate performances."[83] One of the classic examples of temporal discontinuity is Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* (1960) in which jump cuts, opening sequences with close-ups rather than establishing shots, and ellipses in narrative continuity were used to produce a sense of discontinuity and disorientation in the spectator.

[82] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 228.

[83] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 230.

This temporal bouncing and capacity of circulating independently among different images has a key importance for Benjamin. Thought and imagination can do this bouncing but the continuity in the intuition of space is at variance with it. Kant says in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "Space is not a discursive or, as is said, general concept of relations of things in general, but a pure intuition. For, first, one can only represent a single space, and if one speaks of many spaces, one understands by that only parts of one and the same unique space. And these parts cannot as it were precede the single all-encompassing space as its components (from which its composition would be possible), but rather are only thought in it."[84] For Kant, a similar continuity can be seen in 'time' as well: "Time is no discursive or, as one calls it, general concept, but a pure form of sensible intuition. Different times are only parts of one and the same time."[85]

While flashbacks create temporal bouncings back, non-chronological arrangings and tieings between the time slices of the past are possible thanks to the technique of montage. This gives us the opportunity to see the embodiment of intellectual abstraction which we make by breaking time and space into pieces, in the 'mirror' (film screen) positioned in the phenomenal world. Such an experience has a converting influence on the perception of space and time. Hence, the new radical possibilities ensured by film undercut the Kantian conception of 'continuous space-time'. Here, it would not be inaccurate to say that Kant's conception of continuous time constitutes the bases of his universalist view of history. The art of film offers us alternative means for a new conception of history against the conception of history

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[84] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 175 [A24-25/B39].

[85] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* p. 179 [A31-32/B47].

based on continuity and progress. Film, which has a capacity to construct some kind of visual history, can even go further and organize our relation to the past in a way: it empowers today's practices to direct its forces to a future project that interrupts the supposedly necessary progress. Instead of a progress that is nothing else than always more of the same, it opens a world in which maybe the "not-yet" of the past that Ernst Bloch thought about can find a place of its realization. To produce history in dialectical time-images opens a possibility to conceptualize a history from the perspective of a practice that is based on the negation of the capitalist progress that only seems to be without alternative. The re-assembly of the relation between past and present helps make film a machine embodying the world rather than representing the scientist's so-called 'objective' gaze on things. Based on past events that definitely vanished, history becomes a practice of appropriation of the present rather than a representation of "how it really was".

In addition, film has a power to remind the spectator that other contingent situations can be possible in the current conditions. It achieves the capacity to give this message through the realization of the surrealist technique of montage and the alienation effect of this technique. Benjamin sees a crucial force of negation in the montage technique of film which has a paralel function with the principle of interruption which governs Brecht's epic theater. In epic theater the interruption of the action results in what Brecht called the 'alienation effect' (*Verfremdungseffekt*).[86] Drama promotes an 'illusion of reality' through representing the ordinary conditions of life in a natural way and this gives rise to *katharsis*: that is, the audience cannot examine his real life from a critical point of view. This is the problem of mimetic understanding of art: the mimetic artwork, in the Platonic sense, only affirms the

[86] Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (California; London: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 189-190.

current conditions of the world through universalizing the particular facts and aims to convince the people in a way that what exists is also what should be. Therefore, such an art practice only produces tautologies and politically this may legitimize the current unjust situation. Therefore, in order to reconstruct art practices in a critical way, we must present the social conditions which underlie human action in a non-linear, unnatural, strange or unfamiliar way. We may critically distance the audience from the representations exposed through such interruptions. Benjamin thinks that the montage principle in film also creates distancing effects through interruptions and alienation effects which include the negation of the negation—that is, alienation of the spectator through the shock effect from an alienated society: "The spectator's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film, which, like all shocks, should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind."[87] In this respect, film is not a means of "katharsis" in the Aristotelian sense, or a "day-dream" in the Freudian sense; but rather it is a surrealist "*in-between* situation" between sleep and vigilance. Film is neither entirely thought, emotion or imagination as in literature, nor does it become actual purely in the physical world as in the plastic arts—it provides us an 'optic space' (visual but intangible) in addition to the 'haptic space' (visual and tangible). It bestows on us a third eye in the intersecting point of these two worlds. "The dialectical image is a lightning flash."[88] Film is the light which appears as a "profane illumination" where these two worlds, which have been considered as opposites, conflict—the light of the dialectical images reflecting on the film screen!

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[87] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 238.

[88] Benjamin, "N: Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," p. 64.

CHAPTER 3

THE SPATIAL BASES OF BENJAMIN'S PHILOSOPHY OF FILM: A NEW CONCEPTION OF 'ART'

The Enlightenment was mainly based on the idea of 'humanity' and was aiming to liberate human beings from any kind of suppression. According to this idea, reason and the senses were under the threat of religious and superstitious themes, and they should be emancipated from those metaphysical chains for a real freedom. The roots of the idea of the 'liberation of reason' goes back to the scientific revolution in the 17th century through which secularism began to spread in Europe and gave rise to a radical change in the understanding of rationality in the 1700s that excluded faith. This exclusion of faith was the ideal for reason itself and could only be achieved through *science*. This new epistemological idea was very strict with the scholastics of the medieval times since they gave credit to both reason and faith. Seeing and thinking for yourself and drawing on the evidence of the five senses were central to the Enlightenment mindset. Therefore, empiricism took a crucial role in establishing knowledge on firm foundations rather than blindly following authority, convention, tradition and prejudice. The ideal for the senses, on the other hand, was an emancipation from their ascetic chains and such a liberation could only be achieved through *art*. Both reason and senses should be based on 'man' (anthropocentrism) rather than *religion* (faith in God) to improve man and his environment and to make the world a better place through the sciences and the arts.

The Idea of Autonomy: Art for Art's Sake

The first universal conception—'liberation of reason via science'—gave birth to *scientism* (faith in science), whereas the second one—'liberation of senses via art'—triggered *aestheticism* (faith in art). These two ideas conceive science and art as 'monad's, and therefore they reject any interaction with the social. The idea of the 'autonomy of science', which is directly related to the ideological heritage of scientism, explains the scientific developments merely with reference to science's inner dynamics and gives no credit to social effects in this process. After the 1970s, sociologists of knowledge and sociologists of science began to question the processes of production of scientific knowledge and the relations between the inner dynamics of science and social influences. As a consequence of this period, the autonomy of science is regarded as a positivist myth and strongly criticized by the social constructivists such as Bloor,[89] Latour & Woolgar,[90] and Shapin and Schaffer.[91] The idea of the 'autonomy of art', on the other hand, was developed from Kant's view explained in the *Third Critique* that art can only be judged by its own criteria and not by anything external to it. This approach to art was firstly formulated in 1832 by the French writer Théophile Gautier as the doctrine *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake). Briefly speaking, this doctrine holds the view that

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[89] David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976); Bloor, "The Strengths of the Strong Programme," *Philosophy of Social Sciences* 11 (1981), pp. 199-213.

[90] Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts,* 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[91] Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

(i) 'art' is an end in itself: it does not need to have any moral, religious, political, or educational purpose, and it is divorced from any didactic, moral or utilitarian function.

(ii) the 'artist' has nothing to do with the expectations and demands of people: if he or she takes notice of what other people would like to see or hear, and tries to supply the demand, he or she ceases to be an artist, and becomes a craftsman or tradesman;

(iii) the 'artwork' is an isolated phenomenon: it is 'autotelic' (complete in itself, inner-directed, self-motivated), namely is governed by its own internal laws of stylistic development rather than by human impulse; thus, it floats in some rarefied, ideal Platonic zone.

This idea, which rejects any kind of interaction with the materialistic world and the mundane affairs of ordinary people, was deeply criticised by the Frankfurt School members such as Adorno,[92] Marcuse,[93] and Benjamin.[94] Before the age of Intellectual Revolution (Renaissance and the Enlightenment), the work of art was at

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[92] Adorno says in his letter to Benjamin (London, 18 March 1936), "There is no one who will agree with you more than I when you defend kitsch cinema against the quality film; but *l'art pour l'art* needs just as much defending . . ." Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940,* ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 129. Nevertheless, he indirectly argues for the social basis of art in his *Aesthetic Theory* (1997): "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist" (p. 1). He rejects an isolated notion of art: "Art perceived strictly aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived" (p. 6). Adorno believes in the Janus faces of art and explains "art's double character as both autonomous and *fait social*" (p. 5). He formulates this double character in a critical way: "Art is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it" (p. 8). Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[93] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

[94] Benjamin, "The Work of Art."

the disposal of religion, namely the ritual function was one of its main characteristics—that ritual function was related to its aura.[95] This characteristic was secularized after the Intellectual Revolution through the negative theology of art, that is the doctrine *l'art pour l'art*. In the Enlightenment age, art was re-organized as a secular religion, museums and exhibitions as new temples, and auratic artworks as new ritual objects which bring a privileged position, social status and political power for their owners through the cultural and symbolic capital.[96] The Enlightenment ideas on art and the creative process were deeply influenced by the veneration for reason, empiricism and the classics. Art should be a universal expression of knowable, rational and controllable through which passions are shaped into form in accordance with reason. Then an artwork should depict the Truth just like science, but in its own way; thus, it should reflect naturalism instead of supernaturalism, the communicable instead of the mystical. The job of the artist, on the other hand, was conceived of as the imitation of nature. It was a generally shared idea among Enlightenment *philosophe*s that perfection in art could only be achieved through well-established rules—noble simplicity, balance, symmetry, broad, unified light effects and a prominent, hierarchical positioning of the main figures—derived from the classics and empirical reason. These rules were regarded as the 'ornament of reason' and applied by the great artists of the eighteenth century. For instance, the busts of sculptors such as Étienne Maurice Falconet and Jean-Antoine Houdon, and the paintings of the masters such as Jean-Antoine Watteau, Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Jean-Baptiste Greuze were the perfect examples of naturalism or realism in art.

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[95] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," pp. 223-224.

[96] Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), see especially "Part IV: The Apotheosis of Art".

As Snyder explains, "the theory of autonomous art—of art that gives itself its own formative principles—*apparently* releases art from ritual and does so by establishing its own, independent domain, with its own, critical vocabulary—the lexicon that includes 'creativity, genius, external value and style, form and content' [citation from Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften,* I, p. 435]. The older theology demanded veneration for the objects of art by assigning their value to a higher realm. The new theology derives eternal value from independence of any other realm. The categories of artistic criticism and evaluation become internal to art itself and ultimately find their justification in the theory of the Kunstwollen."[97] In short, if art should be a universal expression of the Truth, which is an Enlightenment ideal, then it must reflect what *is* rather than what *ought to be*. This is the general explanation of *l'art pour l'art* and the justification for *mimesis*.

Dialectic of Art and Society: Against the Autonomous and Crude Marxist Conceptions of Art

According to Benjamin, since those who defend the idea of *l'art pour l'art* oppose interaction of artistic activity with 'life' and exclude the social influences from the aesthetic realm, they were inevitably alienated to themselves. And, during the first half of the twentieth century, the self-alienation of them had "reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic."[98] Apparently

[97] Joel Snyder, "Benjamin on Reproducibility and Aura: A Reading of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility'." In *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History,* ed. Gary Smith (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 168.

[98] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 242.

artworks were out of reach for most people and the indicators of unjust class differences in that age, as argued by the Marxist thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu. That's why Benjamin criticizes what Adorno calls "a narrow bourgeois religion of art."[99] Again we must recall his famous dictum which is compatible with Rousseau's critique of arts: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."[100]

It was an obvious fact that there was a relation between art and society, but how could it be explained and analysed? This was one of the main problems that Benjamin tried to cope with. Just as his notion of history turns away from its characteristic faith in progress, so Benjamin's aesthetics breaks with the representationalism of crude Marxism. Even though he inclined by temperament and association towards the Marxists of his age (e.g. Soviet constructivists, Sergei Eisenstein, Brecht and the Bauhaus), he rejected the approaches of crude Marxists who regarded art as merely a 'superstructural' reflection of the economic substructure of society (e.g. Kautsky and Plekhanov). Since such an idea, defended by the crude Marxists, could scarcely account for the critical power of art, Benjamin abandoned the Marxist categorization of art as mere epiphenomenal superstructure. His genealogical project may be explained as an attempt to transform the narrowminded conception of political economy of art and to develop a manner in which art unautonomously and unprogressively engages in social spheres.

In sum, he neither rejected the social and political bases of art, nor reduced the critical power of art to those bases. We can formulate his thesis statement as the following: Any change in the historical circumstances and nature influences the art

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[99] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 55.

[100] Benjamin, "Theses," p. 256.

forms, and any change in the art forms influences the organization of human perception. We can explain the changes in the organization of human perception with reference to its social causes.[101] In a dialectical way, the new organization of perception also influences the later modes of aesthetic production, and those new modes of aesthetic production similarly influence the social realm. Therefore the cause-effect relation between art and society is mutual. That's what Benjamin understood from the images of thought, or 'dialectical images': the artwork as the effect of social causes and the cause of social changes. His dialectical model which depends on the relation between organization of perception and modes of aesthetic production has a moderate structure and includes many elements from Marx himself:

> Each of his *human* relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, being aware, sensing, wanting, acting, loving—in short, all the organs of his individual being, like those organs which are directly social in their form, are in their *objective* orientation, or in their *orientation to the object*, the appropriation of that object, the appropriation of the human world.[102]

Benjamin's moderate interpretation of Marx and his defense of interaction between art and society as opposed to the crude Marxist interpretation of the political economy of art seems plausible because any unilateral view is inevitably entangled with theoretical problems in explanation. Since the crude Marxists view art as merely a part of the sociopolitical realm, they certainly fail to explain the following case. In the case of a social and political decline, it does not necessarily follow that, for instance, a novel, a literary work of art or a film which has aesthetically higher value, cannot be written or produced under those awful circumstances. Lastly, we should keep in mind that even though the different artistic forms of different cultures are

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[101] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 222.

[102] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," p. 87.

directly related to their modes of production, this relation is not established in mechanical or entirely predictable ways. Thus we must not forget that there is no simple, direct correlation between cultural-aesthetic sophistication and economic development.

Benjamin applies his model to the history of art and classifies the periods in art history with reference to the modes of aesthetic production. We can explain the mode of aesthetic production as a specific combination of 'artistic productive forces'—the artist's labour power, imagination, nature, means of aesthetic production, and aesthetic desire—and the 'social and technical relations of aesthetic production'—property, power and control relations such as patronage and cooperative work relations. Different modes of aesthetic production, which correspond to different social classes and strata in the population, might emerge and exist alongside each other. For instance, the capitalist culture industry might co-exist with traditional aesthetic production. According to Benjamin's theoretical framework, there are three 'modes of aesthetic production'. The first one is *the primitive mode of aesthetic production* which was at work "in prehistoric times when, by the absolute emphasis on its cult value, … [artwork] was, first and foremost, an instrument of magic. … The elk portrayed by the man of the Stone Age on the walls of his cave was an instrument of magic. He did expose it to his fellow men, but in the main it was meant for the spirits."[103] The distinctive feature of this mode is its magic function. The second one, on the other hand, is *the traditional mode of aesthetic production* which could be dealt with under two rubrics: (i) *the classical mode of aesthetic production* which was in action during ancient and medieval times and included early Christian, Byzantine, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and

[103] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 225.

Carolingian art. The main function of art at that moment was again ritual—not a magical but a religious kind: “Certain statues of gods are accessible only to the priest in the cella; certain Madonnas remain covered nearly all year round; certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are invisible to the spectator on ground level.”[104] As is explained by Benjamin in these lines, the traditional art was the art of classes.[105] (ii) *The Intellectual Revolutionary mode of aesthetic production* was active during the Renaissance era and the age of Enlightenment. The ritualistic bases were secularized and persisted even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty and this “secular cult of beauty, developed during the Renaissance and prevailing for three centuries, clearly showed that ritualistic basis in its decline and the first deep crisis which befell it. . . . At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, that is, with a theology of art. This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of ‘pure’ art, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing by subject matter.”[106]

Liberation from Mimesis: A Critique of the Auratic Conception of Space

In “The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility” (1936), Benjamin aims at understanding the paradigm shift in art by exploring the change in (1) the nature of art, (2) the ontological status of artwork, (3) the conditions of art practice and aesthetic experience, (4) the role of the artist in society, and (5) the position of the audience in relation to the effects of technical reproducibility, particularly the

[104] Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” p. 225.

[105] Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” p. 218.

[106] Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” p. 224.

introduction of film and photography. To do this, he firstly reconsiders and scrutinizes the current definitions of the founding elements of art: aura, ritual function, cult value, originality, authenticity, uniqueness, autonomy, and concentration. Secondly, he inquires into the new possibilities that have emerged in art practice via the rise of technical reproducibility and investigates the liquidating effects of technologization on the nature of the artworld: revolutionary/political function, exhibition value, enriched perception and apperception, the optical unconscious, democratization of art, universal equality of things, distraction and shock effect. This critical and philosophical inquiry for a contemporary art theory was mainly based on how the nature and the definitions of the aforementioned five elements had changed after the technological revolution in terms of (1) the conditions of 'presence'; (2) the discursive, discontinuous and heterogeneous conception of space-time as opposed to the Kantian conception; (3) the development of perception and apperception; and (4) the function of art.

Benjamin raises several objections against the aesthetic conduct and aesthetic consciousness which must be seen in the historical context of the *Kunstreligion* cultivated among the educated classes in Germany around the turn of the century. He rejects not only the classicist understanding of art (*mimesis*) and its references such as naturalism and objectivism,[107] but also aesthetic autonomy and aesthetics as an academic discipline as a whole. On the other hand, this does not mean that Benjamin humiliates arts by putting them into a subordinate and inferior position, and thinks that art is essentially or by its nature 'evil'. By contrast, he sees a positive and critical

[107] Benjamin's theoretical approach is compatible with that of Fry in terms of its non-natualistic structure (against *mimesis*). Fry argues that the visual arts "are the expression of the imaginative life rather than a copy of actual life." Therefore it would be a reductive, or even false, approach to define visual arts as mere imitative. See Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics," in *Problems in Aesthetics: An Introductory Book of Readings,* ed. Morris Weitz (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 49-61.

power in art in accordance with Nietzsche, who believed that art expressed a realm more fundamental and constitutive than that accessible to the natural sciences. Benjamin criticizes the imitative character of traditional art and holds that art as a critical power should be the representative of free will, not necessity. Then, as opposed to "the very narrow conception of imitation" of the existing reality (nature/necessity),[108] art must depict new realities (imagination/free will) which are possible but have not been actualized yet.[109] In Breton's words, "beloved imagination, what I most like in you is your unsparing quality. The mere word 'freedom' is the only one that stil excites me. . . . Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what *can be*."[110] That's why Benjamin is in favor of surrealism and constructivism which attempted to bring the *avant-garde* back to its original Saint-Simonian roots to integrate aesthetic innovation with political engagement. According to this "Saint-Simonist concept of art as an 'avant-garde' part of modern production," the destruction of autonomous art will contribute to the 'liberation of the senses' and the 'emancipation of the artwork from the occultism of aesthetic

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[108] André Breton, "Surrealism and Painting." In *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas,* ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2003), p. 459.

[109] Benjamin's and surrealists' criticisms of *mimeticism* are mainly based on the Platonic definition of the term, namely the crude idea of 'imitation'. But here we must also emphasize two things: Firstly, Aristotle's use of the term avoids the pejorative connotations of Platonic definition and tends to mean simply 'artistic representation' and to indicate that the world presented in an artwork is much like, but not identical with, the real world. Therefore, Aristotelian *mimesis* includes the power of 'imagination' as well. Secondly, Benjamin understands the notion of *mimesis* in relation to 'similarity'—either sensuous (visual arts) or non-sensuous (language). When the issue is 'sensuous similarity' (visual arts) he seems to refer to Platonic sense of the term and when the issue is 'non-sensuous similarity' (language and literature) he defines the term with reference to "representation and expression". See Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty." In *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings,* trans. Edmund Jephcott; ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), pp. 333-336.

[110] André Breton, "The First Manifesto of Surrealism." In *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas,* p. 447.

dogma' for the sake of the praxis of life![111] Just as Marx gives a revolutionary function to philosophy, Benjamin gives one to art, and applies the last thesis of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" to the aesthetic realm: "The artists have hitherto only imitated the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

Benjamin argues that art is no longer profanely illuminating and life no longer seems inexplicably magical in the era of *technological mode of aesthetic production*, because of the change in the ontological status of the artwork through technology. For him, the distinctive feature of the ontological status of an artwork is 'aura' and this term can be defined as an invisible emanation or an intangible quality surrounding an artwork. In Benjamin's own words, it is "a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be."[112] The term, which was used by Benjamin to differentiate artworks from other physical entities, derives from the Greek and Latin words for breeze or air in motion, something ethereal that extends itself and permeates the environment. It is an "unfathomable darkness, unbridgeable distance, unexpected reciprocity" which "combines both negative and positive moments: on the one hand, it is a form of obscurity and inscrutability, a murky residue of the cultic origins of the work of art; on the other, it is a source of 'melancholy, incomparable beauty', a moment of mutual recognition, a mnemonic device for the remembrance of the dead."[113] Benjamin explains the auratic experience with reference to 'the ability to look at us

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[111] Margaret A. Rose, *Marx's Lost Aesthetic: Karl Marx and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 1, 5.

[112] Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography." In *One-Way Street and Other Writings,* trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London; New York: Verso, 1997), pp. 249-250.

[113] Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 177.

in return': "Experience of the aura thus rests on a transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return."[114] Of course, Benjamin did not attribute an immanent consciousness, or cognition, to the artwork when he refers to 'the ability to look at us in return'. Rather, he uses this metaphor to explain the nature of our auratic experience and to make it clear: actually an artwork does not have the ability to look at us in return, but we feel *as if* it has.

The aura of an artwork stems from the unique presence it has, from being situated in a particular space and having a certain history or belonging to a certain tradition, or in other words, its authenticity. The Süleymaniye Mosque, for instance, does have an aura and an authority which derives not only from its formal qualities but the fact of its being in the historical peninsula of Istanbul, having lasted five centuries and its belonging to the Ottoman architectural tradition, having been designed by Sinan, and even more than that, the fact that it can never be duplicated. A small replica of Süleymaniye has been built in Miniaturk, Istanbul, but it is without aura: it lacks the tradition of the former, the history of the former; it is a replica and in this sense inauthentic. It is not authentic because, as Marcuse explains, "something is authentic when it is self-reliant, can preserve itself, and is not dependent on anything else."[115] A replica, on the other hand, owes its existence to the original: "the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of

[114] Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." In *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 188.

[115] Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory." In *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader,* ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (New York; London: Routledge, 1989), p. 61.

authenticity."[116] Therefore not only cannot the replica be authentic but "authenticity is not reproducible."[117] As Benjamin wrote, "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition."[118] That is to say, "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."[119] To put it in a more elaborate form, authenticity is related to the life process of a thing, and even though the appearance of an entity can be copied it is impossible to duplicate its life process. In Benjamin's own explanation, "the authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced."[120]

Aura testifies to the authority of art in its cultic form, its condition of inimitable uniqueness, a singularity in time and space, and this notion mainly emphasizes that even though the traditional artworks exist in this physical world, they seem to belong to a higher realm. On the other hand, aura is not an ontological property of the artwork, nor is it a consciously created, misleading ideological façade. Rather, it is an historically and socially imposed relation of the recipient to the work of art. For Benjamin, although originality and authenticity are the key notions for the existence of aura in expressing and substantiating the autonomous existence of the artwork, it cannot emerge without a subject who views that artwork. In other words, it appears in the relation and interaction between the artwork and the

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[116] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 220.

[117] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 243.

[118] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 221.

[119] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 220.

[120] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 221.

viewer. In the ideological sense, aura constructs an 'authority' over the viewer through its enchanting effects which can be considered as a 'false sublime'[121].

After the loss of the 'original' and authenticity, the authority of the aura is liquidated and the aura is destroyed by the techniques of mass reproduction. Here, at best we can speak of 'master copy' but not of 'original'. With the destruction of aura, the ritual function of the work of art also disappears, since "the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In

[121] *The sublime* is something literally overwhelming, either because of its 'enormity' (a high mountain, a deep chasm, a blinding light), its 'infinity' (the spiritual or timeless) or its 'obscurity' (a cloud-capped mountain, a floating mist, night, intense darkness). When faced with the sublime, the viewer, listener or reader feels a kind of paralysis of the will and of the powers of understanding and imagination. At the same time, as an aesthetic experience (grounded in art rather than reality) the sublime allows for the thrill of danger without its real consequences. The roots of the term 'the sublime' go back to ancient times. When the philosopher Longinus (the 1st or 3rd century AD?) first used the term in his treatise *Peri Hupsous* (*On the Sublime,* first published in 1674), he linked it with a great, lofty and elevated use of literary language. The term came into much broader use in the eighteenth century through the theories of Addison, Burke and Kant. It was applied not only to literature and art, as Longinus did, but also to the experience of nature. Benjamin didn't use the term 'sublime' or 'false sublime' in any of his texts to explain the auratic experience. But while explaining the auratic experience in the tenth paragraph of the "Artwork" essay, he separated the aura into two main categories—the aura of historical objects and the aura of natural ones—and then he referred to nature's capacity to overwhelm our powers of perception or the 'sublime' without using the term itself: "If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch." See Benjamin, "The Work of Art," pp. 222-223. "[T]o trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance—that is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch." See Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," p. 250. Some commentators such as Miriam Hansen have used the term 'false sublime' while explaining auratic effects. Such a use does indirectly refer to the Kantian conception of the sublime which limits the meaning of the term with our encounters with nature. The Longinian view of the sublime is a mode of elevated 'self-transcendence' and can be achieved only through the creation of and response to 'lofty' thought and art—art that expresses and exceeds nature's greatness. But as Addison argues, self-transcendence can come about when we encounter nature's greatness by visual perception alone, and not through artworks. If the sublime is defined as a pleasant and distinctive aesthetic experience of nature's capacity to overwhelm our powers of perception, as Kant says, then the auratic effects of mimetic artworks which represent nature cannot cause a real experience of the 'sublime'. Therefore, such an auratic condition can be defined as the 'false sublime'. See Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street," *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (1999), pp. 306-43; reprinted in *Benjamin's Ghosts: Interventions in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory,* ed. Gerhard Richter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

other words, the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value."[122] At this point, we must emphasize that Benjamin's concern with technical reproducibility and the destruction of aura cannot be limited by a desire to have a merely ontological discussion about art. Although his debate on aura is related to a certain kind of aesthetic presence of art, which is grounded in religious experience and eliminated by mechanical reproduction, it also refers to the model of a certain kind of new experience. According to Benjamin, film as a post-auratic form of art will enrich our perception and apperception: "*The film has enriched our field of perception* with methods which can be illustrated by those of Freudian theory. … For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception *the film has brought about a similar deepening of apperception.*"[123] It may play positive roles not only to enrich our cognitive capacities but also to introduce us to our state of unconsciousness: "The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses."[124]

Benjamin creates the concept of 'fragmentation' with the purpose of both finding a reason for his claim that the film has a higher cognitive status, and explaining how the spatially and temporally 'discontinuous' medium of film has developed. Benjamin recognized that the cinema was a powerful force, able to shift the patterns of human perception in new ways. That is, he gives a privileged place to the seventh art which has, according to him, a higher cognitive status. Benjamin explains how an artform influences the organization of perception and apperception with reference to the 'distraction and concentration' effects of traditional and

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[122] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 223.

[123] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 235 [italics are mine].

[124] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 237.

technologically reproducible art forms:

> Let us compare the screen on which a film unfolds with the canvas of a painting. The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested. Duhamel, who detests the film and knows nothing of its significance, though something of its structure, notes this circumstance as follows: 'I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images' (Georges Duhamel, *Scenes de la vie future,* Paris, 1930, p. 52). … A man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. He enters into this work of art the way legend tells of the Chinese painter when he viewed his finished painting. In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art.[125]

He also explains the way film changes apperception: "Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception. … Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise. The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway."[126]

Lastly, we must mention the economic aspect of art: by referring to the destruction of uniqueness and to reproducibility, Benjamin also aims at solving the problem of property. Namely, another aspect of Benjamin's political economy of art is certainly the exchange value of artwork and "the various changes in its ownership".[127] In an artworld in which mechanical reproduction is at work, a work of art will not turn into a cultural capital, will not give any priviliged status to its possessor and will not be a symbol of class difference since it is democratized. Then it will bring equality in addition to liberty. In other words, the new political economy

[125] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," pp. 238, 239.

[126] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 240.

[127] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 220.

of art depends on the principle of “the universal equality of things”.[128] Value-types are also changed with the effects of the destruction of aura. With the emergence of technically reproducible artworks, the ‘cult value’ of the artwork (an object of aesthetic experience) is displaced by the ‘exchange value’ of the artwork (an object whose character is determined first and foremost by its relation to the market).[129] As a consequence of these new conditions, an artwork will not be a ritual object, since it has lost its aura, or its magic function. Therefore, just as Weber announced the ‘disenchantment of the world’ in his “Science as a Vocation” (1918-1919) essay with reference to the scientific revolution which is the foundation of the modern reality,[130] Benjamin announced the ‘disenchantment of the artworld’ in his “Work of Art” (1936) essay with reference to the artistic revolution, that is, mechanical reproduction.[131]

Politicization of Art: The Revolutionary Function of Film

By referring to the change in the ‘experience’ of both artist and audience, Benjamin aims to approach both aesthetics and ethics and, in doing so, to approach what mass media might mean as the grounds for a revolutionary politics. He explains in his “Artwork” essay, with examples, how the auratic function of art served to fascism. According to his depiction, aura gives a fascination to the spectator. Fascination gives rise to a mythical way of thinking (mythos) and this obtructs the rational way

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[128] Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” p. 223.

[129] Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” p. 225.

[130] Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation.” In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology,* ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 155.

[131] Benjamin, “The Work of Art.”

of thinking (logos). Without rationality, any kind of violence can be legitimatized because the question ‘what is just?’ is not a topic for the mythical way of thinking. In the last part of his “Artwork” essay, Benjamin instantiates his position with reference to Marinetti’s manifesto on the Ethiopian colonial war:

> For twenty-seven years we Futurists have rebelled against the branding of war as antiaesthetic. . . . Accordingly we state: . . . War is beautiful because it establishes man’s dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers, and small tanks. War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metalization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns. War is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the cease-fire, the scents, and the stench of putrefaction into a symphony. War is beautiful because it creates new architecture, like that of the big tanks, the geometrical formation flights, the smoke spirals from burning villages, and many others. . . . Poets and artists of Futurism! . . . remember these principles of an aesthetics of war so that your struggle for a new literature and a new graphic art . . . may be illumined by them![132]

As is understood from these terrible lines of the Manifesto, there is a strong connection between art and the social, and fascism is definitely tantamount to irrationality and misuses art and aesthetics as a means to politics. Fascism legitimatizes violent acts through ‘aesthetizing politics’. In conclusion, since fascism is definitely tantamount to irrationality and aura has an irrational character, any auratic moment necessarily coincides with fascist stategies of aesthetization.[133] The dialectical counterpart of the ‘aesthetization of politics’ necessarily will be the ‘politicization of art’.[134] Benjamin argues that with the destruction of aura, revolutionary forces which liberate the senses emerged within the new technically

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[132] Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” pp. 241-242.

[133] Here, Benjamin discursively mixes theoretical, historical and normative lines of argumentation and implies all-too-facile and misleading links between the persistence of aura and the aesthetization of politics.

[134] Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” p. 242.

reproducible art. Through the destruction of aura, the totality and autonomy of the work of art got lost. As a result, the artwork has been based on fragmentary structure. This provides us new ways of thinking and perceiving, that is, it enhances our rational and cognitive capacities. The optical vision of photography and film enables us to see the microscopic details better than our eyes, so our sense faculties evolve to a better condition. Through this elaboration of our sense faculties, our understanding of the world, in the Kantian sense, will operate in a better way. Such a consequence helps us in understanding reality in a more realistic and rational way, and disenchanting the 'world picture'. At this point, I must add that in Benjamin's argument, the tension between rationalist and empiricist ways of thinking melts since his main concern is political rather than purely epistemological. This enhancement of the rational and cognitive capacities refers to the revolutionary forces. The fragmental (non-auratic) artwork reminds us of the contingency of our present situation or current historical context and shows new possibilities, and provides alternative ways of seeing and revolutionary forces. "Photography and film represent a new vision of reality, but only a revolutionary consciousness can appreciate this vision as both accurate and unprecedented."[135] As Hansen explained these alternatives and new visions, "the mimetic capacity for capturing traces of social experience in the ostensibly dead world of things draws on both the representational qualities of photography (including indexically grounded contingency) and procedures specific to film (such as slow motion, variable framing, and editing). Thanks to these fracturing, alienating techniques film does not merely depict a given world, but makes that world visible for the first time, produces it for the sensoria of a spectating collective. Hence Benjamin emphasizes that film in fact opens up 'a new

[135] Snyder, "Benjamin on Reproducibility and Aura," p. 159.

region of consciousness'; it provides a 'prism' that transforms the past forgotten in the hopeless present into the possibility of a future."[136] Through its revolutionary forces, "film will show man in an environment re-made (re-produced) and managed by himself."[137]

At this point, we can ask whether Benjamin means a transcendent or spiritual reality when referring to alternative reality. For him, the basis of the alternative reality is neither spirituality nor pure imagination, but certainly the current reality. What makes us justified in calling it 'alternative' is its reconfiguredness and reconstructedness: history as ruination and redemption, and art as mortification and reconstruction. Gilloch defines "the goal of film and photography" as "the ruination of traditional art and aesthetics and their revolutionary reconfiguration within political practice."[138] But the goal of film does not consist of this, but rather the ruination of the existing reality and its revolutionary reconfiguration as well. The film blows up necessity (nature) through its close-ups and turns it into contingency through ruination and reconstruction. The close-ups and other camera movements prepare us for new apperceptions. As Benjamin says: "The film serves as a way of preparing man for those new apperceptions and reactions that are conditioned by contact with mechanical devices whose role in his life increases almost daily."[139] Benjamin argues that perceptual standards are neither stable nor fixed for all time. For him, there is a strong relationship between depiction and perception, and he

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[136] Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street." In *Benjamin's Ghosts,* p. 68.

[137] Snyder, "Benjamin on Reproducibility and Aura," p. 171.

[138] Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations,* p. 174.

[139] Cited in Snyder, "Benjamin on Reproducibility and Aura," p. 171, from Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften,* I, p. 445.

strives to justify his assertion which refers to the reformation of the character of human perception through technological art, as Snyder explains: "Technical production brings about technically informed perception that, in turn, engenders technical depiction or reproduction. The standard for judging technically manufactured art cannot be the same standard used to judge manually produced art since the latter is derived from non-technically informed perception."[140]

In conclusion, revolutionary forces liberate the senses which were under the enslavement and decay of fascism. This liberation of the individual undoubtedly refers both to ontological and political emancipation. In accordance with this aim, *film*, as a destructive and constructive form of art, can play an important role and acquire "revolutionary functions"[141] in the political struggle as the "most powerful agent"[142]. This "role of film and photography is conditioned by the most radical realization of their inherent technical capacities and possibilities."[143] "Its social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage."[144] Benjamin discusses the most important function of the film in terms of its role in the emancipation of the human being from the prison of the current reality:

> By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other

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[140] Snyder, "Benjamin on Reproducibility and Aura," p. 160.

[141] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 236.

[142] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 221.

[143] Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations,* p. 174.

[144] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 221.

hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. So, too, slow motion not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones "which, far from looking like retarded rapid movements, give the effect of singularly gliding, floating, supernatural motions. (Rudolf Arnheim, loc. cit., p. 138.) Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye--if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man.[145]

[145] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 236.

CHAPTER 4

ADORNO'S CRITIQUE OF BENJAMIN: DEBATE ON REVOLUTIONARY ART

> *"The laughter of a cinema audience ... is anything but salutary and revolutionary; it is full of the worst bourgeois sadism instead."*—Theodor Adorno[146]

Benjaminian-Adornian articulations of the 'mechanical reproduction versus aura' controversy mainly focuses on the issue of artistic autonomy/dependence and the catastrophic/positive effects of the technologization of art. Benjamin believed that art could be revolutionized by technology and that this technical revolution would bring about revolutionary collective modes of aesthetic production and reception in art. Along with different philosophers such as Heidegger and Marcuse who developed negative approaches concerning technology, Adorno and Horkheimer, as pessimist philosophers, produced *technophobia* in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). According to Adorno, Marx's optimistic anticipation failed to explain the catastrophic effects of unprecedented increase in the forces of production in modern times because the expansion of technology had culminated in barbarism, mass deception, and instinctual repression rather than being an explosive force conducive to revolution. Adorno introduced the notion of 'culture industry' as an aspect of the dialectic of Enlightenment in which technical rationality had become "the rationality of domination."[147] As Horkheimer says, "art, since it became autonomous, had

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[146] Theodor W. Adorno, "Wiesengrund-Adorno to Benjamin, London, 18 March 1936," *Theodor W. Adorno & Walter Benjamin: The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940,* ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge; Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 130.

[147] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* p. 121.

preserved the utopia that evaporated from religion."[148] In accordance with this approach, Adorno argues that "art is the social antithesis of society" and will be a force of negation as long as it provides a 'utopian' alternative to existing society.[149] In other words, art and society interact not in the realm of the social but in the realm of art: "Art and society converge in the artwork's content [Gehalt], not in anything external to it."[150]

Adorno believed that the rise of the reproducible art forms of mass culture and the destruction of traditional art were indicators of a more thorough-going decline in the forces of negation in society. Through the destructive effects of the culture industry, the purposeless nature of art had been transformed into a pleasure-giving element, the artwork into a commodity to be sold and artistic techniques into manipulative effects for enchanting the consumers: that is, reproducible art forms include no concern for artistic form or truth content. If art "embodies something like freedom in the midst of unfreedom," this is strongly related to its "purposelessness."[151] To put it another way, "insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness."[152] The destruction of aura is at the same time the death of purposelessness and the birth of 'aesthetic utility' which is a contradictory term by nature. That's why technically reproducible art cannot be critical: "A liberated society would be beyond the irrationality of its *faux frais* and beyond the ends-means-rationality of utility. This is enciphered in art and is the

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[148] Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 275.

[149] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 8.

[150] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 228.

[151] Theodor Adorno, "Is Art Lighthearted?" In *The Nature of Art: An Anthology,* ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg (Fort Worth: Harcourt College, 2002), p. 184.

[152] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 227.

source of art's social explosiveness."[153] Adorno was of the opinion that the product of mechanical reproduction was not liberation and the rise of rationality but on the contrary mass culture and the decline of rationality, consciousness and freedom. He says, "In contrast to the Kantian, the categorical imperative of the culture industry no longer has anything in common with freedom."[154] He also adds: "The power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness."[155] By referring to "the lower arts and entertainment, which are today administered, integrated, and qualitatively reshaped by the culture industry," Adorno implicitly accuses Benjamin of being "never familiar with art" since Benjamin argues "for the deaestheticization of art."[156] Benjamin defines the aura as "the unique phenomenon of a *distance*, however close it may be" and he sees the "decay of the aura" from a positive point of view.[157] Adorno also criticizes Benjamin's dependence on the destruction of the metaphysical 'distance' of the artwork in physical space: "They push for the deaestheticization of art. Its unmistakable symptom is the passion to touch everything, to allow no work to be what it is, to dress it up, *to narrow its distance from its viewer*."[158] According to Adorno, through the deaestheticization of art, artworks are turned into "cultural commodities" which serve customers; and in the post-auratic period, even "autonomous art was not completely free of the culture

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[153] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 227.

[154] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered." In *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader,* p. 133.

[155] Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered," p. 133.

[156] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 16.

[157] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 222 [italics are mine].

[158] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 16 [italics are mine].

industy's authoritarian ignominy."[159] Adorno insists on the view that "refusal of aura *tout court* would be the refusal of critique."[160]

It is an undeniable fact that with the rise of mass culture, art incured a danger to degenerate into a mere reproduction of the economic base: "For a society in which art no longer has a place and which is pathological in all its reactions to it, art fragments on one hand into a reified, hardened cultural possession and on the other into a source of pleasure that the consumer pockets and that for the most part has little to do with the object itself."[161] Within the framework of his dialectically constructed political economy of art, Benjamin argued that in an artworld in which mechanical reproduction is at work, a work of art will not turn into cultural capital, will not give any priviliged status to its possessor and will not be a symbol of class difference since it is democratized. Adorno criticizes this approach with reference to the fact that the capitalistic mode of aesthetic production turns artworks into commodities: "The false relation to art is akin to anxiety over possession. The fetishistic idea of the artwork as property that can be possessed and destroyed by reflection has its exact correlative in the idea of exploitable property within the psychological economy of the self."[162] Against this liquidation of art's critical power, Adorno argues that we must defend *l'art pour l'art*, "since then, under the dictates of the culture industry, [not the negative but the] affirmative character [of art] has become omnipresent, and the joke has become the smirking caricature of advertising

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[159] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 17.

[160] Robert Kaufman, "Aura, Still," *October* 99 (Winter 2002), p. 51.

[161] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 15 [additions in parentheses are mine].

[162] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 13.

pure and simple."[163] Adorno seems not to agree with Benjamin on "[Benjamin's] transferring the concept of the magical aura to the 'autonomous work of art' and [his] flatly assigning a counter-revolutionary function to the latter."[164] Instead, he argues that "the uttermost consistency in the pursuit of the technical laws of autonomous art actually transforms this art itself, and, instead of turning it into a fetish or taboo, brings it that much closer to a state of freedom, to something that can be conciously produced and made."[165] Even though Adorno insists on the capitalistic structure of the technically reproducible art form, he seems to neglect the fact that the traditional art is also the art of classes. As Dewey explains,

> Most European museums are, among other things, memorials of the rise of nationalism and imperialism. Every capital must have its own museum of painting, sculpture, etc., devoted in part to exhibiting the greatness of its artistic past, and, in other part, to exhibiting the loot gathered by its monarchs in conquest of other nations; for instance, the accumulations of the spoils of Napoleon that are in the Louvre. . . . The growth of capitalism has been a powerful influence in the development of the museum as the proper home for works of art, and in the promotion of the idea that they are apart from the common life. The nouveaux riches, who are an important by-product of the capitalist system, have felt especially bound to surround themselves with works of fine art, which being rare, are also costly. Generally speaking, the typical collector is the typical capitalist. For evidence of good standing in the realm of higher culture, he amasses paintings, statuary, and artistic bijoux as his stocks and bonds certified to his standing in the economic world.[166]

Adorno shares the view of the decline of aura with Benjamin but he presents some objections about Benjamin's reductive explanation concerning the decay of aura:

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[163] Adorno, "Is Art Lighthearted?" p. 186.

[164] Theodor W. Adorno, "Wiesengrund-Adorno to Benjamin, London, 18 March 1936," p. 128 [small shifts in parentheses are mine].

[165] Adorno, "Wiesengrund-Adorno to Benjamin, London, 18 March 1936," p. 129.

[166] John Dewey, "The Live Creature." In *Aesthetics: The Big Questions,* ed. Carolyn Korsmeyer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 15-16.

> I would not wish to secure the autonomy of the work of art as a special prerogative, and I agree with you that the auratic element of the work of art is in decline, and that not merely on account of its technical reproducibility, incidentally, but also through the fulfilment of its own 'autonomous' formal laws . . . . But the autonomy of the work of art, and therefore its material form, is not identical with the magical element in it. The reification of a great work of art is not simply a matter of loss, any more than the reification of the cinema is all loss. It would be a reactionary bourgeois gesture to negate the reification of the cinema in the name of the ego, and it would border on anarchism to revoke the reification of a great work of art in the spirit of an immediate appeal to use-value.[167]

He also rejects Benjamin's view that film is a post-auratic art form, and insists on the hyper-auratic character of cinema: "if anything can be said to possess an auratic character now, it is precisely the film which does so, and to an extreme and highly suspect degree."[168] In order to support his claim, he adopts a behaviourist position and refers to the reaction of the spectators of Chaplin's film *Modern Times* (1936): "You need only have heard the laughter of the audience at the screening of this film to realize what is going on." Then he continues:

> if you consider Mickey Mouse instead, the situation is much more complex, and the serious question arises as to whether the reproduction on the part of each individual really does constitute that a priori you claim it to be, or whether this act of reproduction belongs instead to precisely that 'naive realism', concerning the bourgeois nature of which we found ourselves in complete agreement in Paris.[169]

As for the political aspects of the decline of aura, Adorno stands on the negative side of Benjamin's idea that the destruction of aura through the mechanical reproduction will provide us liberated senses, and says,

> Adopting Benjamin's designation of the traditional work of art by the concept of aura, the presence of that which is not present, the culture

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[167] Adorno, "Wiesengrund-Adorno to Benjamin, London, 18 March 1936," pp. 129-130.

[168] Adorno, "Wiesengrund-Adorno to Benjamin, London, 18 March 1936," p. 130.

[169] Adorno, "Wiesengrund-Adorno to Benjamin, London, 18 March 1936," pp. 130-131.

> industry is defined by the fact that it does not strictly counterpose another principle to that of aura, but rather by the fact that it conserves the decaying aura as a foggy mist. By this means the culture industry betrays its own ideological abuses.[170]

Adorno has a pessimistic approach to the film phenomenon in assuming that it is essentially mimetic and conservative. By identifying film with technical reproducibility, he does not see it as critical and dialectical images, but as a passive replication of the status quo. If "mass culture was the seedbed of political totalitarianism," then so-called dialectical images of film, as the essential element of mass culture, cannot have any revolutionary force of negation.[171] Adorno argues that the spectator of film receives the world as an extension of the film he just left behind because the film faithfully reproduces the world of everyday perceptions:

> When I spent a day in the studios of Neubabelsberg a couple of years ago, what impressed me most of all was how *little* montage and all the advanced techniques you emphasize were actually used; rather, it seems as though reality is always *constructed* with an infantile attachment to the mimetic and then 'photographed'. You underestimate the technical character of autonomous art and overestimate that of dependent art; put simply, this would be my principal objection.[172]

Adorno insists on the view that the film is a mimetic art: it would not be difficult to derive from this assumption that if film is a mimetic and dependent art, then it cannot present alternative realities. His reductive theory of film not only gives a distorted picture of the art of cinema but also regards the spectator as a passive receiver who lacks interpretative skills:

> The sound film, far surpassing the theater illusion, leaves no room for imagination or action on the part of the audience, who is to respond

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[170] Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered," p. 131.

[171] Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School of Social Research 1925-1950* (Boston: Little Brown, 1973), p. 218.

[172] Adorno, "Wiesengrund-Adorno to Benjamin, London, 18 March 1936," p. 131.

> within the structure of the film yet deviate from its precise detail, without losing the thread of the story; hence the film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality … Sustained thought is out of the question, if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of the facts.[173]

Adorno's conservative comments on the art of film are based on an ahistorical ontology of the film medium. Adorno universalizes the particular historical examples—mainly Hollywood films of the 1940s, dominated by wartime sentimentality and propaganda—and constructs timeless arguments which are suspended in an empty space without any relation to history. But this kind of approach is philosophically an unacceptable one because the knowledge of particulars cannot provide us the *mathesis universalis*! Of course, the Hollywood cinema has mainly a naturalistic tendency in aesthetic issues, but the film art cannot be limited to that cultural context. Naturalism of those films is culture-oriented, not inherent in the medium. The non-natualistic aesthetic of the films directed by Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov as well as German Expressionist silent films, the surrealist films of Buñuel, and the avant-garde films of the French New Wave of the 1960s constitute the counterexamples which were neglected by Adorno in his criticisms. The difference between Benjamin and Adorno is that while the former tries to show possibilities, the latter puts forth universal statements. To point out a possibility, there is no need to show an actual example. But to prove the truth of a universal statement which is the major premise of one's argument, one should examine all the instances, and only one counter-example is enough to refute his argument. Since there are many counter-examples that refute Adorno's universal argument about film, and there is at least one film, *The Battleship Potemkin* of

[173] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* pp. 126-127.

Eisenstein, that instantiates Benjamin's theoretical framework, then we are justified in claiming that Benjamin's argument is stronger than Adorno's.

Lastly, I must also add something more on Adorno's reductive and crude interpretation of Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936). In the film, Charlie is described as an industrial worker who is alienated from his own activity and the product of his labor through following the directions of management and the dictates of machines. The factory is not under the control of its makers and operators. Rather, the workers are mere extensions of their machines and are nowhere at home in this human-made 'second nature' that surrounds them. Even though it is not a political drama but a tragicomedy, Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) is a critique of the modern, industrialized world and its effects such as the desperate employment and fiscal conditions many people faced during the Great Depression. Of course, it would be a bold claim that the film conveys a certain social and political message such as defense of communism, since nowhere does the film defend the necessity to organize collectively for meaningful social and political change, but depicts an individualistic response to the Great Depression and its hardships. On the other hand, it would be equally unjust claim that the purpose of the film is merely to produce entertainment and to get the audience to laugh. Rather, it seems to employ an indirect language of comedy, which threatens the understanding of progress and undercuts standing hierarchies and respected values of the modern world, to realize the 'negation of the negation'. No viewer could possibly overlook the critical significance of Chaplin's depiction of how workers are assembled in a large factory and typically do not work under their own direction but under the close supervision of a hierarchy of managers who do most of the important thinking for themselves.

In this critical depiction, workers are turned into replaceable cogs in a gigantic machine with the aid of Adam Smith's famous principle of 'the division of labor' and bound to become estranged *from themselves*, *from their products* and *from each other* under the conditions of the capitalist industrial production. At this point, one can question whether a depiction can be critical without any distortion. Every depiction is a form of understanding and cannot be produced with a 'view from nowhere'—that is, a depiction is a product of a single perspective, and not a universal one. Therefore since reality cannot be hedged by us and since every true depiction is a collection of images which correspond to reality, a depiction can be both true and critical with reference to the images *we selected* and to those *we omited*. Chaplin's depiction is entirely compatible with the Marx's theory of alienation:

> What, then, constitutes the alienation of labor? First, the fact that labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague.[174]

In conclusion, by ironically depicting dehumanizing effects of the Fordist automation and industrial capitalism, the film abases the dignity of modernity and its progressive conception. If one argues that Chaplin's film cannot be considered as a genuine critique since it does not advocate an alternative system and point to any causes of

[174] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," p. 74.

the misery it represents, we can remind of him the principle that an artwork should avoid didacticism and propaganda: the force of negation is enough to define an artwork as critical.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

> When Marx undertook his critique of the capitalistic mode of production, this mode was in its infancy. Marx directed his efforts in such a way as to give them prognostic value. He went back to the basic conditions underlying capitalistic production and through his presentation showed what could be expected of capitalism in the future. The result was that one could expect it not only to exploit the proletariat with increasing intensity, but ultimately to create conditions which would make it possible to abolish capitalism itself.[175]

This first paragraph of the "Artwork" essay can be read and re-interpreted as a response to Adorno: "I am undertaking my critique of the technological mode of aesthetic production, which is a necessary condition for the culture industry, at a time when this mode is in its infancy. I am directing my efforts in such a way as to give them prognostic value. I went back to the basic conditions underlying technological aesthetic production and through my 'Artwork' essay showed what could be expected of technological art in the future. The result is that one could expect it not only to exploit masses with increasing intensity, but ultimately to create conditions which would make it possible to abolish the capitalist culture industry itself."

As is analysed in this thesis, Benjamin believed that art could be revolutionized by technology and saw in the new techniques of mechanical reproduction certain positive consequences. Accordingly, he was of the opinion that this metamorphosis in the nature of artwork must be considered as a precursor of the emergence of the intrinsic 'revolutionary forces' of art which will bring, in Marxian terms, the 'liberation of senses' (both ontological and political emancipation). He argued that these new developments in art such as the technique of montage,

[175] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 217.

evolving functions of apparatus (camera), and some other techniques of metamorphic and anamorphic transformation will assure us new ways of thinking and perceiving, and will enhance our rational and cognitive capacities. The fragmentary, or non-auratic, artwork (film) will remind of us the contingency of our current situation and will show us new possibilities in a creative way. Of course, Benjamin, as an heir of the first phase of a technological era, was certainly aware that mass production and reproduction did not automatically guarantee mass art an emancipatory function if it was subjected to the capitalist production and distribution apparatus. But his "primary aim . . . was to find a way to rescue post-auratic experience from the manipulation and control of the masses that Fascism had attempted; and then, while sketching the link between the social collective and the commodity system, to argue that consciousness itself, when understood at the level of the collectivity, cannot be dissociated from the historical formation of media technologies."[176] Moreover, if he were not aware, then he would not be able to speak of "market values which are so characteristic of the film."[177] He indirectly shows his awareness in the "Artwork" essay:

> The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, as Pirandello describes it, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror. But now the reflected image has become separable, transportable. And where is it transported? Before the public. Never for a moment does the screen actor cease to be conscious of this fact. While facing the camera he knows that ultimately he will face the public, the consumers who constitute the market. This market, where he offers not only his labor but also his whole self, his heart and soul, is beyond his reach. During the shooting he has as little contact with it as any article made in a factory. This may contribute to that oppression, that new anxiety which, according to Pirandello, grips the actor before the camera. The film responds to the shriveling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the

[176] Alexander Gelley, "Contexts of the Aesthetic in Walter Benjamin," *MLN* 114 (5) (Dec. 1999), p. 952.

[177] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 237.

> "personality" outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony spell of a commodity. So long as the movie-makers' capital sets the fashion, as a rule no other revolutionary merit can be accredited to today's film than the promotion of a revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art. We do not deny that in some cases today's films can also promote revolutionary criticism of social conditions, even of the distribution of property. However, our present study is no more specifically concerned with this than is the film production of Western Europe.[178]

Benjamin's concern is not the *historical situation* of the film industry—whether the films of 1930s Europe promote revolutionary criticism of social conditions or commodity fetishism ("the capitalistic exploitation of the film"[179])—but the ontological structure of the film phenomenon for revolutionary criticism. He explains his aim which avoids 'historical plasticity' in a letter to Adorno:

> In my own essay ["The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1936] I attempted to articulate the positive moments as clearly as you have articulated the negative ones. I can therefore see that your study is strong precisely in places where mine was weak. Your analysis of the psychological types produced by the industry, and your presentation of the way in which they are produced, seems particularly felicitous. If I had devoted more attention to this aspect of the matter, my own study *would have gained something in historical plasticity*. I see more and more clearly that the launching of the sound film must be regarded as an operation of the film industry designed to break the revolutionary primacy of the silent film, which had produced reactions that were difficult to control and hence dangerous politically. An analysis of the sound film would constitute a critique of contemporary art, which would provide a dialectical mediation between your views and mine.[180]

Even though Adorno was totally justified in drawing a dark picture about the changing conditions of aesthetic production and economic structure of the artworld

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[178] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 230.

[179] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 232.

[180] Walter Benjamin, "Benjamin to Adorno, Paris, 9.12.1938." In *Theodor W. Adorno & Walter Benjamin: The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940,* p. 295 [italics are mine].

in favor of the unjust capitalist order, Benjamin sought for a 'hope' rather than 'despair' and tried to show the possibilities instead of impossibilities. As Habermas mentioned, Benjamin seeks an exoteric rescue of art which brings it to the masses in the hope that the enjoyment of art can be "instructive and critical".[181] In addition, he did not claim that the technological art form was necessarily going to actualize its critical potentials and revolutionary forces.

He was aware of the opposite case, but just tried to show that the case which had been actualized was not necessary, but contingent. His theory aimed to remind us that other contingencies are always possible and the critical thinker should talk about them. For him, if one is really a critical philosopher from a Marxian point of view, then he should give up only describing the world in a negative way; and try to explore the ways that will provide a revolutionary change.[182] On the other hand, we should also be aware of the fact that the alternative contingency Benjamin sought has been actualized to some extent after the digital revolution. Independent artists can produce *not-for-sale artworks* and exhibit them on the internet. For instance, digital artworks such as the examples of cinema and video art are accessible to all in *Youtube*. Those artworks can be critical of the political system, can be downloaded and owned by all without payment. Since there is not only one physical but many digital originals, this ownership does not limit other's accessibility to the artwork and also does not give any privileged position to the owners. That is, digital conditions of this new artworld bring what Marx calls "the abolition of private property" and therefore "the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes":

[181] Jürgen Habermas, "Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique (1972)." In Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p. 132.

[182] Cf. Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach." In *The Marx-Engels Reader,* ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 145.

> In the place of *all* physical and mental senses there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of *all* these senses—the sense of *having*. The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outer world. (On the category of *"having,"* see Hess, in the *Twenty-One Sheets*.) The abolition of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, *human*. The eye has become a *human* eye, just as its *object* has become a social, *human* object—an object emanating from man for man. The *senses* have therefore become directly in their practice *theoreticians*. They relate themselves to the *thing* for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man, and vice versa. Need or enjoyment have consequently lost their *egotistical* nature, and nature has lost its mere *utility* by use becoming *human* use.[183]

In this new digital artworld, it is possible for an artwork which has a critical content not to be turned into a cultural capital, not to give any priviliged status to its possessor and not to be a symbol of class difference since it is democratized. Therefore Benjamin's theory has also become stronger during the digital age: not only logically possible but also historically actualized *now*.

Of course, there are several problems about Benjamin's theory of technological art. *Firstly,* the tension in Benjamin's theory between the liberative potential of mass media and the vulgarity it represents is never fully resolved.[184] It is not clear how the liberatory potential can be actualized: Benjamin does not explain the ways or methods of the actualization of the forces of negation with reference to the political and economic conditions. *Secondly,* the digital revolution opened up a new point of entry into the debate on the issue of the 'aura'. As Douglas Davis points out, "there is no distinction now between 'original' and 'reproduction' in virtually

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[183] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," pp. 87-88. *"Aufhebung des Privateigentums"* is translated as "The abolition of private property" rather than "The transcendence of private property."

[184] Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema, and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology'," *New German Critique* 40 (1987), p. 187.

any medium based in film, electronics, or telecommunications. . . . This means that any video, audio, or photographic work of art can be endlessly reproduced, without degredation, always the same, always perfect. The same is true for handmade images or words that can be 'scanned,' that is, converted to digital bits."[185] A digital artwork is by its very nature infinitely reproducible and every version of it has equal status by virtue of being absolutely identical. At this point, we must emphasize that Benjamin speaks of the 'original' with reference to the 'physical'. But after the digital revolution, the nature of the original has changed and turned into a mathematical one. The "post-original original"[186] is composed of digits. Therefore we are justified in saying that "it is the repetitive copy that is dead, not the original."[187] If the original turned back, then it would not be inaccurate to conclude that "the concept of aura (if not of its material realization) persists."[188]

In sum, the 'absence of the physical original' does not necessarily bring us into the destruction of aura. Benjamin says in the "Artwork" essay, "Earlier much futile thought had been devoted to the question of whether photography is an art. The primary question—whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art—was not raised."[189] We can revise Benjamin's words, but against his way of thinking, and say, "Benjamin devoted much futile thought to the question of whether aura is destroyed with the loss of the *physical* original. The primary question—whether the very invention of technical reproduction had not

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[185] Douglas Davis, "The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction (An Evolving Thesis: 1991-1995)," *Leonardo* 28(5) (1995), pp. 381, 382.

[186] Davis, "The Work of Art," p. 383.

[187] Davis, "The Work of Art," p. 385.

[188] Davis, "The Work of Art," p. 384.

[189] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," p. 227.

transformed the entire nature of the original and the aura—was not raised by him." Aura has an historical character, and thus it would be difficult to give a universal definition of it. Benjamin's claim that the aura was destroyed is related to the definiton of his epoch and it would not be a bold claim that the contemporary definitions of original and aura cannot be the same with the ones that Benjamin adopted since the nature of original and the nature of aura have changed. Therefore we must interpret Benjamin's theory of technological art in the context of Romantic art tradition—that is, the end of Romantic aura. At last, but not least, we must emphasize that, for Benjamin, "art is not in the process of disappearing, it is in the process of reconstruction."[190] The main question that appears here is "what kind of *reconstruction* is this?" Frankly speaking, what makes Benjamin's aesthetic views essential and central to the contemporary debates regarding art is certainly his "militant critique of concepts that breaks down the 'Great Wall' between technology and aesthetics to create a bordercrossing."[191]

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[190] Snyder, "Benjamin on Reproducibility and Aura," p. 169.

[191] Karlheinz Barck, "Connecting Benjamin: The Aesthetic Approach to Technology." In *Mapping Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Digital Age,* p. 42.

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