

**The Work of Art in the Epoch of its Technical Reproducibility** [Reproduzierbarkeit]  
by Walter Benjamin 1938

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“Nos Beaux-Arts ont été institués, et leurs types comme leur usage fixés, dans un temps bien distinct du nôtre, par des hommes dont le pouvoir d’action sur les choses était insignifiant auprès de celui que nous possédons. Mais l’étonnant accroissement de nos moyens, la souplesse et la précision qu’ils atteignent, les idées et les habitudes qu’ils introduisent nous assurent de changements prochains et très profonds dans l’antique industrie du Beau. Il y a dans tous les arts une partie physique qui ne peut plus être regardée ni traitée comme naguère, qui ne peut pas être soustraite aux entreprises de la connaissance et de la puissance modernes. Ni la matière, ni l’espace, ni le temps ne sont depuis vingt ans ce qu’ils étaient depuis toujours. Il faut s’attendre que de si grandes nouveautés transforment toute la technique des arts, agissent par là sur l’invention elle-même, aillent peut-être jusqu’à modifier merveilleusement la notion même de l’art.” [Our fine arts were instituted, and their types as well as their uses established, during a time quite distinct from ours, by human beings whose power of action over things was insignificant compared to what we possess. But the astonishing increase of our means, the dexterity and the precision which they have attained, the ideas and the habits which they have introduced, augur imminent and profound changes in the antique industry of the Beautiful. There exists in all arts a physical element which can no longer be regarded or dealt with as before, which cannot be exempted from the enterprise of modern knowledge and power. Neither matter, nor space, nor time are what they had always been some twenty years ago. We may expect that such great innovations are transforming all the technique of art, acting thereby on invention itself, and additionally perhaps already modifying the very notion of art to an astounding degree.] – Paul Valéry, “Pieces on Art,” Paris: *The Conquest of Ubiquity*, 1928. [My own translation from the original French cited by Benjamin – DRR]

## Preface

When Marx undertook the analysis of the capitalist mode of production, this mode of production was still in its beginnings. Marx thus directed his efforts, so that they obtained prognostic value. He went back to the fundamental relationships of capitalist production and presented them in such a manner that one could deduce what could henceforth be expected of capitalism. The result was that one could expect not only an increasingly sharpened exploitation of the proletariat from capitalism, but ultimately also the production of conditions which make the latter’s abolition possible.

The overturning of the superstructure, which goes on much slower than that of the infrastructure, required more than half a century to make the transformation of the conditions of production binding in the cultural realm. In what form that occurred, can finally be observed today. These statements pose certain prognostic demands. However, these demands accord less to theses on the art of the proletariat after the seizure of power, let alone that of the classless society, than to theses on the tendencies of development of art under contemporary conditions of production. Their dialectic is not less noticeable in the superstructure than in the economy. That is why it would be wrong to underestimate the value of such theses to the struggle. They push

aside a number of outmoded concepts – like creativity and genius, eternal value and enigma, concepts whose uncontrollable (and momentarily difficult to control) usage leads to the processing of the factual material in the fascistic sense. The concepts introduced hereafter for the first time into the theory of art are to be distinguished from more conventional ones in that they are completely unusable for the purposes of Fascism. Conversely, they are usable only for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art.

## I

The work of art has fundamentally always been reproducible. What human beings have made, could always be copied by human beings. Such copying was practiced by students as art exercises, by masters to disseminate works, and finally from profit-minded third parties. Consequently, the technical reproduction of the work of art is something new, which drove through history intermittently, in waves distant from each other, but with growing intensity. The Greeks knew only two forms of technical reproduction of works of art: casting and stamping. Bronzes, terracotta and coins were the first works of art which they could produce on a mass scale. All the others were singular and could not be technically reproduced. With woodcuts, graphics became technically reproducible for the first time; this was true for a long time, before writing also became reproducible through the printing press. The enormous transformations which the press, the technical reproducibility of writing, generated in literature are well known. However this was only one case, albeit an especially important one, of a phenomenon which can be observed in world-historical terms. In the course of the Middle Ages, copper engraving and etching appeared next to the woodcut, just as lithography did at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

With lithography, the technics of reproduction attained a fundamentally new level. The much more succinct procedure, which distinguished the application of drawings from a stone from its carving in a wooden block or its acid etch on a copper plate, gave graphics for the first time the possibility of bringing its products to the market not merely on a mass scale (as was already the case) but also in new shapes daily. Lithography enabled graphics to accompany daily life illustratively. It began keep pace with the press. However, despite this beginning, graphics was outflanked by photography just a few decades after the discovery of lithography. With photography, the hand was for the first time relieved from the most important aesthetic obligations in the process of visual reproduction, which now fell alone to the eye looking into the camera lens. Since the eye perceives quicker than the hand can draw, the process of visual reproduction was so vastly accelerated that it could keep pace with speech. The camera-person ensconced in the studio could hand-crank the pictures at the same speed the narrator spoke. If the illustrated newspaper lay virtually hidden in lithography, so too was the sound-film already implicit in photography. The technical reproduction of sound was taken up at the end of the last century. These converging efforts have made a situation conceivable, which Paul Valéry characterized with the sentence: “Comme l’eau, comme le gaz, comme le courant électrique viennent de loin dans nos demeures répondre à nos besoins moyennant un effort quasi nul, ainsi serons-nous alimentés d’images visuelles ou auditives, naissant et s’évanouissant au moindre geste, presque à un signe.” [“Just as water, gas and electricity come [from afar into our dwellings, responding to our needs with almost no effort, so too will we be fed visual or auditory images, which will be created and melt away at the slightest gesture, at almost a sign.” – Paul Valéry, “Conquest of Ubiquity,” my translation] Around 1900, technical reproduction attained a standard from which it could not only make the entirety of traditional [überkommenen: traditional, part of a legacy] art-works into its object, subjecting the aesthetic effect of the latter to the deepest transformations, but conquered its very own place among the modes of aesthetic conduct. For the

study of this standard, nothing is more instructive than how both of its manifestations – the reproduction of the art-work and the art of film – interact reciprocally on art in the latter’s traditional [überkommenen] form.

## II

Something is missing in even the most perfect reproductions: the here-and-now [das Hier und Jetzt] of the work of art – its unique existence [Dasein: being-there, with a spatial connotation] at the place where it is located. It is in this unique existence [Dasein], however, and in no other, that the history to which it has been subjected to in the course of its existence [Bestehens: existence, with a temporal connotation] occurs. This relates as much to the transformations which its physical structure has suffered in the course of time, as to the changing conditions of ownership in which it was entangled.<sup>1</sup> The traces of the former can only be confirmed by the sort of chemical or physical analysis which the reproduction cannot satisfy; the traces of the latter are the object of a tradition, which must be tracked down from the habitat [Standort: habitat, location, position] of the original.

The here-and-now [Hier und Jetzt] of the original comprises the concept of its authenticity. Chemical analyses of the patina of a bronze statue [Bronze] can help to establish its authenticity; likewise, evidence that a certain manuscript from the Middle Ages comes from a fifteenth century archive can also help establish its authenticity. The entire realm of authenticity eludes technical – and naturally not only technical – reproducibility.<sup>2</sup> Yet while what is genuine retains its full authority in the face of the manual reproduction, typically by stamping the latter as a forgery, this is not the case in the face of technical reproduction. The basis for this is twofold. First, technical reproduction proves to be more independent in regards to the original than the manual kind. In photography, for example, it can highlight aspects of the original inaccessible to the human eye by means of the lenses and shot angles of its own choosing, or capture images with the help of certain procedures, such as the zoom or slow motion, which utterly elude natural vision. That is the first reason. Secondly, it can furthermore bring the copy of the original into situations, which are not accessible to the original. Above all it makes it possible for the original to come closer to the consumer, whether in the form of photography, or as a sound record. The cathedrals leave their place, in order to be viewed in the studio by a friend of art; the choral work which was performed in a chamber or under the open sky, is heard in a living-room.

The circumstances into which the product of the technical reproduction of the work of art can be brought may, incidentally, leave the existing stock [Bestand] of the work of art untouched – they devalue in any case its here-and-now [Hier und Jetzt]. While this is by no means true only for works of art, but also applies for example to a landscape shot in a film, this process touches on a most sensitive core in the art object, which is vulnerable in a way natural objects are not. That is its authenticity. The authenticity of a thing [Sache: thing, matter] is the embodiment of everything transmissible to it since its origins, from its material duration to its historical testimonial [Zeugenschaft: testimony]. Since the latter is based on the former, what happens in the reproduction, where the former escapes human beings, is also what happens to the latter: the historical testimonial of the thing [Sache] falters. Indeed not only this; but what however falters in such a way is the authority of the thing [Sache].<sup>3</sup>

One can summarize what falls out here in the concept of the aura and say: what wastes away in the epoch of the technical reproducibility of the art-work, that is its aura. The process is symptomatic; its significance points beyond the realm of art. The technics of reproduction, to make a generalization, dislodges what is reproduced from the realm of tradition. By multiplying the reproduction, it puts its mass-produced occurrence in the place of its unique one. By permitting the reproduction, by approaching the consumer in their appropriate situation, it

actualizes what is reproduced. Both these processes lead to a mighty shake-up [Erschütterung: shaking, agitation, jolting] of what is traditional – a shake-up of tradition, which is the flip side of the contemporary crisis and renewal of humanity. They stand in the closest connection with the mass movements of our day. Their most powerful agent is film. Its social significance is, even in its most positive form, and precisely in such, unthinkable without its destructive, cathartic side: the liquidation of traditional values in the cultural legacy. This phenomenon is most palpable in the great historical films. It includes ever more distant positions in its realm, and if Abel Gance enthused in 1927: “Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven feront du cinéma... Toutes les légendes, toute la mythologie et tous les mythes, tous les fondateurs de religions et toutes les religions elles-mêmes... attendent leur résurrection lumineuse, et les héros se bousculent a nos portes pour entrer” [“Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven will make films... all legends, all mythologies and all myths, all founders of religion, indeed all religions... await their luminous resurrection, and the heroes throng at the gates”], then he had, probably without meaning to, called for a comprehensive liquidation.

### III

Over long historical periods of time, the entire mode of existence [Daseinsweise] of the human collectivity changes along with the manner and mode of its sense-perception. The manner and mode in which human sense-perception is organized – the medium in which it occurs – is not only conditioned naturally, but also historically. The time of the migration of peoples, in which the late Roman art-industry and the Viennese genesis originated, had not only a different art than that of [Greco-Roman] antiquity, but also a different perception. The professors of the Viennese school, [Alois] Riegel and [Franz] Wickhoff, who stood against the weight of the classical tradition under which art lay buried, were the first to think of drawing conclusions from those artworks about the organization of perception in their corresponding time-frame. As far-reaching as their insights were, they had their limit in the fact that their research was content to show the formal signature which typified perception in the late Roman era. They did not attempt – and could perhaps not hope – to show the social revolutions which found expression in this transformation of perception. Today, the conditions for this sort of insight are far more favorable. And if transformations in the medium of perception, which we are witnessing today, can be understood as the decay of the aura, then one can point to its social determinants.

It is worth illustrating the concept of the aura mentioned previously for historical objects by means of the aura of natural objects. This latter we define as the unique phenomenon of something distant [einer Ferne], however near it may be. Tracing a line of mountains on the horizon on a tranquil summer afternoon, or following a branch which casts its shadow on the placid observer – that means breathing the aura of those mountains and these branches. In the case of this description, it is easy to see the social conditionality of the contemporary decay of the aura. It rests on two circumstances, both of which are conjoined to the increasing significance of the masses in today's life. Namely, the contemporary masses have just as passionate a concern for bringing things spatially and humanly “closer”,<sup>4</sup> as their tendency to overcome what is unique about every given actuality [Gegebenheit: actuality, condition, given fact] through the snapshot [Aufnahme: photographic exposure, reception, absorption] of its reproduction. Every single day the necessity to tangibly grasp the object from the closest proximity as an image, or rather as a copy, as a reproduction, becomes more incontrovertible. And the reproduction, as found in both the illustrated magazine and the weekly newsreel, distinguishes itself unmistakably from the image. Uniqueness and duration are as closely intertwined in the former as evanescence and repeatability [Wiederholbarkeit: repeatability, repetitiveness] in the latter. The removal of the object from its shell, the smashing of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose “sense for

that which is similar [Gleichartige] in the world” has increased to the point that, by means of the reproduction, it can garner that similarity even from something unique. What is promulgated in the intuitive realm, is what is becoming noticeable in the realm of theory as the increasing significance of statistics. The arrangement of reality to the masses and of the masses to the former is a process of immeasurable consequence for thinking as much as for intuition [Anschauung].

#### IV

The uniqueness of the work of art is identical with its embeddedness in the context of tradition. This tradition is itself, to be sure, something thoroughly alive, something extraordinarily variable. A statue of Venus from [Greco-Roman] antiquity, for example, stands in a different context of tradition for the Greeks, who turned it into the object of a cult, than the medieval clerics who saw it as the idol of a false god. What however confronted both audiences in the same manner was its uniqueness, or in other words: its aura. The original way that the art-work was embedded in the context of tradition found its expression in the cult. The oldest works of art are those, as we know, which originated in the service of a ritual, at first magical ones, then religious ones. It is therefore of the utmost importance that this auratic mode of existence of the art-work was never totally separated from its ritual function.<sup>5</sup> In other words: the unique value of the “genuine” art-work has its foundation in the ritual, in which it had its original and primary use-value. This latter may be as mediated as you wish, but it is still recognizable as secularized ritual in the most profane forms of the worship of beauty [Schönsheitsdienst].<sup>6</sup> The profane worship of beauty which emerged during the Renaissance, and which lasted for three hundred years, has allowed us, after the first severe shake-up which has affected it after the passage of this time, to clearly recognize that fundament. When art felt the proximity of the crisis which, after a further hundred years, has become unmistakable – specifically, with the arrival of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, that of photography (simultaneous with the advent of socialism) – it reacted with the doctrine of l’art pour l’art [French: art for art’s sake], which is a theology of art. From this then emerged a well-nigh negative theology in the form of the idea of a “pure” art, which rejects not only every social function, but also every determination through an objective approach [Vorwurf]. (In poetry, Mallarmé was the first to take up this standpoint.)

Doing justice to such contexts is indispensable for reflections on the art-work in the epoch of its technical reproducibility. For they pave the way for the decisive insight here: for the first time in world history, the technical reproducibility of the art-work emancipates that work from its parasitic existence [Dasein] in ritual. The reproduced art-work becomes, to an ever increasing degree, the reproduction of a work of art designed for reproducibility.<sup>7</sup> For example, it is possible to obtain a multiplicity of prints from a photographic negative; the question concerning the genuine print makes no sense. However at the moment when the standard of authenticity in art-production fails, the entire function of art is overturned. In place of its foundation on ritual, steps its foundation on a different praxis: namely its foundation on politics.

#### V

The reception of art-works occurs with various accents, out of which two antipodes can be discerned. The first of these accents lies on cult value, the other on the exhibition value of the art-work.<sup>8</sup> Artistic production begins with constructs [Gebilde], which stand in the service of the cult. One may presume that it was more important for these constructs to exist than to be seen. The elk which the human beings of the Stone Age drew on the walls of their cave is a magical instrument. It was indeed displayed in front of their peers; above all, however, it was directed to the spirits. Today, cult value as such seems more inclined to keep the art-work secret: certain statues of

deities are accessible only to the priests in the cella [Latin: cell]. Certain portraits of Madonna remain covered for nearly the entire year, certain sculptures in medieval domes are invisible to observers on the ground. With the emancipation of individual art-practices from the lap of ritual, the opportunities grow for the exhibition of their products. The displayability [Ausstellbarkeit] of a portrait bust, which can be sent hither and yonder, is greater than that of a statue of a deity which is fixed in place in the interior of the temple. The displayability of the panel painting is greater than that of the mosaics or frescos which preceded it. And even if the displayability of a [Christian church] mass was perhaps not inherently lesser than that of a symphony, then the symphony nevertheless emerged at a point in time when its displayability promised to become greater than that of the mass.

With the various methods of technical reproduction of the art-work, its displayability has grown to such a tremendous degree that the quantitative slippage between its both poles recoils, just as in prehistorical times, into a qualitative transformation of its nature. While in prehistoric times the work of art, due to the absolute weight which lay on its cult value, became primarily an instrument of magic, which was to a certain extent only recognized as a work of art much later on, nowadays the work of art is turning, thanks to the absolute weight which lies on its exhibition value, into a construct [Gebilde] with entirely new functions – functions of the sort which, when compared to the one familiar to us, namely the artistic one, may someday show the latter to be merely incidental.<sup>9</sup> This much is certain, that today photography and, even more so, film provide the most compelling tangible evidence of this insight.

## VI

In photography, exhibition value begins to push back cult value, all along the line. This latter however does not concede without resistance. It has recourse to a last defense, and that is the human countenance. It is no accident that the portrait stands at the center of early photography. The cult value of pictures had its last refuge in the cult of remembering distant or deceased loved ones. For the last time, the aura comes across in early photography in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what marks its melancholic, utterly incomparable beauty. Where however human beings withdrew from photography, that is where exhibition value exhibits its superiority to cult value for the first time. It is the incomparable significance of Atget to have documented this process, by taking photos of the Parisian streets in 1900 devoid of human beings. It was said of him, quite correctly, that he took them as if they were crime scenes. The crime scene, too, is devoid of people. His photos are taken as evidence [Indizien: evidence, indications, signs]. With [Eugène] Atget, photos begin to become pieces of evidence [Beweisstücke: exhibit in court of law] in the historical proceedings [Prozess: trial, judicial court, legal proceeding]. This is what comprises their hidden political meaning. They already demand a certain kind of reception. Free-floating contemplation is no longer quite appropriate for them. They disturb the observer; you feel that you must find a certain pathway to them. At the same time, sign-posts begin to appear in the illustrated magazines. Right ones or wrong ones – no matter. In them, the caption becomes obligatory for the first time. And it is clear that this has a totally different character than the title of a painting. The directives which the viewer receives from illustrated magazines via captions, soon become even more precise and exigent in film, which mandates the perception of every single image through the succession of all previous ones.

## VII

Today the debate fought out between painting and photography during the nineteenth century concerning the artistic value of their products seems absurd and confused. This does not speak against its significance, but on the contrary even underlines it. In fact this debate was the

expression of a world-historical transformation, which neither side of the debate was aware of as such. By separating art from its cultic fundament in the epoch of its technical reproducibility, the appearance [Schein: appearance, financial note, bill] of its autonomy was forever extinguished. However, the functional transformation of art which thereby transpired, disappeared from the view of the century. And it long escaped even the twentieth century, which experienced the development of film.

Whereas previously an unavailing perspicacity had been devoted to deciding the question of whether photography was art – without asking the preliminary question, as to whether the entire character of art might have changed due to the invention of photography – the film theorists quickly took up a correspondingly premature line of questioning. But the difficulties which photography had created for traditional aesthetics were children's play next to those which film generated. This explains the blind readiness to do violence [Gewaltsamkeit], which characterized the beginnings of film theory. Thus for example Abel Gance compared film to hieroglyphs: "That is why, due to a most remarkable throwback to what already exists, we have once again returned to the level of expression of the Egyptians... The language of pictures has not yet grown to maturity, because our eyes are not yet accustomed to it. There is still not enough attention, not enough of a cult, for what is expressed in it." Or Séverin-Mars writes: "What art was granted the dream... of being simultaneously more poetic and more real! From this standpoint, film would represent an utterly incomparable means of expression, and only persons of the most noble mode of thinking, in the most perfect and most secret moments of their course of life, ought to breathe its atmosphere." Alexandre Arnoux, for his part, concludes a reverie on silent film precisely with the question: "Aren't all the bold descriptions which we have given here tantamount to the definition of prayer?" It is quite instructive to see how the attempt to stamp film as an "art" compels these theoreticians, with an incomparable lack of consideration, to interpret cultic elements into such. And yet by the time these speculations were published, works already existed such as "L'Opinion publique" [French: "Public Opinion", directed by Charlie Chaplin in 1923, original English title *A Woman in Paris*] and "La ruée vers l'or" [French: "The Gold Rush," directed by Charlie Chaplin in 1925]. This did not stop Abel Gance from making the comparison to hieroglyphs, and Séverin-Mars spoke of film the way one might speak of the pictures of Fra Angelico [Italian Renaissance painter of early 15<sup>th</sup> century, also called Giovanni da Fiesole]. Characteristically enough, the especially reactionary authors of our day follow the same line when searching for the meaning of film, ending up, if not necessarily in the sacred, then surely in the supernatural. On the occasion of Reinhardt's film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, [Franz] Werfel opined that what had hitherto stood in the way of the expansion of film into the realm of art was the sterile copying of the external world, with its streets, interiors, railway stations, restaurants, cars and beach resorts. "Film has not yet grasped its true significance, its real possibilities... These consist of its unique capacity to express, with natural means and with an incomparable power of persuasion, that which is fairylike, marvelous, and supernatural."

## VIII

The artistic performance of the theatrical actor definitively presents itself through that actor in their own person; by contrast, the artistic performance of the film actor is presented to the public through an apparatus [Apparatur: apparatus, equipment, gadgetry]. This latter has two consequences. The apparatus which brings the performance of the film actor to the public is not required to respect this performance as a totality. Under the direction of the camera-operator, it takes a running position vis-a-vis this performance. The succession of positional shots, which the editor composes out of the material delivered to them, forms the final assembled film. It

comprises a certain number of moments of movement, which must be recognized as such by the camera – not to mention special technical considerations such as close-ups. Thus the performance of the actor is subjugated to a range of optical tests. This is the first consequence of the circumstance, that the performance of the film actor is staged via the apparatus. The second consequence consists of the fact that since film actors do not present their performance to the public themselves, they lose the opportunity to adapt their performance to the public during the showing which is reserved to stage actors. The public ends up taking the position of an assessor, who has no personal contact with the actor. The public can only empathize with the film actor, by empathizing with the apparatus. It therefore takes on the position of the latter: it tests.<sup>10</sup> This is not a position which could possibly encounter cult-value.

## IX

Film is much less concerned with the film actor depicting someone else to the public, than with the actor depicting the apparatus itself. One of the first to sense this reworking of the actor through the test-performance was Pirandello. That the remarks he made in his novel *Si gira* [Italian: “while filming,” Pirandello novel written 1915, translated as *Shoot!*] are limited to the negative side of the matter hardly disqualifies them. Still less, that they exclusively concern the silent film. For the sound-film has changed nothing fundamental in this matter. What remains decisive is that the acting takes place for one apparatus – or two, in the case of sound-film. “The film actor,” wrote Pirandello, “feels as if he is in exile. Exiled not only from the stage, but from his own person. With a murky sense of discomfort, he feels the inexplicable emptiness caused by his body turning into a phenomenon of decay, caused by his evaporation and the fact that his reality, his life, his voice and the sounds which he makes by moving around are robbed, in order to transform them into a silent picture, which trembles for a moment on the screen and then vanishes into silence... The little projector plays with his shadow in front of the public, and he must remain content to act for the former.” One could characterize the same state of affairs in the following manner: for the first time – and this is the achievement of film – human beings are capable of taking action with their entire living person, but only by renouncing its aura. For the aura is bound to its here-and-now [Hier und Jetzt]. There is no copy of it. The aura which is around Macbeth on stage, cannot be separated from the one around the actor who plays him in front of a live audience. Yet what is most peculiar about the shot in the film studio is the fact that it puts the apparatus in the place of the public. The aura around the one who represents, falls away – and thereby simultaneously with the one around what is represented.

It should not surprise us that it is precisely a dramatist like Pirandello who, by characterizing film, involuntarily touches on the ground of the crisis which we see in theater. There is in fact no more decisive contrast to art-works completely encompassed by technical reproduction – especially film – than to those of the stage. Every thorough-going reflection confirms this. Expert observers have long recognized that in the film narration “the greatest effects are always achieved by acting as little as possible... The latest development,” saw Arnheim in 1932, “is treating the actor like a prop, which one chooses by characteristic and... deploys at the correct place.”<sup>11</sup> This is closely connected to something else. The actor who acts on the stage, puts themselves into a role. The film actor is very often forbidden from doing this. The latter’s performance is by no means something uniform, but put together from many particular performances. Next to incidental considerations such as studio rents, availability of partners, décor and so forth, there are elementary necessities of machinery, which disassemble [zerfallen: disintegrate] the acting of the film actor into a series of episodes ready to be mounted. It is a question above all of the lighting, whose installation compels the representation of an event, which appears on the screen as a uniform and fast-paced sequence, to be accomplished by a

series of particular shots, taken in the studio over the course of hours. This is not to mention montages done by hand. Thus a leap from the window can be shot in the studio in the form of the leap from a scaffold, and the ensuing flight can if necessary be taken weeks later as an outdoor shot. Incidentally, it is quite easy to construe even more paradoxical cases. An actor can be asked to shrink away from a knock at the door. Perhaps the proceedings do not turn out satisfactorily. Once the actor is back in the studio, the director can fall back on the resort of firing a gun behind the actor's back, without telling the latter beforehand. The fright of the actor in this moment can be captured and edited into the film. Nothing shows more drastically that art has escaped from the realm of "beautiful appearance [Schein]", which for the longest time was supposed to be the only one in which it could flourish.

## X

The externalization [Befremdung] of the actor in front of the apparatus, as Pirandello described it, is inherently the same kind as the externalization [Befremdung] of a human being in front of their appearance in the mirror. Now however the mirror-image is detachable, it has become transportable. And where is it transported? In front of the public.<sup>12</sup> The consciousness of this does not leave the film actor for a second. While standing in front of the apparatus, the film actor knows that, in the final analysis, all of this has to do with the public: the public of consumers, who comprise the market. This market, to which they devote not just their labor power, but their heart and soul, from head to toe, is as little tangible to them in the moment of their specific performance as any sort of article produced in a factory. Might this circumstance perhaps have a share in the trepidation, the new anxiety which, according to Pirandello, afflicts the film actor before the apparatus? The film answers for the shriveling of the aura with an artificial build-up of "personality" [in English in original] outside of the studio, the cult of the star fostered by film capital conserves that magic of personality [Persönlichkeit: personality, personalism], which has long consisted only of the putrefying magic of its commodity character. As long as film capital sets the tone, contemporary film does not in general perform any sort of revolutionary service, except promoting a revolutionary critique of traditional representations of art. We do not dispute that contemporary film can in certain cases go beyond this, promoting a revolutionary critique of social relationships and indeed of the social order of property. But this essay does not focus this any more than Western European film production does.

The technics of film are connected, precisely like those of sports, in that everyone grows accustomed to the performances they display, as a kind of part-time technical expert. One need only have heard a group of young newspaper delivery boys on their bicycles, discussing the results of a cycle race, to comprehend this state of affairs. It is not for nothing that newspaper publishers hold racing competitions for their newspaper boys. These awaken great interest in the participants. For the winners of these events have a chance to rise from newspaper boy to racer. Thus for example the newsreel gives everyone the chance of rising from a passerby to a film extra. Under certain circumstances, they can in that guise even see themselves put into a work of art – one thinks of [Dziga] Vertoff's *Three Songs of Lenin* or [Joris] Iven's *Borinage*. Every human being today can claim to have been filmed. The best way of explicating this claim is by taking a look at the historical situation of contemporary writing [Schrifttum: general realm of writing, literature, written narration].

For centuries, the situation in writing [Schrifttum] was such that a tiny number of writers confronted a few thousand readers. Towards the end of the previous century a transformation occurred. With the increasing extension of the press, which provided access to ever new political, religious, scientific, occupational, and local organs for readers, ever greater sections of the readership became – at first intermittently – writers. It began with the daily press publishing

“letters to the editor,” and today things have reached the point where there is basically hardly a European involved in the labor-process who does not, in principle, have some sort of opportunity to publish a work-experience, a complaint, a journalistic report or the like. The distinction between author and public is thus in the process of losing its fundamental character. It is turning into something functional, which varies from case to case. Those who read are prepared at any time to become those who write. As the technical experts which they must become, for good or ill, in an extremely specialized labor-process – be it only as the technical expert of a minor institution – they win access to authorship. In the Soviet Union, labor itself is having its say. And its representation in words makes up part of the proficiency, which is necessary for its practical exercise. Literary competence is no longer grounded in specialized education, but in polytechnical education, and thus becomes a property in common.<sup>13</sup>

All this can be applied without further ado to the film, where shifts which took place in writing over centuries transpired in the course of decades. For in the praxis of film – above all in the Russian kind – this shift has in places already been realized. Some of the actors found in Russian film are not actors in our sense of the term, but people who – and indeed first and foremost in their labor-process – represent *themselves*. In Western Europe the capitalist exploitation of film refuses to give any consideration to the legitimate claim which contemporary humanity has of becoming reproduced [Reproduziertwerden]. Under these circumstances, the film industry has its primary interest in spurring the participation of the masses through illusionary representations and dubious speculations.

## XI

A film shoot – especially a sound-film shoot – yields a sight, which has nowhere previously existed and never before been thinkable. It represents a process in which no individual viewpoint can be arranged, from which the recording apparatus, the lighting machinery, the assistant staff etc., in short everything which does not belong to the onscreen action, might be excluded from the field of vision of the observer. (Unless, of course, the position of its pupils precisely matches that of the recording apparatus.) This circumstance, more than any other, turns the intermittent similarities between a scene in the film studio and on the stage into something superficial and inconsequential. The theater knows quite well the place, from which the action cannot initially be seen through as illusionary. By contrast, this place does not exist in the film shoot. Its illusionary nature is a nature of second degree; it is a result of the cut. This means: in the film studio the apparatus penetrates so deeply into reality, that its pure aspect, free of the foreign body of the apparatus, is the result of a special procedure, namely the recording via an appropriately calibrated photographic apparatus and its montage with other recordings of the same kind. The apparatus-free aspect of reality thereby turns into the most artificial of them all, and the sight of an unmediated reality turns into magic flowers [blauen Blumen: blue flowers, symbol of longing for 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticism] in the land of technics.

The same state of affairs, so different from that of the theater, can be contrasted even more instructively with the one which exists in painting. Here we must ask the question: how does the camera-person relate to the painter? To answer this, let us take recourse to a bridging construction, which rests on a concept of the camera-operator already familiar to surgery. The surgeon represents one pole of the social order, at the other stands the magician. The conduct of the magician, who heals the sick patient by a laying on of hands, differs from that of the surgeon, who proceeds by reaching inside the sick patient. Magicians retain the natural distance between themselves and the patient; put more precisely, if they only slightly lessen that distance – through the laying on of hands – they greatly increase it, by virtue of their authority. Surgeons do just the opposite: they greatly reduce the distance to the patient – by penetrating into their innards – and

increase it only slightly, through the care by which their hand moves among the organs. In a word: in contrast to magicians (who still lurk in the practical doctor), the surgeon refuses, at the decisive moment, to confront the sick patient person-to-person; on the contrary, they press operatively into the latter. – Magicians and surgeons relate to each other like painters and camera-persons. Painters observe a natural distance in their work to what exists as a given [Gegebenen], the camera-person by contrast delves deep into the web of structural conditions [Gegebenheit: situation, condition, actuality]. The pictures which each of them generate are enormously different. The one of the painter is something total, the one of the camera-person is something fragmented several times over, whose parts are recombined according to a new law. That is why the filmic depiction of reality is incomparably more meaningful to the people of today, because it grants the apparatus-free aspect of reality, which they have every right to demand from the work of art, precisely on the grounds of its most intensive permeation with the apparatus.

## XII

The technical reproducibility of the work of art transforms the relationship of the masses to art. From the most reactionary, for example vis-a-vis a Picasso, it recoils into the most progressive, for example in view of Chaplin. The progressive mode of conduct is characterized by the fact that the pleasure in viewing and in experiencing it enters into an immediate and interiorized [innige] connection with the attitude of the expert observer. Such a connection is an important social index. Specifically, the more the social significance of an art diminishes, the more the critical and enjoyment-related attitudes of the public pull apart. What is conventional is enjoyed without critique, what is truly new is criticized with antipathy. At the movies, the critical and enjoying attitude of the public are connected. And indeed the decisive circumstance therein is: nowhere more so than at the movies do the reactions of individuals, whose sum comprises the massive reaction of the public, prove to be conditioned from the start by their directly imminent massification. And by revealing these reactions, they mutually regulate each other. Here, too, the comparison with painting is fruitful. The canvas always had an excellent chance of being observed by one person or a few. The simultaneous viewing of paintings by a large public which transpired in the nineteenth century, was an early symptom of the crisis of painting, which was by no means triggered solely by photography, but came about relatively independently of this latter through the appeal of the art-work on the masses.

As things stand, painting is not capable of offering the object of a simultaneous collective reception, as has long been the case for architecture, as once was the case for the epic, and as is the case for film today. And while no real conclusions on the social role of painting can be drawn from this circumstance alone, it nevertheless carries weight at the moment as a severe curtailment, that painting is confronted, through special circumstances and to a certain extent against its nature, immediately with the masses. In the churches and cloisters of the medieval era and in the courts of the princes until the end of the eighteenth century, the collective reception of paintings did not occur simultaneously, but on the contrary was mediated by gradations and by hierarchies. Since this has changed, what comes to be expressed is the particular conflict in which painting has been ensnared, via the technical reproducibility of the image. But although the attempt was made to introduce them to the masses in galleries and salons, there was nevertheless no way for the masses to organize and examine themselves in such a reception.<sup>15</sup> That is why the same public which reacts progressively to a slapstick film, turns into a reactionary one in front of Surrealism.

## XIII

The characteristics of film exist not only in the way human beings represent themselves through the recording apparatus, but also in the way film represents the surrounding world, with the latter's help. A glance at occupational psychology illustrates the capacity of the apparatus to test. A glance at psychoanalysis illustrates it from another side. Film has in fact enriched our world of perception, with methods which could be illustrated by Freudian theory. A Freudian slip in conversation would occur fifty years ago more or less unnoticed. That it might at stroke have opened up perspectives of depth in the conversation, which seemed to run on transparently, was exceptional indeed. Since [Freud's] *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* this has changed. It has isolated things and at the same time rendered things which previously swam unnoticed in the broad stream of perception analyzable. Film has, in the full breadth of the optical world of perception, and now also in the acoustic one, had a similar consequence of a deepening of apperception. The flip side of this state of affairs is that the performances which film presents, are much more exact and can be analyzed under many more numerous points of view than the performances represented on the canvas or the theatrical scene. In contrast to painting, it is the incomparably more exact definition of the situation, which constitutes the greater analyzability of the performance represented on film. In contrast to the theatrical scene, the greater analyzability of the cinematically depicted performance is conditioned by a higher isolatability. This circumstance has, and this forms its main significance, the tendency to promote the reciprocal interpenetration of art and science. In fact, given the prospect of behaviors cleanly extracted from the interior of a specific situation – like a muscle from a body – it is difficult to say which is more captivating: its artistic value or its scientific utility. One of the revolutionary functions of film will be to make the artistic and the scientific utilizations of photography, which for the most part previously diverged, recognizable as identical.<sup>16</sup>

By close-ups of the daily inventory, by emphasizing the hidden details of familiar props, by researching banal milieus under the brilliant leadership of the lens, film on the one hand expands the insight into the inevitabilities which govern our existence [Dasein]; on the other hand, it assures us of an enormous and undreamt-of field of play! Our bars and main city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railway stations and factories seemed to hopelessly enclose us. Then film came and blew up this jail-world with the dynamite of the tenth-of-a-second, so that now, left amidst the widely strewn rubble, we intrepidly undertake adventurous journeys. With close-ups, space expands; with slow-motion, movement does so. Just as the enlargement does not merely explicate what one “anyway” sees indistinctly, but on the contrary permits completely new structural formations of the material to come to view, so too does slow-motion reveal more than just familiar types of movement, but discovers in these entirely unfamiliar ones, “which are by no means the deceleration of rapid movements, but function as the actually gliding, swaying, unearthly ones” [Arnheim 116-117]. What becomes palpable is that a different nature speaks to the camera than to the eye. It is different above all because in the place of a space consciously navigated by human beings, an unconsciously navigated one appears. Even though we are more or less accustomed to seeing the walking gait of people, we certainly know nothing of our posture in the second-by-second progression of our stride. Even though we are more or less used to reaching for a lighter or a soup spoon, nonetheless we scarcely know what really plays out between hand and metal, let alone how this varies in accordance with the various moods we find ourselves in. Here the camera intervenes with its means of assistance, its falling and rising, its interrupting and isolating, its extension and time-lapse photography, its enlargement and diminution. We first experience the optic-unconscious through it, as we experience the drive-unconscious through psychoanalysis.

It has always been one of the most important tasks of art to create a demand, for whose full satisfaction the hour has not yet come.<sup>17</sup> The history of every art-form has critical eras in which these forms press for effects, which could emerge without constraint only through a transformed technical standard, that is to say, a new art-form. The extravaganzas and crudities of art which result from this, most notably in so-called periods of decline, are generated in reality out of their richest historical power-center. Most recently, Dadaism abounded in such barbarism. Its impulse is recognizable only today: Dadaism attempted to create the effects which the public seeks today in film, with the means of painting (and to a certain extent, literature).

Every new, fundamentally path-breaking creation of demand will overshoot its goal. Dadaism did this to the extent that it sacrificed the market values, which film has made its own to a great degree, for the benefit for more significant intentions – intentions it was obviously not conscious of in the manner described here. The Dadaists put much less weight on the commercial valorizability of their art-works than on their unvalorizability as objects of contemplative immersion. They sought to achieve this unvalorizability not the least through the thorough-going degradation of their material. Their poems are “word-salad”, they contain obscene phrases and every sort of imaginable garbage of language. No different were their paintings, on which they pasted buttons or tickets. What they achieved with such means, is a relentless annihilation of the aura of its creation, which they branded as a reproduction with the means of production. Before a picture of Arp or a poem of August Stramm, it is impossible to take the time for concentration and evaluation as before a picture of Derain or a poem of Rilke. The immersion which in the decay of the bourgeoisie turned into a school of asocial behavior, is countered by diversion as a mode of play of social behavior.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the Dadaistic events assured a quite vehement diversion, by making the art-work the focus of a scandal. It had above all one goal in mind: inciting public outrage.

From an alluring appearance or a convincing sound-shape, the work of art become a bullet for the Dadaists. It struck the observer. It achieved a tactile quality. It thereby encouraged the demand for film, whose diverting element is in any case first and foremost a tactile one, more specifically to the variations of backgrounds and settings which periodically impinge on the viewer. One could compare the screen, on which the film scrolls, with the canvas, on which the painting is found. The latter invites the observer to contemplation; in front of it, they can abandon themselves to the stream of associations. They cannot do this in front of the film. They have hardly seen something, when it has already changed. It cannot be stopped. Duhamel, who hates film and comprehends nothing of its significance, and yet perceives much of its structure, stylized this circumstance with the comment: “I can no longer think, what I want to think. Moving images have taken the place of my thoughts.” In fact the stream of associations for those who watch these images, is immediately interrupted by their transformation. This is what the shock-effect of film is based on, which, like every shock-effect, must be absorbed by a heightened mental awareness.<sup>19</sup> By virtue of its technical structure, the film has freed the physical shock-effect from the wrapping of the moral effect in which Dadaism had packed it, as it were.<sup>20</sup>

## XV

The masses are a matrix, out of which all the customary modes of conduct towards art-works are today being reborn. Quantity has recoiled into quality: the much greater masses of participants have produced a transformed kind of participation. It need not dismay the observer, that this participation initially appeared in a disreputable guise. Yet there has been no lack of those who passionately inveigh against this superficial side of the matter. Among these, [Georges] Duhamel has expressed himself most radically. What he reproaches film for is the kind of participation,

which it awakens in the masses. He calls film “a pastime of helots, a distraction for the uneducated, miserable creatures, worked to the bone, who have been consumed by their sorrows... a spectacle, which demands no concentration, requires no capacity for thinking... which sets nothing alight in the heart and raises no other hope than the pathetic one of become a ‘star’ in Los Angeles someday.” It can be seen that this is fundamentally the same old complaint, that the masses seek distraction, while art demands concentration from the observer. That is a cliché. The question remains, does it provide a standpoint for the investigation of film. – This requires a closer look. Distraction and concentration are opposites, which permits the following formulation: those who concentrate in front of works of art immerse themselves therein; they enter into the work, as in the legend told of the Chinese painter who viewed a finished painting. By contrast, the work of art is immersed in the scattered masses. Most strikingly in buildings. Architecture offered from time immemorial the prototype of a work of art, whose reception took place via distraction and via the collective. The laws of its reception are most instructive.

Buildings have accompanied humanity since its Ur-history. Many art-forms have emerged and passed away. Tragedy originated with the Greeks and disappeared with them, and only after centuries was it resurrected as its “rules”. The epic, whose origins lay in the youth of peoples, becomes extinct in Europe at the end of the Renaissance. Panel painting is a creation of the Middle Ages, and nothing guarantees it an uninterrupted duration. The need of human beings for shelter however is continuous. The art of construction has never lain fallow. Its history is longer than that of every other art, and the contemporary effects it brings to mind are of significance for every attempt to account for the relationship of the masses to the art-work. Buildings are received on a double level: through usage and through perception. Or better: tactically and optically. There is no concept of such a reception in the sense of rapt concentration, for example the kind typical of visitors of famous buildings. On the tactical side, there exists no counterpart to what on the optic side is contemplation. Tactical reception takes place not so much on the path to attentiveness, as that of habit. In regards to architecture, this last determines for the most part optical reception. The latter, too, takes place much less through rapt attention than by an occasional observation. This reception generated by architecture has however under certain circumstances canonic value. For the tasks confronting the human apparatus of perception during historical turning-points, cannot be solved by the path of mere optics, thus of contemplation. They are mastered gradually, under the tutelage of tactical reception, through habituation.

Those who are distracted can also acquire habits. Still further: that certain tasks can be mastered in distraction, proves that solving them can become a matter of habit. Under the rubric of distraction, as offered by art, what is covertly registered is how far new tasks of the apperception have become soluble. Since by the way the temptation exists for individuals to withdraw from such tasks, then art takes up its most difficult and important tasks where it is able to mobilize the masses. It does so today in film. Reception in distraction, which is becoming increasingly emphatic in all areas of art, and which is the symptom of deep-seated transformations of apperception, has its authentic instrument of practice in film. In its shock-effect, film converges with this form of reception. Film pushes back cult value not only by bringing the public into the position of an expert observer, but also by the fact that this position dispenses with attentiveness at the movies. The public is an examiner, yet a distracted one.

## Afterword

The increasing proletarianization of contemporary humanity and the increasing formation of masses are two sides of one and the same phenomenon. Fascism is attempting to organize the newly created proletarianized masses, without touching the property-relations which the latter are

pushing to overthrow. It sees its salvation in allowing the masses to express themselves (by no means allowing them their right).<sup>21</sup> The masses have a right to transform the property-relations; Fascism seeks to give them a way to express themselves in the latter's conservation. Consequently, Fascism is tantamount to the aestheticization of political life. The rape of the masses, which Fascism compels to kneel before the cult of a leader, corresponds to the rape of an apparatus, which is utilized for the production of cult values.

All efforts concerning the aestheticization of politics culminate in a single point. This point is war. War and only war makes it possible to give mass movements on the largest scale a goal, while preserving traditional property-relations. That is how the facts of the case are formulated from the standpoint of politics. From the standpoint of technics, it is formulated as follows: only war makes it possible to mobilize the entire technical means of the present era while preserving property-relations. It is self-evident that Fascism's apotheosis of war does not avail itself of this argument. Nevertheless a look at it is instructive. Marinetti's manifesto on the Ethiopian colonial war reads: "For 27 years we Futurists have rebelled against the stylization of war as anti-aesthetic... Consequently we say... war is beautiful, because it founds the domination of human beings over the subjugated machine through gas masks, shock-inducing megaphones, flame-throwers and miniature tanks. War is beautiful, because it inaugurates the long dreamt-of metalization of the human body. War is beautiful, because it enriches a blooming meadow with the fiery orchids of machine-guns. War is beautiful, because it unites rifle fire, artillery, ceasefires, the perfume and stench of decay into a symphony. War is beautiful, because it creates new architecture, like that of the giant tanks, the geometric flying squadrons, the spiral of smoke in burning villages and much else... Poets and artists of Futurism... remember these principles of an aesthetic of war, so that your battle for a new poetry and a new graphic art... will be illuminated by them!"

This manifesto has the virtue of clarity. Its line of questioning deserves to be taken up by the dialectician. This last poses the aesthetics of contemporary war in the following fashion: if the natural valorization of productive forces is hindered by the property-order, then the increase in technical aids, of tempo, of energy-sources presses for an unnatural one. It finds this in war, whose destruction provides the evidence that society was not yet mature enough to make technics into its organ, that technics was not mature enough to control the social elementary forces. Imperialist war is in its ghastly features determined by the discrepancy between the mighty means of production and their inadequate valorization in the production-process (in other words, through mass unemployment and the lack of consumer markets). Imperialist war is the uprising of technics, which collects the claims in "human material", to which society has withdrawn its natural material. Instead of canalizing rivers, it directs a human river into a bed of trenches, instead of sowing seeds from airplanes, it tosses fire-bombs on cities, and in gas warfare it has found a means of abolishing the aura in a new way.

*Fiat ars – pereat mundus* [Latin: let art exist, let the world perish] says Fascism and expects the artificial satisfaction of a sense-perception transformed by technics, as Marinetti admits, from war. This is clearly the fulfillment of *l'art pour l'art* [French: art for art's sake]. Humanity, which was once the plaything of the Olympian gods in Homer, has now become its own plaything. Its self-alienation has achieved that degree, which allows it to experience its own annihilation as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. Thus it is with the aestheticization of politics, which Fascism propagates. Communism answers it with the politicization of art.

End Notes

1. To be sure, the history of the work of art encompasses far more: for example, in the history of the Mona Lisa, the manner and number of copies which were made of it in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

2. It is precisely because authenticity is not reproducible, that the intensive penetration of certain procedures of reproduction – mostly technical – was crucial in the differentiation and gradation of authenticity. One of the important functions of the art-trade was to construct such differentiation. With the discovery of wood-carving, one might say that the quality of authenticity was attacked at its roots, before it had yet developed into its late bloom. A medieval portrait of the Madonna was not yet “authentic” at the time of its creation; it became so in the course of subsequent centuries and perhaps most strikingly in the past century.

3. The most wretched provincial production of *Faust* is in any case superior to a film of *Faust*, in that it stands in ideal competition to the original Weimar production. And whatever of traditional content might be recalled before the stage, has become unrealizable in front of the silver screen – that Goethe’s youthful friend Johann Heinrich Merck lurks in Mephisto, and what is more than suchlike.

4. Causing the masses to be brought humanly closer can mean: having their social function erased from view. Nothing guarantees that a contemporary portraitist, painting a famous surgeon at the breakfast table and in the presence of near and dear ones, will strike the latter’s social function more precisely than a painter of the seventeenth century who depicts their doctors representatively to the public, as for example Rembrandt in *The Anatomy*.

5. The definition of the aura as the “unique phenomenon of something distant, however close it may be” represents nothing less than the formulation of the cult value of the art-work in the categories of spatio-temporal perception. Distance is the opposite of proximity. What is essentially distant is what is unapproachable. In fact unapproachability is the major quality of the cult image. It remains, by its very nature, “distant, however near it may be.” The proximity which might be garnered from its material does not disrupt the distance which it preserves by its existence [Erscheinung: appearance, phenomenon].

6. To the extent that the cult value of the image is secularized, the representations of the substrate of its uniqueness become more indeterminate. The unique nature of the phenomena prevailing in the cult image is displaced more and more by the empirically unique nature of the image-maker or their visual achievement in the minds of consumers. Indeed never entirely so; the concept of authenticity never ceases to reach beyond the authentic attribution. (This is especially evident in the collector, who always retains something of the fetishist and partakes of the cultic energy of the art-work by owning it). Irrespective of this, the function of the concept of what is authentic remains binding in the consideration of art; with the secularization of art, authenticity steps into the place of cult value.

7. In works of film, the technical reproducibility of products is not something newly impressed on it from outside as a condition of its mass-based dissemination, as with for example works of literature or painting. The technical reproducibility of works of film is immanently founded on the technics of its production. This does not only enable the mass dissemination of the film-work in the most direct manner, it compels the latter to do so. It compels the latter, because the production of a film is so expensive that a single individual who might, for example, be able to

purchase a painting, cannot afford to buy a film. In 1927 it was calculated that for a large-scale film to break even, it must reach an audience of nine million. With the sound-film, there was at first an admittedly contrary tendency; the audience was restricted by linguistic borders, and this occurred simultaneously with the emphasis on national interests by Fascism. What is more important than registering this setback, which by the way was largely neutralized by synchronization, is to specify its connection with Fascism. The simultaneity of both phenomena is a result of the economic crisis. The same disturbances which led on a larger scale to the attempt to stabilize the existing property-relations with open violence, drove film-capital, threatened by crisis, to force the transition to the sound-film. The introduction of the sound-film thus brought temporary relief. And indeed not only because the sound-film drew the masses back to the movie-halls, but also because the sound-film allowed new capitals from the electrical industry to solidarize with film-capital.

Thus from an external standpoint, the sound-film promoted national interests, but from an internal standpoint, it internationalized film production even more than before.

8. The aesthetics of idealism never did justice to this polarity, whose concept of beauty it fundamentally circumscribed as something undifferentiated (or conversely, excluded as something differentiated). It registers clearly enough in Hegel, so far as this was thinkable in the confines of idealism. "Images", goes the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, "had already existed for a long time: piety necessitated them quite early on for its devotional services, but it did not need any *beautiful* images, for these were potentially disturbing here. In the beautiful image something external is available, but insofar as it is beautiful, the Spirit [Geist] approaches something selfsame to human beings; in that devotional service, however, the relationship to a thing is essential, for it is itself only an insipid dullness [Verdumpfen: dull sound, thud] of the soul... Fine art... originated in the church itself... even though art emerged out of the principles of art." A passage in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* also points to the fact that Hegel sensed a problem here. "We are beyond", goes the passage, "venerating works of art as idols and being able to pray to them; the impression they make is of a sober-minded kind, and what is stimulated in us through them, requires a still higher touchstone."

The transition from the first kind of artistic reception to the second determines the historical passage of artistic reception more generally. For irrespective of this, a certain oscillation can be shown in principle between both polar kinds of reception for every single artwork. Thus for example the Sistine Madonna. Since Hubert Grimme's investigation, we know that the Sistine Madonna was originally painted for the purpose of exhibition. Grimme drew the impetus for his research from the question: just what was the wooden slat doing in the foreground of the painting, on which both puttos [putto: depiction of a small child, often unclothed, in Renaissance paintings] were borne? What motivated Raphael, Grimme continued, to outfit the heavens with a pair of doormen? The fact was that the Sistine Madonna had been commissioned on the occasion of the public laying-out of the body of Pope Sixtus. The laying-out of the Pope took place in a certain side-chapel of St. Peter's Cathedral. In a niche-like background of the chapel, Raphael's painting had been brought to rest on the coffin during the solemn laying-out ceremony. What Raphael depicted in this painting is how the Madonna, wreathed in clouds, approached the papal coffin against the backdrop of the niche, decorated in green. During the ceremony for Sixtus, Raphael's painting found a splendid use of its exhibition value. Sometime later, it ended up at the high altar in the cloister church of the Black Monks at Piacenza. The reason for this exile lay in Roman ritual. Roman ritual forbade paintings which had been displayed at official events from gaining cult status at the high altar. Raphael's work was devalued to a certain extent by this proscription. Nonetheless, in order to fetch an appropriate

price for it, the curia decided to give its tacit approval of the painting for the high altar by its sale. In order to maintain appearances, they let the painting go to the brotherhood of a remote provincial city.

9. On another level, Brecht poses analogous considerations: “If the concept of the art-work no longer holds for the thing which emerges when an art-work is turned into a commodity, then we must clear away this concept cautiously and conscientiously, but without being afraid, if we do not wish to liquidate the function of this thing along with itself, for it must go through this phase, and indeed without demurring, it is not a noncommittal wanderer off the straight path, but what happens to it here, changes it from the ground up, wiping out its past, so much so that if the old concept should happen to be taken up again – and it will be, why not? – it will no longer trigger any memory of the thing it once referred to.” [Bertolt Brecht, “Der Dreigroschenoperprozess,” in: *Gesammelten Schriften* 21, 769-86]

10. “Film... provides (or could provide) useful conclusions concerning human behavior in detail... Every motivation of the character is absent, the inner life of the person never reveals the main cause and is seldom the main result of the action.” Brecht: *Versuche, The Threepenny Opera Trial* [Bertolt Brecht, “Der Dreigroschenoperprozess,” in: *Gesammelten Schriften* 21, 769-86] The expansion of the field of what is testable, which the apparatus creates for the film actor, corresponds to the extraordinary expansion of the field of what is testable, deployed for the individual by economic circumstances. Thus the significance of occupational aptitude tests constantly increases. The occupational aptitude tests are concerned with sampling the performance of individuals. Film shots and occupational aptitude tests are brought in front of a committee of technical experts. The shot director in the film studio stands exactly where the head examiner stands during the aptitude test.

11. Certain seemingly incidental details, which distance the film director from the practices of the stage, garner in this context a heightened interest. Thus the attempt to let the actors play without make-up, as Dreyer did in *Jeanne of Arc*, among other directors. He spent months just finding the forty actors, who made up the court which condemns heretics. The search for these actors resembled the one for difficult-to-find props. Dreyer took the greatest care to avoid similarities of age, stature and physiognomy. When the actor turns into a prop, the prop functions, on the other hand, not seldom as an actor. In any case it is not unusual for films to give props a role. Instead of reaching for an endless fount of examples, we will limit ourselves to one endowed with a special weight of evidence. A running clock will always be perceived on stage as a disturbance. Its role, measuring time, cannot be granted on the stage. Even in a Naturalist piece, astronomical time would collide with scenic time. Under these circumstances, it is highly indicative of film that it can take avail itself of clock-time without further ado. What can be discerned herein more clearly than in many other traits of film, is how under certain circumstances every single prop can take on decisive functions. From here it is only a step to Pudovkin’s observation, that “the acting of an actor which is tied to an object and is built on it is... always one of the most powerful methods of cinematic depiction.” Thus film is the first means of art which is capable of showing how the material plays along with human beings. It can therefore be an excellent instrument of materialistic representation.

12. The transformation observed here in the mode of exhibition through the technics of reproduction is also noticeable in politics. The contemporary crisis of the bourgeois democracies includes a crisis of the conditions which set the standards for the exhibition of those who govern.

The democracies display those who govern immediately in their own person and indeed in front of representatives. The parliament is their public! With the innovations of the recording apparatus, which permit speakers to be heard by countless others during the speech and to be seen shortly thereafter to countless more, the display of political people in front of the recording apparatus steps into the foreground. The parliament becomes deserted, simultaneously with the theater. Radio and film not only transform the function of the professional actor, but precisely the function of those presented before it, as with those who govern. The direction of this transformation, regardless of its various special tasks, is the same in film actors and in those who govern. It aspires to deploy testable and indeed transferable performances under determinate social conditions. The result is a new selection, a selection before the apparatus, in which the star and the dictator are the winners.

13. The character of privilege of the respective technics is being lost. Aldous Huxley writes: “Advances in technology have led... to vulgarity... Process reproduction and the rotary press have made possible the indefinite multiplication of writing and pictures. Universal education and relatively high wages have created an enormous public who know how to read and can afford to buy reading and pictorial matter. A great industry has been called into existence in order to supply these commodities. Now, artistic talent is a very rare phenomenon; whence it follows... that, at every epoch and in all countries, most art has been bad. But the proportion of trash in the total artistic output is greater now than at any other period. That it must be so is a matter of simple arithmetic. The population of Western Europe has a little more than doubled during the last century. But the amount of reading – and seeing – matter has increased, I should imagine, at least twenty and possibly fifty or even a hundred times. If there were  $n$  men of talent in a population of  $x$  millions, there will presumably be  $2n$  men of talent among  $2x$  millions. The situation may be summed up thus. For every page of print and pictures published a century ago, twenty or perhaps even a hundred pages are published today. But for every man of talent then living, there are now only two men of talent. It may be of course that, thanks to universal education, many potential talents which in the past would have been stillborn are now enabled to realize themselves. Let us assume, then, that there are now three or even four men of talent to every one of earlier times. It still remains true to say that the consumption of reading – and seeing – matter has far outstripped the natural production of gifted writers and draughtsmen. It is the same with hearing-matter. Prosperity, the gramophone and the radio have created an audience of hearers who consume an amount of hearing-matter that has increased out of all proportion to the increase of population and the consequent natural increase of talented musicians. It follows from all this that in all the arts the output of trash is both absolutely and relatively greater for just so long as the world continues to consume the present inordinate quantities of reading-matter, seeing-matter, and hearing-matter.” [Aldous Huxley, *Beyond the Mexique Bay: A Traveller's Journal*] – This mode of observation is self-evidently not progressive.

14. The bold moves of the camera-operator are in fact comparable to those of the surgeon. Luc Durtain reiterates in a list the specific physical feats of technics of those “who are required to be in surgery during certain difficult interventions. I choose as an example a case from oto-rhino-laryngology... I refer to the so-called endonasal perspective-procedure; or I could refer to the acrobatic feats, which are directed via the inverted picture of the laryngoscope, which larynx surgery has introduced; I could also speak of the precision work of ear surgery, which is reminiscent of clock-makers. What a rich succession of stages of the most subtle muscle acrobatics are required of those who repair the human body or wishes to save it, one need think only of the star-operation, during which there is a debate of steel with quasi-fluid internal organs,

as it were, or in the most significant explorations of the abdomen (laparotomy).”

15. This mode of reflection may seem unduly obtuse; but like the great theorist Leonardo shows, obtuse modes of reflection can have their appropriate moment. Leonardo compares painting and music with the following words: “Painting is superior to music because it need not die away as soon as it is called to life, as is the case with unfortunate music... Music, which evaporates, as soon as it is created, stands behind painting, which after the final coat of varnish becomes eternal.”

16. If we seek an analogy to this situation, there is a most instructive one in Renaissance painting. There, too, we meet an art, whose incomparable expansion and significance rests not in the least on the fact that it integrates a number of new sciences or indeed new scientific data. It lay claim to anatomy and perspective, mathematics, meteorology and the doctrine of colors. “What is more remote to us,” wrote Valéry, “than the externalizing [befremdliche] claim of a Leonardo, to whom painting was the highest goal and the highest demonstration of knowledge, so much so indeed that he promoted universal science, according to his own conviction, and he himself did not shrink from a theoretical analysis, whose depth and precision puts us today at a loss.”

17. “The work of art,” said Andre Bréton, “has value only insofar as it vibrates with the reflexes of the future.” In fact every fully-formed art-form stands at the intersection of three lines of development. First, technics is at work in a specific art-form. Before film emerged, there were small photo collections, whose pictures flew by rapidly at the press of a thumb, showing a boxing match or a tennis match; then there were the slot machines in bazaars, where a sequence of pictures was produced by the turning of a crank. – Secondly, what is at work in traditional art-forms at certain stages of their development is the effort to create effects, which are later achieved effortlessly by the new art-form. Before film came into being, the Dadaists sought through their events to create the sort of commotion in the audience which Chaplin produced in a natural manner. – Third, there are often intangible social transformations in the transformation of reception at work, which primarily come to benefit the new art-form. Before film began to construct its public, pictures (which had already ceased to be immobile) were shown to a public gathered at the *Kaiserpanorama*. This audience found itself before a screen, in which stereoscopes were installed, into which each visitor could look. In front of this stereoscope individual images automatically appeared, which paused quickly and then were replaced by another. Edison worked with similar means, when he showed the first film strips (before the use of a film screen and a projector became widespread) to a small audience, which stared into the apparatus, in which a succession of images unrolled. – Incidentally, the institution of the *Kaiserpanorama* expresses a dialectic of development with especial clarity. Shortly before film turned the viewing of pictures into something collective, the viewing of pictures through stereoscopes by individuals in these quickly outmoded establishments once more took on the sort of trenchancy formerly exhibited by the viewing of the divine image by the priests in the cella [Latin: cells].

18. The theological Ur-image of this immersion is the consciousness of being alone with one’s god. During the bourgeoisie’s epoch of greatness, this consciousness strengthened the freedom to shake off hieratic dependency on the church. In the era of its decline, the same consciousness must bear the reckoning for the hidden tendency of those forces which once gave the individual communion with god through the work, to escape from the affairs of the larger community.

19. The film is the art-form appropriate to the increased mortal danger, which the people of today must stare in the face. The need to expose oneself to shock-effects is an adjustment by human beings to the dangers which threaten them. The film corresponding to deep-seated transformations of the apparatus of apperception – transformations which are experienced on the scale of private existence by every passerby in big city street traffic, and on the historical scale by every national citizen of today.

20. Just as with Dadaism, film allows important conclusions to be garnered from Cubism and Futurism. Both appear as inadequate attempts by art to account for the permeation of reality with the apparatus. These schools undertook their attempt, in contrast to film, not through the valorization of the apparatus for the artificial representation of reality, but through a kind of alloy of the represented reality and the represented apparatus. Thus in Cubism, the primary role was played by the premonition of the construction of this apparatus, which relies on optics; in Futurism, it was the premonition of the effects of this apparatus, which emerged in the rapid succession of the film-reel.

21. There is a technical circumstance which is particularly important here, especially with regards to the newsreel, whose propagandistic significance can hardly be overestimated. Mass-based reproduction is accommodated by the reproduction of the masses. In the great parades, monster rallies, in mass institutions related to sports and to war, which are today accompanied by the recording apparatus, the masses see themselves in the face. This process, whose significance needs no emphasis, is tightly connected to the development of reproduction and recording technics. Mass movements are in general more visible to the apparatus than the gaze. Cadres of hundreds of thousands can best be encompassed from a birds-eye perspective. And even if this perspective is as accessible to the human eye as to the apparatus, then nevertheless it is not possible to enlarge the picture the eye registers, in the way the shot can undertake. This means that mass movements, and thus also war, represent a form of human behavior especially suited to the apparatus.

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