

reproduction does the “artistic” element and its “aura” retreat? The exhibition value and mass distribution of films becomes primary – film is the most serviceable exemplification of the function of exhibition. However, if one turns to the original version of the essay, one sees how Benjamin realised that magic – and thus also “art” – is a form of technology, one fused with ritual, though in modern society it would become freed from ritual. This raises the question, poised by archaeologist Margaret Conkey that art could be interpreted as an “attempted resolution of the stress arising from new complexity on the eve of domesticated society.” And here she implies that “domesticated society” was also a form of “technological progress”. This can also be related to the thinking of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who argued that “The symbolic world is the world of the machine” – a viewpoint not in agreement with normal definitions of art! But if art originally served to adapt humans to nature and nature to humans by means of technology allied to ritual, now the technology is allied to politics (and capital!).

VI. PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM: For film, *exhibition* value supersedes *cult* value. The need for continued cult value was achieved by using photography for portraiture – the cult of remembrance. But photography also took on an exhibition value – e.g. Eugene Atget’s photographs of the empty streets of Paris. Were they portraiture” or political statements? Benjamin believes them to be devoid of aura.

VII. PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM AS ART: For Benjamin, the protracted debate about whether photography is art is confused; e.g. art as poetical and real; reading ritual elements into film; or seeing film as hieroglyphics. The concept of art being defended was the product of an obsolete stage of technical development. Photography and film were needlessly defended on the terrain of art. Mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, its autonomy disappearing. Photography and film transformed the very nature and meaning of art. Film is defended by Benjamin under the new value of “exhibition” over “cult” value.

VIII. THEATRE AND FILM: At first sight, Benjamin seems to favour theatre actors over film actors: the theatre actor is present before the audience moving and speaking, while it is the camera and editing equipment that presents the film actor. The movement is created mainly by the film camera. Consequently the film audience takes greater distance from the actor; they become critics, identifying with the camera. It is difficult to attach cult values to film. (Note: today “cult films” refers more to the idea of obsessive “fandom”, forming a “subculture” that differentiates itself from the larger culture).

IX. THE ACTOR AS HIMSELF: The film actor presents *himself* not the character – as if one can only act someone else before an audience. The film actor is said to be empty, deprived of reality. Benjamin summarises this as follows: “for the first time (with film) man has to operate with his whole living person, yet foregoing his aura. For aura is tied to presence; there can be no replica of it.” But what has changed is the whole way of “acting”: the theatre actor “acts”, the film actor attempts to “be normal”, as if inserted in place. Directors may even really scare an actor in order to achieve “realism”. Hence art has left the realm of the “beautiful semblance” – which was supposed to be its true realm.

X. THE EXPERT AUDIENCE: The film actor faces... Who? The consumer and the masses. The aura is replaced by the construction of personality, the creation of “movie star” status, a phoney commodity. If capital leads the way, then revolutionary potential of film will be hindered. It’s only revolutionary role is to change the nature of traditional art. The “distance” initially provided by film, makes the audience experts. And filming lends the opportunity of people being caught on film. The distance between the public and audience changes with mass media; e.g. even starting with letters to newspapers. That is, it took centuries in literature for transitions to happen