

## The Work of Art in the Age of Post-Mechanical Reproduction.

('Post-Mechanical Reproduction' 'Mechanical' as in a machine which is physical and makes physical stuff using force. 'Age of Post-Mechanical Reproduction' = 'Age of virtual production.' "Ecstasy of Communication")

Art in its broadest sense was defined by Benjamin<sup>1</sup> as being once that of objects which had traditional and ritualistic values. Places of worship, architecture, painting, sculpture, drama, literature, music and performance created a culture in which whose 'spaces' individuals could interact, communicate, learn, entertain and be entertained. Within this framework individual works of art were unique productions, though Benjamin makes the point that a certain degree of mass production could be found in the pre industrial ages, examples such as ballad broadsheets and wood block printing. But art was Art more importantly, the singular object, a statue, painting or building, because of its very singularity, and with this it gained an *aura*. An aura in the sense of something which was more than a material physical presence, be it religious or aesthetic, or both. 'Gained' an aura in Benjamin's Marxist/materialist thesis rather than already had this aura. Gained an aura from the society in which it was located as opposed to being given to that society already with an aura. This is a materialist idea for the potency of art, rather than art having in itself any transcendental quality, a sublimity above the ordinary, given by that which is above the ordinary, art is given its aura in Benjamin's materialism by and from and for the ordinary. Art's aura is given to it by the masses, or proletariat or by the bourgeoisie, or by an authority, civil, religious, institutional or capital.

It is a consequence of the aura, no matter its source, that the powerful would collect and associate themselves with such art. They would collect artworks, commission art, musical compositions, and latter endow institutions. Benjamin's argument is with mechanical reproduction the 'original' was no longer needed once the quality of production was such that difference from an original could become trivial or non existent. Digital reproduction could be said to be 'perfect'.

Art-forms today in the broadest sense as a communal activity exist in various forms such as music, performances, the ownership of media, from vinyl through tape to CD and MP3. Drama in the form of film, movies, once celluloid but now digitized. Television, in which drama, news, and especially sport is the cultural input for the many, and now and more recently video games and the internet also accounts for cultural activity.

With the internet not only can 'art' be shared and downloaded, but much more importantly and significantly is the creation of Social Media. Social Media is significantly different to all past cultural activity because it has all the sociality of these other mass forms of art/entertainment but with no external content. Social Media has all the sociality of these other mass forms of art/entertainment without any artwork. Social Media has no external content as its focus, it is just social interaction without any object. It mediates individual directly with individual without anything other. The only requirements for its engagement therefore is to be an individual who uses it. It is the "Ecstasy of Communication"<sup>2</sup>.

As such in the post-mechanical age the reproduction of art has become redundant.

Certainly art still exists, in its traditional form of High Art which is collected and serves as a capitalist criteria of success, and the more mass art of cinema and sport, music and the public gallery and art spaces. But even here the activity has shifted from the art object to the collection, curatorships, events, artists and curators. And the art objects if not disappearing have become all the more poorer for it. Post-modern art objects can be precisely reproduced and are. There are many pickled sharks, ceramics of Micheal Jackson, Brillo Boxes and Urinals.

But it is with Social Media that Benjamin's teleology reaches its finality, in the masses just interacting as 'individuals' within a unifying network. There is no 'real' art because there is no need. We still have a 'copy' of traditional art, even the mass political art of Benjamin's Marxism, but it is supplanted by Social Media as being no longer the necessary constituent of culture and community. Art's creation in the past of culture and community of all kinds was its power, its value, its aura. As it is no longer required, its defining aura of creating a culture and community has gone. The gallery systems might want to use Art's value as power in a capitalist system or political

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<sup>1</sup> "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by Walter Benjamin,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Work\\_of\\_Art\\_in\\_the\\_Age\\_of\\_Mechanical\\_Reproduction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Work_of_Art_in_the_Age_of_Mechanical_Reproduction)  
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

<sup>2</sup> "The need to speak, even if one has nothing to say, becomes more pressing when one has nothing to say, just as the will to live becomes more urgent when life has lost its meaning." --from The Ecstasy of Communication by Jean Baudrillard

activists might use art forms and events as propaganda in political systems. But the essence of art, its power, its aura no longer exists as it is only used in the service of these institutions as a signifier **of** the systems significance and not as once it was where the aura of art gave a significance **to** the system, be it religion or capitalism. Then art works legitimated the systems. Suggested a transcendental. This is no longer the case. Contemporary art is therefore no longer Art. It has become a medium for, and not an object of.

For society this is not a problem, for the artist it is. Anything and nothing can be art. And art is no longer necessary, and no longer is needed originality, or uniqueness.

The artist cannot retreat to a pre-mechanical age, agrarian age. Or if so be of no consequence, such an art though it appears like pre-mechanical art lacks the aura pre-mechanical art had, and so lacks its public significance. It lacks this aura of the pre-mechanical age, the agrarian age, as the aura then was given by those others, by the society, by the civilization.

What and how can anyone wanting to make art, something separate from the ordinary, do? Society can no longer provide the artists with any criteria because it has established itself as self-sufficient and in no need of art. The audiences can and do amuse themselves. And for any artist to be accepted as an artist is for the audience to decide. They in effect make the artist the artist and her or his work art.

One resource that the individual wanting to make the non-ordinary does have is that this is her/his desire for her /his self. Society is therefore no criteria for such an artist using this resource, or is any audience, show, performance or exhibition. And historically art objects did exist prior to such institutions of civilized society, and it is to remake art in this fashion which is a solution for the person wanting to make something extra-ordinary, or sublime. We need not even use the word 'art' as such an activity is possible pre any written language.

Pre-agrarian art had an essential quality which we, as attempting to be artists and make art works, can also utilize. In Pre-agrarian art the object's aura was significant to its maker, and primarily significant. Such cultures, if they can even be called that, lacked even the rudimentary structures of agrarian societies in which sophisticated culture and communities developed. Pre-agrarian artworks could be 'secret', were in effect secret without (the need of) communication and audiences. They could never be known, shared or communicated with more than a handful of others. Therefore the aura of these artworks was not from a mass (of society) so it follows this 'aura' can only have been from the individual maker, for the individual maker. Unless we re-introduce some external source of transcendental sublimity. Though this latter move is difficult if not contradictory, the source of a higher and external transcendental for it to be transcendental would need to be from such a being, and not the imagination or desire of the ordinary individual. We do not fall back from materialism into a faux spiritualism, but neither are we incapable of manifesting an object which has an aura. An object can still, without supernatural resources, have an aura for the ordinary individual, still have a totemic value. This is easy to show, not only in the case of the pre-agrarian individuals and their objects, or in the cases of 'primitive' groups/tribes. We have ourselves had this experience of the totemic object, or many of us have, as children in our interaction with 'special' toys. Such an interaction is not primarily religious, it lacks the sophistication for any religiosity. It is more like the vague qualities of Mana, but even mana is more sophisticated and proto-rational than our childhood fascination with objects which become special only to us and for us.

It follows.

There is no external framework for these works\*, of value or significance, yet their manufacture indicates a desire to create these, this is then internal to the artist and not external to a public. It is not predicated or judged on any external framework, of aesthetic value, cash value, institutions, audiences, experts, connoisseurs, nobility, state or political ideology.

\*They are in my case 'The Black Swans'. (and maybe i'll make other things besides and as well...)