Article Title: The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction
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Source Title: Illuminations
Vol.: Issue: Date: 1968 Pages: 217-251

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The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

"Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were estab-
lished, in times very different from the present, by men whose
power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with
ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability
and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are
carving, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending
in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts there is a
physical component which can no longer be considered as treated
as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern
knowledge and power. For the last twenty-five years number mass
nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial.
We must expect great innovations to transform the entire tech-
nique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and
perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very no-
tion of art."

—Paul Valéry, notes sur l'art,

PREFACE

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

The transformation of the superstructure, which takes place
*Quoted from Paul Valéry, Aesthetics, "The Conquest of Ubiquity,"
translated by Ralph Manheim, p. 115. Pantheon Books, Bollingen Series, New
York, 1946.
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reproduction of writing, has brought about in literature are a familiar story. However, within the phenomena which we are here examining from the perspective of world history, print is merely a special, though particularly important, case. During the Middle Ages engraving and etching were added to the woodcut; at the beginning of the nineteenth century lithography made its appearance.

With lithography the technique of reproduction reached an essentially new stage. This much more direct process was distinguished by the tracing of the design on a stone rather than its incision on a block of wood or its etching on a copperplate and permitted graphic art for the first time to put its products on the market, not only in large numbers as lithographs, but also in daily changing forms. Lithography enabled graphic art to illustrate everyday life, and it began to keep pace with printing. But only a few decades after its invention, lithography was surpassed by photography. For the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction, photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which hitherto devolved only upon the eye by looking through a lens. Since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech. A film operator shooting a scene in the studio captures the images at the speed of an actor's speech. Just as lithography virtually implied the illustrated newspaper, so did photography foretell the sound film. The technical reproduction of sound was tackled at the end of the last century. These convergent endeavors made predictable a situation which Paul Valéry pointed out in this sentence: "Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual and auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sight" (op. cit., p. 126). Around 1900 technical reproduction had reached a standard that not only permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public; it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic proc-
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be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art, the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room.

The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated. This holds not only for the art work but also, for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie. In the case of the art object, a most sensitive nucleus—namely, its authenticity—is interfered with whereas no natural object is vulnerable on that score. The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproducations it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. Their most powerful agent is the film. Its social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inseparable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritages. This phenomenon is most palpable in the great historical films, an actualized version of the historical narratives of which, from the small, castles, palaces, and churches of the imagination, the great film can produce a new position. In 1927 Abel Gance exclaimed enthusiastically: "Shake-
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...your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch. This image makes it easy to comprehend the social basis of the contemporary decay of the aura. It rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "close" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their best toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newspapers differs from the image seen by the unmoved eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former. To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose "sense of the universal equality of things" has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction. Thus is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is molecule in the increasing importance of aesthetics. The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception.

The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol. Both of them, however, were equally confronted with its uniqueness, that is, its aura. Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence


spare. Rembrandt, Beethoven will make films... all legends, all mythologies and all myths, all founders of religion, and the very religious... await their exposed resurrection, and the horses crowd each other at the gate." Presumably without intending it, he issued an invitation to a far-reaching liquidation.

During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well. The fifth century, with its great shifts of population, saw the birth of the late Roman art industry and the Vienna Genesis, and there developed not only an art different from that of antiquity but also a new kind of perception. The scholars of the Viennese school, Riegl and Wickhoff, who resisted the weight of classical tradition under which these later art forms had been buried, were the first to draw conclusions from them concerning the organization of perception at the time. However far-reaching their insight, these scholars limited themselves to showing the significant, formal hallmark which characterized perception in late Roman times. They did not attempt—and, perhaps, saw no way—to show the social transformations expressed by these changes of perception. The conditions for an analogous insight are more favorable in the present. And if changes in the medium of contemporary perception can be comprehended as decay of the aura, it is possible to show its social causes.

The concept of aura which was proposed above with reference to historical objects may usefully be illustrated with reference to the aura of natural ones. We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with...
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existence, not their being on view. The elk portrayed by the man of the Stone Age on the walls of his cave was an instrument of magic. He did expose to his fellow men, but in the main it was meant for the spirits. Today the cult value would seem to demand that the work of art remain hidden. Certain statues of gods are accessible only to the priest in the cella; certain Madonnas remain covered nearly all year round; certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are invisible to the spectator on ground level. With the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the exhibition of their products. It is easier to exhibit a portrait bust that can be sent here and there than to exhibit the statue of a divinity that has its fixed place in the interior of a temple. The same holds for the painting as against the mosaic or fresco that preceded it. And even though the public presentability of a mass originally may have been just as great as that of a symphony, the latter originated at the moment when its public presentability promised to surpass that of the mass.

With the different methods of technical reproduction of a work of art, its fitness for exhibition increased to such an extent that the quantitative shift between its two poles turned into a qualitative transformation of its nature. This is comparable to the situation of the work of art in prehistoric times when, by the absolute emphasis on its cult value, it was, first and foremost, an instrument of magic. Only later did it come to be recognized as a work of art. In the same way today, by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental.

This much is certain: today photography and the film are the most serviceable exemplifications of this new function.

In photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line. But cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human
The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction transcended the perspective of the century, for a long time it even escaped that of the twentieth century, which experienced the development of the film.

Earlier much futile thought had been devoted to the question of whether photography is an art. The primary question—whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art—was not considered. Film theorists asked the same ill-considered question with regard to the film. But the difficulties which photography caused traditional aesthetics were more child's play as compared to those raised by the film. Whence the insensitive and forced character of early theories of the film. Abel Gance, for instance, compares the film with hieroglyphics: "Here, by a remarkable regression, we have come back to the level of expression of the Egyptians..." Pictorial language has not yet matured because our eyes have not yet adjusted to it. There is as yet insufficient respect for, insufficient cult of, what it expresses."

Still, in the words of Sérarin-Mars: "What art has been granted a dream more poetical and more real at the same time? Approaching the film in this fashion the film might represent an incomparable means of expression. Only the most high-minded persons, in the most perfect and mysterious moments of their lives, should be allowed to enter its ambience." Alexandre Arnaux concludes his fantasy about the silent film with the question: "Do not all the bold descriptions we have given amount to the definition of prayer?" It is instructive to note how their desire to class the film among the "arts" forces these theoreticians to read visual elements into it—with a striking lack of discretion. Yet when these speculations were published, films like L'Opinion publique and The Gold Rush had already appeared. This, however, did not keep Abel Gance from adding hieroglyphics for purposes of comparison, nor Sérarin-Mars from speaking of the one film as the most of paintings by Fra Angelico. Characteristically, even today uncritical authors give the film a similar conceptual significance—if not an

1 Abel Gance, op. cit., p. 100.
2 Sérarin-Mars, quoted by Abel Gance, op. cit., p. 100.
3 Alexandre Arnaux, Civilisme pitto, 1910, p. 56.
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proach is that of testing." This is not the approach to which cult values may be exposed.

The artistic performance of a stage actor is definitely presented to the public by the actor in person; that of the screen actor, however, is presented by a camera, with a twofold consequence. The camera that presents the performance of the film actor to the public need not respect the performance as an integral whole. Guided by the cameraman, the camera continually changes its position with respect to the performance. The sequence of positions which the editor composes from the material supplied him constitutes the completed film. It comprises certain factors of movement which are in reality those of the camera, not to mention special camera angles, close-ups, etc. Hence, the performance of the actor is subjected to a series of optical tests. This is the first consequence of the fact that the actor’s performance is presented by means of a camera. Also, the film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience during his performance, since he does not present his performance to the audience in person. This permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experiencing any personal contact with the actor. The audience’s identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera. Consequently the audience takes the position of the camera, its app


[Image 0x214 to 612x1216]
proves that there is indeed no greater contrast than that of the stage play to a work of art that is completely subjective to or, like the film, founded in, mechanical reproduction. Experts have long recognized that in the film "the greatest effects are almost always obtained by 'acting' as little as possible. . . ." In 1931 Rudolf Arnheim saw "the lowest trend . . . in treating the actor as a stage prop chosen for its characteristics and . . . instead of the proper place." With this idea something else is closely connected. The stage actor identifies himself with the character of his role. The film actor very often is denied this opportunity. His creation is by no means all of a piece, it is composed of many separate performances. Besides certain fortuitous considerations, such as cost of studio, availability of fellow players, décor, etc., there are elementary necessities of equipment that split the actor's work into a series of mountable episodes. In particular, lighting and its installation require the presentation of an event that, on the screen, unfolds as a rapid and unified scene, in a sequence of separate shootings which may take hours at the studio; not to mention more obvious montage. Thus a jump from the window can be shot in the studio as a jump from a scaffold, and the ensuing flight, if needed be, can be shot weeks later when outdoor scenes are taken. Few more paradoxical cases can easily be constructed. Let us assume that an actor is supposed to be startled by a knock at the door. If his reaction is not satisfactory, the director can resort to an expedient: when the actor happens to be at the studio again he has a shot fired behind him without his being forewarned of it. The frightened reaction can be shot now and be cut into the scene version. Nothing more strikingly shows that art has left the realm of the "beautiful semblance which, as far, had been taken to be the only sphere where art could thrive.

The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, as Pirandello describes it, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror.

But now the reflected image has become separable, transportable. And where it is transported? Before the public. Never for a moment does the screen actor cease to be conscious of this fact. While facing the camera he knows that ultimately he will face the public, the consumers who constitute the market. This market, where he offers not only his labor but also his whole self, his heart and soul, is beyond his reach. During the shooting he has as little contact with it as any article made in a factory. This may contribute to that oppression, that new anxiety which, according to Pirandello, grips the actor before the camera. The film responds to the shrinking of the aura with an artificial build-up of the "personality" outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony spell of a commodity. So long as the movie-makers' capital sets the fashion, as a rule no other revolutionary merit can be accredited to today's film than the promotion of a revolutionary criticism of social conditions, even of the distribution of property. However, our present study is no more specifically concerned with this than is the film production of Western Europe.

It is inherent in the technique of the film as well as that of sports that everybody who witnesses its accomplishments is some-what of an expert. This is obvious to anyone listening to a group of newspaper boys leaning on their bicycles and discussing the outcome of a bicycle race. It is not for nothing that newspaper publishers arrange races for their delivery boys. These arouse great interest among the participants, for the winner has an opportunity to rise from delivery boy to professional racer. Similarly, the newsreel offers everyone the opportunity to rise from passive to movie extra. In this way any man might even find himself part of a work of art, as witness Vertov's Three Songs About Lenin or Ivens' Borinage. Any man today can lay claim to being filmed. This claim can best be elucidated by a comparative look at the historical situation of contemporary literature.

For centuries a small number of writers were confronted by
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many thousands of readers. This changed toward the end of the last century. With the increasing extension of the press, which kept placing new political, religious, scientific, professional, and local organs before the readers, an increasing number of readers became writers—at first, occasional ones. It began with the daily press opening to its readers space for "letters to the editor." And today there is hardly a gainfully employed European who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere or other comments on his work, grievances, documentary reports, or that sort of thing. Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. The difference becomes merely functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer. As expert, which he had to become willy-nilly in an extremely specialized work process, even if only in some minor respect, the reader gains access to authorship. In the Soviet Union work itself is given a voice. To present it verbally is part of man's ability to perform the work. Literary license is now founded on polytechnic rather than specialized training and thus becomes common property. Yet all this can easily be applied to the film, where mutations that in literature took centuries have come about in a decade. In cinematic practice, particularly in Russia, this change-over has partially become established reality. Some of the players whom we meet in Russian films are not actors in our sense but people who portray themselves—and primarily in their own work process. In Western Europe the capitalistic exploitation of the film denies consideration to modern man's legitimate claim to being reproduced. Under these circumstances the film industry is trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations.

The shooting of a film, especially of a sound film, affords a spectacle unimaginable anywhere at any time before this. It presents a process in which it is impossible to assign to a spectator a viewpoint which would exclude from the actual scene such extraneous accessories as camera equipment, lighting machinery, staff assistants, etc.—unless his eye were on a line parallel with the lens. This circumstance, more than any other, renders superficial and insignificant any possible similarity between a scene in the studio and one on the stage. In the theater one is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusionary. There is no such place for the movie scene that is being shot. Its illusionary nature is that of the second degree, the result of cutting. That is to say, in the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with other similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an archid in the land of technology. Even more revealing is the comparison of these circumstances, which differ so much from those of the theater, with the situation in painting. Here the question is: How does the cameraman compare with the painter? To answer this we take recourse to an analogy with a surgical operation. The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The magician bends a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient's body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself, though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse, he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient's body, and increases it but little by the caution with which he, hand moves among the organs. In short, in contrast to the magician—who is still hidden in the medical practitioner—the surgeon at the decisive moment abandons from facing the patient man to man; rather, it is through the operation that he penetrates into him. Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web.
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ture at all times, for the epic poem in the past, and for the movie today. Although this circumstance in itself should not lead one to conclusions about the social role of painting, it does constitute a serious threat as soon as painting, under special conditions and, as it were, against its nature, is confronted directly by the masses. In the churches and monasteries of the Middle Ages and at the princely courts up to the end of the eighteenth century, a collective reception of paintings did not occur simultaneously, but by graduated and hierarchized mediation. The change that has come about is an expression of the particular conflict in which painting was implicated by the mechanical reproducibility of paintings. Although paintings began to be publicly exhibited in galleries and salons, there was no way for the masses to organize and control themselves in their reception. Thus the same public which responds in a progressive manner toward a grotesque film is bound to respond in a reactionary manner to surrealism.

Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reception of the masses toward art. The reactionary attitude toward a Chaplin painting changes into the progressive reaction toward a Chaplin movie. The progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert. Such fusion is of great social significance. The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public. The conventional is uninterestingly enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with avenlion. With regard to the screen, the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide. The decisive reason for this is that individual reactions are predetermined by the mass audience response they are about to produce, and this is nowhere more pronounced than in the film. The moment these responses become manifest they control each other. Again, the comparison with painting is fruitful. A painting has always had an excellent chance to be viewed by one person or by a few. The simultaneous contemplation of paintings by a large public, such as developed in the nineteenth century, is an early symptom of the crisis of painting, a crisis which was by no means occasioned exclusively by photography but rather in a relatively independent manner by the appeal of art works to the masses.

Painting simply is in no position to present an object for simultaneous collective experience, as it was possible for architec-
points of view than those presented on paintings or on the stage. As compared with painting, filmed behavior lends itself more readily to analysis because of its incomparably more precise statements of the situation. In comparison with the stage scene, the filmed behavior item lends itself more readily to analysis because it can be isolated more easily. This circumstance derives its chief importance from its tendency to promote the mutual penetration of art and science. Actually, of a screened behavior item which is vastly brought out in a certain situation, like a muscle of a body, it is difficult to say which is more fascinating, its artistic value or its value for science. To demonstrate the identity of the artistic and scientific uses of photography which heretofore usually were separated will be one of the revolutionary functions of the film.

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieu under the ingenuous guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad station and factories appeared to have locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear; it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. So, too, slow motion not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones "which, far from looking like retarded rapid movements, give the effect of singularly gliding, floating, supernatural motion." * Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye—if only because an unconscious penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored.

* Washburn Amabis, Inc. et al., p. 176.

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by man. Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows nothing of a person's posture during the fractional second of a stride. The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extension and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.

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One of the foremost tasks of art has always been the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later.17 The history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form aspires to effects which could be fully obtained only with a changed technical standard, that is to say, in a new art form. The extravagances and crudities of art which thus appear, particularly in the so-called decadent epochs, actually arise from the nucleus of its richest historical energies. In recent years, such barbarisms were abundant in Dadaism. It is only now that its impetus becomes discernible. Dadaism attempted to create by pictorial—and literary—means the effects which the public today seeks in the film. Every fundamentally new, pioneering creation of demands will carry beyond its goal. Dadaism did so to the extent that it sacrificed the market values which are so characteristic of the film in favor of higher ambitions. Though of course it was not conscious of such intentions as here described, The Dadaists attached much less importance to the sales value of their work than to its usefulness for contemplative immersion. The studied degradation of their material was not the least of their means to achieve this usefulness. Their poems are "word salad" containing obscenities and every imaginable waste product of language. The same is true of their paintings, on which they mounted buttons and tickets. What they intended and achieved was a relentless
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The mass is a matrix from which all traditional behavior toward works of art issues today in a new form. Quantity has been transmuted into quality. The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation. The fact that the new mode of participation first appeared in a disreputable form must not confuse the spectator. Yet some people have launched spirited attacks against precisely this superficial aspect. Among these, Duhamel has expressed himself in the most radical manner. What he objects to most is the kind of participation which the movie elicits from the masses. Duhamel calls the movie "a pastime for heroes, a diversion for uncowed, wrecked, work-out creatures who are consumed by their worries... a spectacle which requires no concentration and presupposes no intelligence... which kindles no light in the heart and awakens no hope other than the ridiculous one of someday becoming a 'star' in Los Angeles." Clearly, this is at bottom the same ancient lament that the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration from the spectator. That is a commonplace. The question remains whether it provides a platform for the analysis of the film. A close look is needed here. Distraction and concentration form polar opposites which may be stated as follows: A man who concentrates before a work of art is astounded by it. He enters into this work of art the way legend tells of the Chinese painter when he viewed his finished painting. In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art. This is most obvious with regard to buildings. Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction. The laws of its reception are most instructive.

Buildings have been man's companions since primeval times. Many art forms have developed and perished. Tragedy begins with the Greeks, is extinguished with them, and after centuries its "rules" only are revived. The epic poem, which had its origin


* Duhamel, op. cit., p. 38.
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in the youth of nations, expires in Europe at the end of the Ren-

aisance. Panel painting is a creation of the Middle Ages, and

nothing guarantees its uninterrupted existence. But the human

need for shelter is lasting. Architecture has never been idle. In

history is more ancient than that of any other art, and its claim

to being a living force has significance in every attempt to com-

prehend the relationship of the masses to art. Buildings are ap-

propriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception—or

rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot be under-

stood in terms of the attentive concentration of a courtier before

a famous building. On the tactile side there is no counterpart to

contemplation on the optical side. Tactile appropriation is accom-

plished not so much by attention as by habit. As regards architec-

ture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception.

The latter, too, occurs much less through rape attention than by

noticing the object in incidental fashion. This mode of appropria-

tion, developed with reference to architecture, in certain

circumstances acquires canonical value. For the tasks which face

the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of his-

canny cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contempla-

tion, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the

guidance of tactile appropriation.

The distracted person, too, can form habits. More, the ability to

master certain tasks in a state of distraction proves that their

solution has become a matter of habit. Distraction as provided by

art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks

have become soluble by appreciation. Since, moreover, individ-

uals are tempted to avoid such tasks, art will tackle the most dif-

cult and most important ones where it is able to mobilize the

masses. Today it does so in the film. Reception in a state of dis-

traction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is

symptomatic of profound changes in appreciation, finds in the

film its true means of exercise. The film with its shock effect

meets this mode of reception halfway. The film makes the cult

value reverts into the background not only by putting the public

in the position of the critic, but also by the fact that at the movies

EPILOGUE

The growing proletarianization of modern man and the in-

creasing formation of masses are two aspects of the same process.

Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian

masses without affecting the property structure which the masses

strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses

not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The

masses have a right to change property relations, Fascism seeks to

give them an expression while preserving property. The log-

ical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into politi-

cal life. The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its

Führer cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the viola-

tion of an apparatus which is immersed into the production of

ritual values.

All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing:

war. War and war only can set a goal for mass movements on the

largest scale while respecting the traditional property system.

This is the political formula for the situation. The technological

formula may be stated as follows: Only war makes it possible to

mobilize all of today’s technical resources while maintaining the

property system. It goes without saying that the Fascist appel-

lation of war does not employ such argument. Still, Martinetti

says in his manifesto on the Ethiopian colonial war: ‘For twenty-

seven years we Futurists have rebelled against the branding of

war as antisesthetic…’. Accordingly we state… War is beauti-

ful because it establishes man’s domination over the subjugated

machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame

throwers, and small tanks. War is beautiful because it initiates the

dream of metallization of the human body. War is beautiful be-

cause it enriches a flowering masochism with its fiery orchids of

machine guns. War is beautiful because it combines the gunsfire,

the cannonades, the cease-fire, the scents, and the stretch of

perfection into a symphony. War is beautiful because it creates
new architecture, like that of the big tanks, the geometrical for- 
mation flights, the smoke spirals from burning villages, and many 
others. . . . Poets and artists of Futurism! . . . remember these 
principles of an aesthetics of war so that your struggle for a new 
literature and a new graphic art . . . may be illumined by them!!

This manifesto has the virtue of clarity. Its formulations de- 
scribe to be accepted by dialecticians. To the latter, the aesthetics 
of today's war appears as follows: If the natural utilization of 
productive forces is impeded by the property system, the in- 
crease in technical devices, in speed, and in the sources of energy 
will press for an unnatural utilization, and this is found in war. 
The destructiveness of war furnishes proof that society has not 
been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that 
technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the 
 elemental forces of society. The horrible features of imperial- 
istic warfare are attributable to the discrepancy between the 
tremendous aspect of production and their inadequate utilization 
in the process of production—in other words, to unemployment 
and the lack of markets. Imperialistic war is a rebellion of tech- 
nology which collects, in the form of "human material," this 
claims to which society has denied its natural material. Instead 
of draining rivers, society directs a human stream into a bed of 
tranches, instead of dropping shells from airplanes, it drops inc- 
cendiary bombs over cities; and through gas warfare the aura is 
abolished in a new way.

"Faut ars-essent mundi," says Fascism, and, as Marinetti ad- 
mits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense 
perception that has been changed by technology. This is evi- 
dently the consummation of "Fut pour Fut," Hanka, which 
in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olym- 
plan gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached 
such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an 
aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of poli- 
tics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds 
by politicizing art.

Notes

1. Of course, the history of a work of art encompasses more than 
this. The history of the " Mona Lisa," for instance, encompasses 
the kind and number of its copies made in the 19th, 18th, and 19th 
centuries.

2. Precisely because authenticity is not reproducible, the inten- 
sive penetration of certain (mechanical) processes of reproduction 
was instrumental in differentiating and grading authenticity. To de- 
velop such differentiation was an important function of the trade in 
works of art. The invention of the woodcut may be said to have 
hurt at the root of the quality of authenticity even before its late 
flowering. To be sure, at the time of its origin a medieval picture of 
the Madonna could not yet be said to be "authentic." It became 
"authentic" only during the succeeding centuries and perhaps most 
strikingly so during the last one.

3. The poorest provincial staging of Faust is superior to a Faust 
film in that, ideally, it competes with the first performance at Wei- 
mar. Before the screen it is reproducible to remember traditional 
constances which might come to mind before the stage—for instance, 
that Goethe's friend Johann Heinrich Merck is hidden in Mephisto, 
and the like.

4. To satisfy the human interest of the masses may mean to have 
one's social function removed from the field of vision. Nothing 
guarantees that a portrait of today, when painting a famous sur- 
gon at the breakfast table in the midst of his family, depicts his so- 
cial function more poignantly than a portrait of the 17th century who 
portrayed his medical doctors as representing this profession, like 
Rembrandt in his "Anatomy Lesson."

5. The definition of the aura as a "marginal phenomenon of a dis- 
tance however close it may be" represents nothing but the formula- 
tion of the value of the work of art in categories of space and 
[time] perception. Distance is the opposite of closeness. The essentially 
distant object is the unapproachable one. Unapproachability is im- 
deed a major quality of the cult image. True to its nature, it remains 
"distant, however close it may be." The closeness which one may 
gain from its subject matter does not impair the distance which it 
retains in its appearance.
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within the limits of Idealism. We quote from his Philosophy of History:

"Images were known of old. Piety at an early time required them for worship, but it could do without beautiful images. These might even be disturbing. In every beautiful painting there is also something nonspiritual, merely external, but in spirit speaks to man through its beauty. Worshipping, conversely, is concerned with the work as an object, for it is but a spiritless impostur of the soul... Fine art has arisen... in the church... although it has already gone beyond its principle or art."

Likewise, the following passage from The Philosophy of Fine Art indicates that Hegel sensed a problem here.

"We are beyond the stage of reverence for works of art as divine and objects deserving our worship. The impression they produce is one of more reflective kind, and the emotions they arouse require a higher test..." -- G. W. F. Hegel, The Philosophy of Fine Art, trans., with notes, by F. P. B. Emslie, Vol. 1, p. 12, London, 1903.

The transition from the first kind of artistic reception to the second characterizes the history of artistic reception in general. Apart from that, a certain oscillation between these two polar modes of reception can be demonstrated for each work of art. Take the Sixtine Madonna. Since Hubert Grünem's research it has been known that the Sixtine Madonna originally was painted for the purpose of exhibition. Grünem's research was inspired by the question: What is the purpose of the molding of the foreground of the painting which the two cupids lean upon? How, Grünem asked further, did Raphael come to furnish the sky with two draped angels? Research proved that the Madonna had been commissioned for the public lying-in-chapel of Pope Sixtus. The Popes lay in state in a certain side chapel of St. Peter's. On that occasion Raphael's picture had been fastened in a niche-like background of the chapel, supported by the canopy. In this picture Raphael portrays the Madonna approaching the papal canopy in clouds from the background of the niche, which was decorated by green drapes. At the obsequies of Sixtus a pre-eminent exhibition value of Raphael's picture was taken advantage of. Some time later it was placed on the high altar in the church of the Blanco Frões at Piacenza. This reason for the exile is to be found in the Roman rites which forbid the use of paintings exhibited at obsequies as cult objects on the high altar. This regulation derived Raphael's picture to
some degree. In order to obtain an adequate price nevertheless, the Papal See resolved to add to the bargain the tacit toleration of the picture above the high altar. To avoid attention the picture was given to the monks of the far-off provincial town.

9. Bertolt Brecht, on a different level, engaged in analogous reflection: "If the concept of 'work of art' can no longer be applied to the thing that emerges once the work is transformed into a commodity, we have to eliminate this concept with cautious care but without fear, lest we liquidate the function of the very thing as well. For it has to go through this phase without mental reservation, and not as nonconventional deviation from the straight path; rather, what happens here with the work of art will change it fundamentally and erase its past to such an extent that should the old concept be taken up again—and it will, why not?—it will no longer stir any memory of the thing it once designated."

10. "The film...provides—or could provide—useful insight into the details of human actions. . . Character is never used as a source of motivation, the inner life of the person never supplies the principal cause of the plot and seldom is in main results." (Bertolt Brecht, Versuche, "Die Dreigroschenopera," p. 166.) The expansion of the field of the realistic which mechanical equipment brings about for the actor corresponds to the extraordinary expansion of the field of the realistic brought about for the individual through economic conditions. Thus, vocational aptitude tests become commonly more important. What matters in these tests are segmental performances of the individual. The film shot and the vocational aptitude test are taken before a committee of experts. The camera director in the studio accepts a place identical with that of the examiner during aptitude tests.

11. Rudolf Arnheim, Film als Kunst, Berlin, 1931, pp. 176 f. In this context certain seemingly unimportant details in which the film director deviates from stage practices gain in interest. Such is the attempt to let the actor play without makeup, as made among others by Dryer in his Jeanne d'Arc. Dryer spent months seeking the forty actors who constitute the Inquisition's tribunal. The search for these actors resembled that for stage properties that are hard to come by. Dryer made every effort to avoid resemblances of age, build, and physiognomy. If the actor thus becomes a stage property, this latter, on the other hand, functions as actor. At least it is not unusual for the film to assign a role to the stage property.

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Instead of choosing at random from a great wealth of examples, let us concentrate on a particularly convincing one. A clock that is working will always be a disturbance on the stage. There it cannot be permitted its function of marking time. Even in a naturalistic play, astronomical time would clash with theatrical time. Under these circumstances it is highly revealing that the film can, whenever appropriate, use time as measured by a clock. From this more than from many other touches it may clearly be recognized that under certain circumstances each and every prop in a film may assume important functions. From here it is but one step to Pudovkin's statement that "the playing of an actor which is connected with an object and is built around it... is always one of the strongest methods of cinematic construction." (I. Pudovkin, Filmmegie und Filmaufbau, Berlin, 1928, p. 128.) The film is the first art form capable of demonstrating how matter plays tricks on man. Hence, films can be an excellent means of materialist representation.

12. The change noted here in the method of exhibition caused by mechanical reproduction applies to politics as well. The present crisis of the bourgeois democracies comprises a crisis of the conditions which determine the public presentation of the rulers. Democracies exhibit a number of governments of the people, formed for a while before the nation's representatives. Parliament is his public. Since the innovations of camera and recording equipment make it possible for the orator to become audible and visible to an unlimited number of persons, the presentation of the man of politics before camera and recording equipment becomes paramount. Parliaments, as much as theaters, are deserts. Radio and film not only affect the function of the professional actor but likewise the function of those who also exhibit themselves before this mechanical equipment, those who govern. Though their tasks may be different, the change affects equally the actor and the ruler. The trend is toward embellishing controllable and transferable skills under certain social conditions. This results in a new selection, a selection before the equipment from which the star and the dictator emerge victorious.

13. The privileged character of the respective techniques is lost. Aldous Huxley writes: "Advances in technology have led... to vulgarity... Process reproduction and the rotary press have made possible the indefinable multiplication of writing and picture. On the other hand, frequently functions as actor. At least it is not unusual for the film to assign a role to the stage property."
know how to read and can afford to buy reading and pianoforte
matter. A great industry has been called into existence in order to
supply these communities. Now, artificers in a very rare
phenomenon; whence it follows ... that, at every epoch and in all
countries, must art has been bed. 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 popula-
tion of Western Europe has a little more than doubled during the
last century, but the amount of reading—and seeing—mater has
increased, I should imagine, at least twenty and possibly fifty or
even a hundred times. If there were a men of talent in a popula-
tion of 10 millions, there will presumably be 2 men of talent
among 21 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 still-
born 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—mater has far outstripped the natural produc-
tion of gifted writers and draughtsmen. It is the same with
hearing-mater. Prosperity, the gramophone and the radio have
created an audience of hearers who consume an enormous量 of hear-
ing—mater that has increased out of all proportion to the increase
of population and the consequent increase of talent in music-
icians. It follows from all this that in all the arts the output of
trash is both absolutely and relatively greater than it was in the
past; and that it must remain greater for just so long as the world
continues to consume the present inordinate quantities of read-
ing—mater, seeing—mater, and hearing—mater. —Aldous Huxley,
Beyond the Axenic Bay, A Traveller's Journal, London, 1940,
This mode of observation is obviously not progressive.
14. The baldness of the cameraman is indeed comparable to that
of the surgeon. Luc Darrain lists among specific technical defects
of hand those "which are required in surgery in the case of certain
difficult operations. I choose as an example a case from on-thespot
laryngology ... the so-called endonasal perspective procedure; or

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I refer to the acrobatic tricks of larynx surgery which have to be per-
formed following the reversed picture in the laryngoscope. I might
also speak of ear surgery which suggests the precision work of
watchmakers. What range of the most subtle muscular acrobatics is
required from the man who wants to repair or save the human body?
We have only to think of the chucking of a cadaver where there
is virtually a debate of steel with nearly fluid tissue, or of the
major abdominal operations (laparotomy). —Luc Darrain, op. cit.
last year. This mode of observation may seem crude; but the great
theoretician Leonardo da Vinci has shown, crude modes of observation may at
times be usefully addressed. Leonardo compares painting and music as
follows: 'Painting is superior to music because, unlike unfortu-
nate music, it does not have to die as soon as it is born. . . . Music
which is consumed in the very act of its birth is inferior to painting
which the use of varnish has rendered eternal." (Trattato, I, 13.)
16. Renaissance painting offers a revealing analogy to this situa-
tion. The incomparable development of this art and its significance
was not least on the integratio n of a number of new sciences, or at
least of new scientific data. Renaissance painting made use of anatomy
and perspective, of mathematics, meteorology, and chronology.
Valery writes: "What could be further from us than the strange
claim of a Leonardo to whom painting was a supreme goal and the
ultimate demonstration of knowledge? Leonardo was convinced that
painting demanded universal knowledge, and he did not even shrink
from a theoretical analysis which to us is amusing because of its very
depth and precision. . . . "—Paul Valéry, Pièces sur l'art, "Auteurs de
17. "The work of art," says André Breton, "is valuable only in so
far as it is witnessed by the rhythm of the future." Indeed, every de-
veloped art form interacts three lines of development. Technology
works toward a certain form of art. Before the advent of the film
there were photo booklets with pictures which fitted by the an-
looker's eye to the contours of the subject, thus portraying a
travers a translucent or a tenacious mass. Then there were the slot
machines in basaari; their picture sequences were produced by the
opening of a turn of the crank.
Secondly, the traditional art forms in certain phases of their de-
velopment strangely work toward effects which later are effortless
ly attained by the new ones. Before the rise of the movie the
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The pronouncement that this apparatus will be structurally based on optics plays a dominant part. In Futurism, it is the pronouncement of the effects of this apparatus which are brought out by the rapid sequence of the film strip.

11. One technical feature is significant here, especially with regard to newsreels, the propagandist importance of which can hardly be overestimated. Mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of masses. In big parades and monster rallies, in sports events, and in war, all of which are brought face to face with themselves. This process, whose significance need not be stressed, is intimately connected with the development of the techniques of reproduction and photography. Mass movements are usually discussed more clearly by a camera than by the naked eye. A bird's-eye view best captures gatherings of hundreds of thousands. And even though such a view may be as accessible to the human eye as it is to the camera, the image received by the eye cannot be enlarged the way a negative is enlarged. This means that mass movements, including war, constitute a form of human behavior which particularly favors mechanical equipment.