

## **A study on image art of Walter Benjamin's theory**

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### **Abstract**

*In the twentieth century, the application of mechanical reproduction technology in the field of art led to a dramatic art revolution, which had far-reaching influence on the present image art. This article takes Benjamin's theory of mechanical reproduction as the starting point of thought, and criticizes and reconsiders the art, the public and the life. This paper is divided into three parts. First of all, the "Aura" of art is disappearing and the alienation of art is emerging due to the characteristics of the times. In fact, the dissemination function of art, that is to say, the value of exhibition replaces the value of worship, which the public play a pivotal role. And ultimately explores the meaning of the relationship between art, life and the public for the contemporary image art.*

**Keywords:** Walter Benjamin; mechanical reproduction; image; art

## 1. The disappearance of Aura and the alienation of human

The term "aura" originates with Walter Benjamin. With the advent of art, it had its own proprietary attributes—authenticity. Benjamin said that the authenticity means instantaneousness, uniqueness and that the process of its existence was subject to the history. In fact, the aura is more than that. And when we see the art, we can observe things hard to forget and then think of inspiring moment, which are subject to the times. The viewer may always have no way to fully grasp the meaning of which, art is the product of the history that generates different features. In each era, the viewers can witness diverse things, because each era have different ways of interpretations, that is why the aura is unique. But currently, aura in the era of mechanical reproduction which is perishing under the context of mechanical technology. Art is in a form, poet Baudelaire said wonderfully: "great tradition has disappeared, and the new tradition has not yet formed." [1]

It is generally believed that art derives from life as well as art should be consistent with realistic life. But factually, with the establishment of bourgeois cities and the outbreak of the war, the relationship of art and realistic life has already been transformed. As an ideology, art reveals a part of our life to some extent, but not just a true part. Nowadays, art and life are in an alienated state. Karl Heinrich Marx once said that "the externalization and alienation of the essence of human beings manifested in the externalization and alienation of labor, that is, the nature of human nature in the historical facts of capitalism." [2] Since the aura is disappearing inevitably, art is moving to an alienation that can not be controlled. Due to the nature of the mechanical reproduction, the art itself has changed dramatically. In brief, the dialogue between nature and man is not the same as that of the machine. The authenticity among art vanishes, and the alienation of art is the most direct cause. For art is created by human, the alienation of art leads to the alienation of human self-consciousness. Agreeing with Hegel's perspective that "the essence of man is equal to the self-consciousness, and the alienation of human nature is nothing but alienation of self-consciousness." [3] The alienation of art is subject to various aspects, for example, the development of industrial society, the intervention of capitalism and so on. But the nature of art to a greater extent is determined by human, so the ideological revolution of human is a decisive factor. With the progress of technology and material enrichment, human perception is shrinking and their thinking ability is also constantly declining. They are characteristics of the times currently. In the *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse said: "In the present era, the concept of psychology has become a political concept, so that private, individual spirit has become a certain degree of willing container, which includes satisfaction, desire, aspiration and driving force required for the society." [4] So in the context of this times, the disappearance of aura as well as the alienation of art, so we really need to focus is the consciousness of mankind. In the process of alienation, how should art evolve? this is a problem worth contemplating.

Benjamin thought the arrival of the age of mechanical reproduction, making art in a new form standing on the stage of history. The most typical example of the age of mechanical reproduction was photography and film. Photography was born in 1839, after that it changed the expression way of art. People can use optical instruments and then convey perspectives that the naked eyes can not see. Photography shows the details of the image in a material form from the realistic life and is part of the objective world. In the early days, people expressed great interest in this emerging visual culture. But with the excessive pursuits of technology, it makes it lose its service to the purpose of the people, thus becoming a blind pursuit of technology, so it leads to the common alienation of man and society. Now human can do nothing without technology. As if the technology has brought us a one-dimensional lifestyle. We rely on cars to commute, shopping online, even when the leisure we also face the screen, in general, we live in an age of the "screen". It's no denying that technology brings us convenience, but it also controls the way of human life, isn't it? Technology not only affects our lives, but also controls our lives. Owing to the cultivation of habit, we rest upon technology to an extreme degree. It is not so much that technology can not do without us as that we can not leave them. Behaviors, thoughts are bound in the "screen" of the world. Furthermore, a large number of replicas filled with our lives, that is to say, "imitations", which false information take the place of the uniqueness of original art. In terms of the form, plenty of replicas are substituted for the original works, but in essence, the aura of art is hardly being copied by mechanical means. In contemporary society, the reason why aura disappears is that social environment. But we should not consider lopsidedly that our time can not breed art and we should create our own art based on the characteristics of the times. Now in the information age, we are forced to accept and hunt knowledge fragmentarily, grasp emerging things lopsidedly. The characteristics of our contemporary people are endowed with our era. So, the disappearance of auras as a consequence of that people try to use the mechanical products to forcibly conquer the objective world and result in we seem to be able to control or access to the world. But the cost is that art is not pure any more. Auras vanishing irreversibly and traditional art also will disappear, which lead to our contemporary art also will be bound and the artist's inspirations even are tied up with mechanical reproduction. So what we need to urgently complete is that we should have the correct view of aura and its relationship with mankind.

"Let the art achieve, even if the world perished." [5] This is the slogan of fascism, just put aside the class struggle, we affirm that his attitude towards the arts are worth endorsing. Art is fascinating, the reasons are as follows. Firstly, it has aura rather than others can replace easily in which, is the most priceless thing. Secondly, this paper argues that when the artist in the creation of art, they come to a subtle state, which achieves a harmonious state of the artist and art. At that moment, the artist and the art are in a close union, as if the world leads them a paradise that they can create any art at their will. That is why auras of great charm. But now, as

it elapses, we step into the era where we can not find the aura any more.

## **2. The Reconstruction of Exhibition Value by the public**

Benjamin believed that "technology reproduction has reached such a level, it can not only copy all the handed down works of art, so as to its impact to withstand the most profound changes, and it is also in the way of art for their own place." [6] So now the evolution of art is not only the disappearance of the aura, another can not be ignored is the impact of dissemination function. The earliest art comes from the nature of life. Since then the art had served for aristocracy, the elite, and the art became extremely noble, untouchable. The era of mechanical reproduction has brought a new look, it is no longer a symbol of power. Popularization, liberalization, publicity have become a tag for the new art. And then when we think that it brings merits, but in fact it is "Trojan horse."

The wave of art changes. On the one hand, the public can enjoy the magnificent art easily, on the other hand, it makes situation we can not reverse. First of all, although the appreciation of art becomes quick and easy, but our aesthetic consciousness has not been well improved. We are filled with a lot of information every day, surrounded by information that not necessarily convey the most authentic situation. And then it turns into a kind of entertainment pastime, popular pastime, so the daily expression words, "flood microblog" "flood friends circle", the focus lies in the "flood" word and the result is the disappearance of aesthetic taste. Besides, the human self-consciousness is changed by the corrosion of such a way of transmission. And in order to meet the market consumption, a large number of so-called "art" quietly arrive, to meet people entertainment pastime in the name of art. Benjamin once thought that the relationship between the works of art and the public, "in front of the works of art, calmly sinking into the works"; "In contrast, the mind of the deviant public make art works into their own." [7] In fact, we think that we grasp the art, but in fact it is manipulative means. Every day, every hour, or even every minute, the information is endlessly cycling, we are constantly accepting this information, constantly being stuffed. What is the real value of these information? Today, the exhibition value has become a way to meet the market consumption and this is based on the aura disappeared. Since the core of art—aura disappeared, and then people's consciousness are consumed and the means outsider influence art. Indeed, today's big data, statistics, they are culprits that lead to the destruction of images which would have uniqueness and authenticity. But the most should be considered is that the numerous participants—the public.

First of all, the public seem to have mastered the art, but the bourgeoisie still have controlled of artistic power. A lot of information just like "butterfly effect" sweep across and false information is still emerging among us. On April 9, 2017, the event of the passenger was violently dragged off, on United Airlines, and the 69-year-old man was brutally forced to drop the plane. The news spread quickly, and at that time attracted hundreds of thousands of lively

discussions. The man was not only hurt physically, mental damage and public humiliation, his privacy had also been exposed, calm life was completely broken. But behind this, the public access to information is true and reliable? Online information is overwhelming, much of them is false information artificially controlled. Meanwhile, invisible "network violence" springs up. According to their own images, the public imposed to others, ignoring there are many people manipulated the flow of words behind the scenes, "Network Navy" is a good example. To his age, he had to rebuild his own life, suffer rumors from acquaintances and strangers, it was an unexpected catastrophe. In today's fast-paced era, it takes only a short time to let one thing quickly be open to public and even evolves into something that is not true, but what is the true meaning behind this exhibition value? Rather than the expression of the reality, it is better to say that is "betrayal" of the reality. The reflection of reality itself is not a true expression of reality, so the disappearance of the aura of today's image is the largest victim, and thus may bring more unpredictable disasters.

In fact, in the art market, some false social transactions and excessive packaging of the media, which cause the price of art bubbles and unrealistically surges. In this case, it makes some pseudo-artists put on the hat of "master", misleading a large number of people and art lovers. Under this circumstances, art market is in serious situation. We are now accepting the art which the capitalists decide and art in essence is controlled in the hands of the capitalists. They decide which can enter our lives, thus controlling the public. Commodity and marketization are tags of capitalism. Now art is in our life, a lot of art derivatives also emerge. Art lost its own uniqueness, reduced to a commodity fate. "This degeneration shows that the advanced industrial society is faced with the possibility of being materialized, and the capacity of this society is to further reduce the lofty areas where the situation is idealized and accusations." [8] The Chinese Palace Museum in 2015, the industry sales reached 1 billion yuan, the makers of derivatives use the reputation of the Forbidden City, enlarging the business market. This derivative is the art of alienation products of mechanical reproduction. The surrounding business take advantage of art to make profits.

Finally, in the face of such a situation, the public should ponder that whether it is the direction of art that we want. There is no doubt that the era of mechanical reproduction, the public is both beneficiaries and victims, on this basis, the public need to realize that art should not be a tool to meet the market demand, culture and art should not be consumed in the form of goods, which is generated from the production line and the profits rusted aura. "The artist, by virtue of this alienation, has gradually moved himself out of the alienated society and created an unrealistic and fantasy world where only art can have and convey its truth." [9] The public should cooperate with art and in order to create sacred and sincere "aura", but now, but with this road drifting away.

### **3. Reflections on the Art of Images in the Context of Public Culture**

Today's image art, the most prominent representative is photography and film, and are closely related to life and the public.

Firstly, art and life should be complementary relationship. As we all know, at the beginning of photography, people did not regard it as art. That photography was a servant of art, artists expressed themselves through photography, in other words, photography was a way of expressing the world. But now, all this is quietly changing. Art is no longer an objective imitation of life, more is the creative processing of life. It can be deemed as a predictor of the development of society. The era of mechanical reproduction is a watershed. On the one hand, the art becomes human tools due to the arrival of technology, with the aura disappeared. On the other hand, the power of dissemination leads to a social life whose feature is fragmentation and centralization. It is no doubt that we are in era that sensitive to the visual sensory stimulation and the visual symbols seem to have achieved hegemony. This visual symbol is not a specific kind, but refers to a variety of ideas derived from the reconstruction of our society. That should not be the case, the art serves for life, bases on life, in turn life also needs art, the relationship between them can not be divided. The value of art is to continually ask questions, raise questions that may not be solved, and even humans do not want to face. But in the field of art, not too many rules and regulations, you can use a variety of approaches to manifest the life and find the value of art. This paper argues that art should be the basic part of life, as the country's famous culture, the spirit of the family so that we can never forget, the connotation of art should be the case. It is a famous cultural heritage of the accumulation, the cornerstone of the national spirit. Because art is not falling from the sky, nor is it inherent in the human mind, it does need to find the source of creation from life. In light of the variation and diversity of life, art also needs more diversified, multi-faceted, multi-angle, multi-level so that achieve a sublimation of life connotation. With this means of technology, we should throw our heart and soul into life and in return we can find the significance of life, and then steadily gain inspiration in the process of artistic creation. As the esthetician Croce puts it, "Every real artwork has destroyed a certain kind of species and overturned the notion of critics, the critics then had to expand those species so that they could The new art is the result of the emergence of new jokes, new tipping and new expansion followed. "[10] Therefore, there are a lot of frictions in the process of fusion of art and life. Understandably, the era of mechanical reproduction is the conflict between life and art performance, only to struggle in the process and then make them reach the unity of the state of mind, art can achieve "hundred schools of thought contend, flourishing" trend of the times.

Secondly, the subject of art is also the object—the status of the public is not to be underestimated. So, the public are art participants, in the artistic ideology, the public alienation

process is constantly evolving. As Benjamin put it, "people's self-alienation has experienced a high level of creative use in the reproduction of mankind." [11] It can be seen that in the process of artistic development, the public plays a multiple role. For one thing, in the face of the erosion of art in the era of mechanical reproduction, the public should come forward and not let it be reduced to the tool of bourgeoisie. Once the art becomes a tool of bourgeoisie or vicious groups, then the next victim is the public. For another, the public should be an active advocate of art, on the basis of life, to improve its artistic form, so that art better blends into life, comes out a wonderful "chemical reaction."

The history of image art, not so much a revolution over and over as a development over and over. Image art disseminates thoughts from the center, which is the aura, an irreplaceable thing, with the way of infiltration permeates into the consciousness of the public. The process of image art exists in the public's constant understanding of life. From the perspective of a historical spectator, Benjamin expounded the inevitability of the era of mechanical reproduction to promote the art of image. The public can not control the times, but the aura and the public, life should be combined and integrated with each other. Because they are perfect blends of externality and internality. And we should strive for the era of image art which is committed to reconstructing the aura, thus the public advocate the art by all means.

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