

Reviewing Benjamin as an Advocate for Technology: A Focus on Mass Cultural Discourse

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Abstract: Unlike Adorno, who maintained that technology reduced mass culture to a tool for the ideological propaganda of ruling class, Benjamin, also a member of the Frankfurt School, emphasized the role of mechanical reproduction in breaking the elite culture's monopoly and promoting cultural democratization in the era of technological revolution and the rise of mass culture. His view of mass culture demonstrates the tension of his thought in the opposition to Adorno's. Adorno regarded mass culture as "Culture Industry," criticizing Benjamin for ignoring the dissolution of the revolutionary nature of the masses under the collusion of technological standardization and capitalism. Consequently, Benjamin was labeled as a staunch supporter of technology. This paper attempts to explore the real theoretical purpose of Benjamin from this identity label: Taking the technology of reproduction as the entry point, Benjamin attempts to clarify his unique thought on mass culture. He believes that artistic production and material production share a structural homology, and the masses, as the main agents of artistic production, are potential revolutionary subjects. And there is a new hope for the masses to realize self-transformation and political liberation in the path of art politicization.

Keywords: Benjamin; Mass Culture; Technology; Adorno

1. Introduction

The technological revolutions of the 20th century reshaped human cultural experience through a beneficial interaction with culture, exerting a transformative impact on the world. Unlike most Frankfurt School members, who held a pessimistic view of mass culture, Benjamin creatively observed that media such as film and photography dissolved the "Worship Value" of art while elevating its democratic

"Exhibition Value." This shift empowered the masses to transition from passive spectators to active participants, they becoming discerning appreciators, engaged consumers, and creative producers of cultural artifacts.

In contrast to Adorno's direct description of mass culture as "culture industry," which completely negated the possibility of the masses' inherent creativity and conscious cultural production—a fundamentally pessimistic stance—Benjamin's thought adopts a populist orientation. His work actively emphasizes the participatory dimension of mass cultural engagement and explores its potential possibility for collective self-emancipation.

The application of mechanical reproduction technology in modern era liberated art from the monopoly of the aristocracy, changing traditional art production methods and bringing art to the masses. Benjamin captured the role of technology in the liberation of mass thought during this historical transition. Mechanical reproduction technology dissolved the "Aura" in art—mass reproduction and standardized production dismantled the inherent uniqueness of art, moving them from collectors' display cases to the public. The masses gradually transformed from spectators into connoisseurs, consumers, and creators of cultural products. They could spontaneously use art products as carriers for revolutionary consciousness, briefly escaping the cultural illusions woven by fascism through "shock," and thus gaining critical self-reflection on reality.

The potential for emancipation in mass culture undoubtedly relies on technology. Benjamin's perspective on mass culture places technology in a significant theoretical position, viewing it as a neutral instrument whose value is determined by its societal application. When technology is harnessed for the voluntary restructuring and redistribution of culture, continuously stimulating the collective creative vitality of the masses, a revolutionary force emerges. This force plays a crucial role in confronting

contemporary information cocoons, cultural nihilism, and resisting the ideological infiltration of capitalism through culture.

Benjamin's optimistic stance on technology and the resulting mass culture ideology have often led to his being labeled a "staunch advocate of technology." However, is this characterization entirely justified? Benjamin also reminded us that technology remains under the control of the ruling class, and the cultural products it generates carry their ideology. In this way, the masses potentially being conditioned into passive consumers within a collective consciousness.

This paper aims to examine this very label by firstly examining why Benjamin assumed such an image through the lens of the "Benjamin-Adorno debate." Subsequently, it will analyze Benjamin's emphasis on technology's true theoretical objectives, focusing on the dual aspects of "the politicization of art" and "mass self-transformation."

2. Organization of the Text

2.1 Benjamin's Persona in the Benjamin-Adorno Debate: A Staunch Advocate for Technology

Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, both pivotal theorists of the Frankfurt School, shared a profound intellectual bond. Adorno deeply admired Benjamin's literary criticism and philosophy of history, regarding him as a spiritual mentor. Their scholarly exchanges forged an exceptional friendship between them. In the 1930s, when Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany escalated to extremes, both thinkers were forced into exile-Benjamin to Paris, Adorno across the Atlantic to America. Despite their geographical separation, they maintained correspondence, with Benjamin sharing his research and Adorno providing both financial and academic support. Yet the manuscripts Benjamin sent Adorno met with fierce criticism, sparking three historic intellectual confrontations in 1935, 1936, and 1938 - now canonized as the "Benjamin-Adorno Debates."

In a 1936 letter, Adorno sharply criticized Benjamin's theory of artistic production, accusing him of "underestimating the technicality of autonomous art and overestimating the technicality of heteronomous art[1]." Adorno maintained that art should

preserve its autonomy, existing "for art's sake," while artworks produced through technological reproduction merely served as a vehicle for the ruling powers' ideological control. Since the two thinkers held fundamentally opposing views on the relationship between technology and art, later scholars have often labeled Benjamin as an "unwavering champion of technology" when assessing his ideas. But what exactly was Benjamin's stance on technology in this debate? To answer this question, this paper will examine Benjamin's stance on technology through a comparative analysis of his and Adorno's contrasting viewpoints.

Initially, both thinkers share a common theoretical orientation. The Second International, influenced by the positivist currents arising from technological advancements, misinterpreted Marxism as a form of "economic determinism." They believed that simply following the natural laws of economic and social development would smoothly lead to a communist society, thereby adopting a reformist approach that neglected the inherent revolutionary potential of Marxism. After the success of the October Revolution in Russia, which established a proletarian government. Following World War I, numerous European nations, emulating the Russian model, attempted to seize power through the traditional Marxist theory of violent revolution, yet these endeavors largely failed. Consequently, many revolutionaries began to explore alternative revolutionary strategies, focusing on cultural revolution and re-examining historical development. They integrated modern Western humanist thought with Marxist theories of alienation and revolutionary strategies, aiming to shift the revolutionary arena to the ideological sphere.

This led to the emergence of the Western Marxist school of thought, with the Frankfurt School serving as a prominent example. Both Benjamin and Adorno, as first-generation members of the Frankfurt School, embraced the cultural perspective of Marxist inquiry, developing their theories through a critical lens. Furthermore, both of them faced the same challenges of their time. To serve their propaganda goals and unify ideological thought, the Nazis spread their political agenda through mass media such as newspapers, radio broadcasts, and films. They imposed strict censorship on cultural works, banning democratic and progressive ideas, turning

culture into a tool for manipulating public opinion. Simultaneously, the Nazis implemented nationalist policies, propagating the purported racial superiority of the Aryan race and enacting brutal persecution of the Jewish population. As Jewish intellectuals, both Benjamin and Adorno bore witness firsthand the Nazis' violent persecution and massacres of Jews, as well as how culture was weaponized to deceive and manipulate the masses. Their subsequent exile spurred a profound critique of fascism's employment of culture to dominate and homogenize mass consciousness.

Despite sharing a remarkably similar historical context and theoretical framework, Benjamin and Adorno diverge significantly in their assessments of technology's impact on art. While Benjamin critiques the "Aura" decay in art due to mechanical reproduction, he maintains an overall optimistic perspective on art produced through mechanical means. Adorno, however, could not tolerate the loss of the aura, labeling art generated under mechanical reproduction as "culture industry." He completely negates its artistic value, viewing it as a tool for ideological manipulation by the ruling class.

The two scholars present divergent perspectives on the implications of reproductive technologies and their resultant products, as explicated in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Benjamin posits that "works of art are always reproducible in principle[2]. "He traces the evolution of reproduction technologies, from woodcuts to lithography and printing, noting how technological progress allowed art to flood the market and increasingly depict everyday life. The advent of photography and cinema further eroded the "uniqueness" and "presence" of traditional art. Compared to manual reproduction, technological reproduction expands the perspectives from which the original work can be viewed. Using photography as an example, Benjamin arguing that it captures angles and images invisible to the naked eye, breaking free from the spatial and temporal constraints of traditional art appreciation. Copies could be preserved and experienced in various ways: "It enables the reproduction to meet the viewers halfway, in his own environment, and thus endows the object with a real presence[3]." Furthermore, the cultural products generated by reproductive technologies can be instrumental in mass

movements, exposing the populace to the crises of modernity and thereby awakening revolutionary consciousness.

Adorno entirely opposed to this view. In a letter to Benjamin in 1936, he criticized Benjamin's optimism about mechanically reproduced art. While Adorno also recognized the fading "Aura" of artworks, he argued that greater attention should be paid to art's autonomy. He sharply distinguished between traditional art and contemporary cultural commodities, employing the logic of commodity fetishism to analyze cultural products, thereby adopting a fundamentally negative stance towards mass culture. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno meticulously detailed how the culture industry deceives and manipulates the masses, gradually controlling their ideologies. He interpreted cultural products through the lens of capital, revealing an inherent homogeneity manifested in the standardization of these products. This standardization, in turn, facilitated mass consumption, subtly eroding individual cognitive differences and thought patterns. "Under monopoly, all mass culture is identical, and its artificially produced framework begins to show itself. The people at the top are no longer so eager to avoid the monopoly, becomes more and more open, and the power grows rapidly[4]." The ruling class utilizes the culture industry as a tool to unify ideological consciousness, transforming the populace into manipulated puppets.

In their respective critical analyses of mass culture, Benjamin and Adorno diverge in their analytical approaches and attitudes. Benjamin posits that the masses, within the age of mechanical reproduction, could exercise their agency to discern progressive elements within culture, drawing revolutionary consciousness and tools of resistance from new forms of modern art. However, Adorno critiques Benjamin's work for its "blind faith in the powerful spontaneous forces of the proletariat in the historical process[5]." Adorno views the masses as a "rabble," passively accepting the dominant consciousness imposed by the ruling class, incapable of generating revolutionary spontaneity or advanced cultural currents.

Through these discussions, which are based on "reproduction technology and its products" and "mass culture," we observe that Benjamin and Adorno ultimately diverge onto distinct theoretical paths. What accounts for this

theoretical bifurcation? Why does Benjamin adopt such an optimistic stance towards technology, even being considered a "staunch advocate of technology"?

We can initiate our discussion by considering the biographical contexts of both individuals. Adorno, originating from a Jewish intellectual family and immersed in Europe's refined classical art traditions from childhood. This upbringing left an indelible mark of elitism on his adult persona. He consistently advocated for a purely aesthetic stance, prioritizing art that transcends the mundane and avoids commercial influence. His experiences in the United States further solidified his position on cultural critique, as the burgeoning American popular culture starkly contrasted with the classical art he was accustomed to. The commercial films and advertisements designed to appeal to mass tastes, along with the proliferation of lowbrow literature, clashed with the rigorous artistic principles he had acquired in Europe. Based on his profound observations of the public's lack of critical judgment beneath the veneer of mass culture's prosperity, the thinker chose to survey the cultural landscape from an elitist vantage point. Thus emerged his sharply critical theoretical framework for analyzing popular culture, one that maintained an unrelenting critical edge.

Unlike Adorno, Benjamin, despite his affluent Jewish background, adopted a perspective rooted in the proletariat, a stance arguably shaped by his exile in France. Without stable employment, he relied solely on meager writing fees to scrape by, an experience that immersed him in the struggles of ordinary people and shaped his ability to think from the masses. For the masses, reproductive technology offered greater opportunities for equal access to culture. Mass culture, in his view, represented a form of artistic democracy, dismantling the religious and aristocratic monopolies over art, rather than an exclusive privilege.

In this paper's view, the debate between Benjamin and Adorno does not represent a complete opposition. They shared the same revolutionary ideals but adopted two distinct perspectives in cultural critique: the affirmative dimension of aesthetic redemption versus the negative dimension of ideological critique. Benjamin, recognizing the transformative potential of technological innovation on artistic production, proposed a new paradigm for

cultural emancipation. Moving forward, this paper will analyze the true theoretical purpose behind Benjamin's identity as a "staunch advocate of technology" by focusing on the "politicization of art" and the "self-transformation of the masses."

2.2 The Politicization of Art: the Identity of Artistic and Material Production

Benjamin inherited Marx's perspective on artistic production, integrates it into his own theory, positing an identity between artistic and material production. This very identity allows Benjamin to recognize the potential for art's politicization, which he wields as a defense against the aestheticization of politics, thereby offering a pathway for the masses to self-emancipation.

The advancement of technology presents a duality; while bringing material prosperity in modern times, it has also meticulously woven an ideological cage for humanity. This technological dominance manifests in the rationalization of technology's control over thought. Max Weber's discourse on rationalization elucidates the adverse effects of technological progress on other societal domains within the context of rationalism. Enlightenment, it seems, further exacerbates cultural alienation, fostering totalitarianism and undermining democratic principles. Totalitarianism integrates political ideologies into cultural life, subtly influencing the masses' subconscious through aesthetic activities, embedding ideological implications within the culture that shapes their lives. The rational enlightenment fuels technological advancement, which, in turn, carries both the danger of totalitarian control over thought through the culture industry and the promise of art's politicization through the development of artistic production. In this context, Benjamin views technology as a neutral instrument-when properly employed, it could become a weapon of liberation.

In the Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx first introduced the concept of artistic production during his analysis of spiritual matters: "Once artistic production emerges as artistic production proper, it can no longer be created in those world-historical, classical forms that marked the epoch-making stages of its development. Thus, within the realm of art itself, certain significant art forms are only possible at an undeveloped

stage of artistic evolution[6]." Marx regarded artistic creation as a form of production, with economic conditions being its determining factor. He analyzed artistic production and consumption through the logic of capital, interpreting artistic creation from an economic perspective. From the standpoint of artistic production as a form of material production: Under capitalist wage relations, all social relations are transformed into commodity relations. The capitalist mode of production erodes the fertile ground for certain forms of art, suppressing the creative essence of traditional artistic creation. While from the perspective of artistic production as a spiritual production activity: Marx argued that artistic production shares the same logical structure as material production, yet maintains relative independence in its development. Great historical works embodying revolutionary spirit can emerge in societies with underdeveloped productive forces, while culturally backward phenomena may still appear in modern societies. The relative autonomy of artistic production means it can generate spiritual wealth that surpasses the existing level of productive forces, react upon social development, foster revolutionary consciousness, and guide social transformation. Benjamin, drawing upon Marx's framework, similarly examines artistic production through the lens of material production. By analyzing the characteristics of scaled-up artistic production in the age of mechanical reproduction, he explores the potential for liberation at the level of artistic production. Marx's theory of artistic production provided Benjamin with crucial insights: to interpret the relationship between artistic creation and appreciation from a socio-economic perspective, to situate the production of artworks within the realm of production relations, and to investigate their impact on society as a whole.

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin describes the "Aura" of a work of artworks from a spatiotemporal perspective, defining it as "a unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be[7]." This aura signifies the artwork's singular existence within a specific space and time. Furthermore, the aesthetic dimension of the "Aura" manifests as a sense of psychological tranquility and distance, perceiving charm and vitality found in nature. From the perspective of traditional art's religious characteristics, the "Aura" embodies

the artwork's sacredness and historicity, as well as the psychological distance that viewers experience during aesthetic engagement.

In the pre-modern era, the authenticity of artworks resided in their "Aura." Artworks, born from religious rituals, possessed a sacred quality, accessible primarily to a select elite of nobles and clergy. The populace had limited opportunities to encounter or appreciate these works, often adopting an attitude of "worship." However, in the age of mechanical reproduction, the "here and now" of the original is dissolved. The masses gain increased access to art, and the "Worship Value" of artworks gradually yields to "exhibition value." The religious aura is dispelled by technological rationality. The widespread dissemination of mass reproductions blurred people's ability to distinguish between original works and copies, making them indifferent to identifying the authentic piece, instead turning their attention to its appreciation. As the divine aura and its singular authenticity dissipate, the religious function of art gradually transforms into a political function accessible to the masses. While Benjamin lamented the loss of the "Aura," the emergence of exhibition value and the "disenchantment" of art's religious aura allowed the public to participate in the production and appreciation of art, thereby advancing the democratization of art.

In *The Author as Producer*, Benjamin further elucidates the ways in which artistic production advances the politicization of art. Benjamin particularly emphasizes the political mobilization responsibility inherent in artistic creation, specifically addressing how art production, through its expansion, awakens a collective revolutionary consciousness. The tools of artistic production have undergone a transformation in the modern era, with mass media such as photography and radio becoming new instruments of artistic production. This evolution of production tools facilitates the progress of artistic production. Once the influence of capital logic on intellectual production is overcome, the potential for the political liberation of art production is realized. Drawing upon literature as a case study, and positing an isomorphic relationship between artistic creation and material production-specifically, that social relations are predicated upon relations of production-the trajectory of literature is thus revealed through the advancement or regression of its techniques.

The author as producer is thereby tasked with actively engaging with and intervening in social issues. Following an examination of the literary landscape of Soviet Russia, Benjamin observed a key distinction between the bourgeois press and the Soviet press: "As literature, in gaining breadth, has become shallower, the distinction between author and public, which the bourgeois press maintained in a traditional way, is beginning to disappear in the Soviet press. There, readers are always ready to become writers, that is, writers who describe or create examples." [8] Artistic production thus dismantles the boundaries between the traditional author and the masses, incorporating more individuals into the process of artistic creation, thereby awakening class consciousness and the spirit of struggle. Literary and artistic production, in this context, takes on a clear political orientation: the conventional roles of producer and consumer are overturned, as the consumer becomes a producer. Authors are thus compelled to assume responsibility, uniting with the proletariat to dismantle the bourgeoisie's ideological control over mass consciousness, and to embrace a collective struggle.

Adorno, however, refutes the notion of equivalence between artistic and material production, underscoring the unique status of art. Within the traditional mode of artistic creation, artists imbue artworks with a distinctive "style" rooted in their perspectives and emotional experiences. This "style," often distanced from social reality, resonates with the concept of "Aura." Art possesses an inherent "autonomy," encompassing the purity of form, medium, and aesthetics, thus symbolizing freedom. In contemporary mass culture, integrated into the cycles of production and consumption and governed by capitalist logic, authentic art must preserve its autonomy. It should be both rooted in and transcend the social conditions, embodying struggle within unity and striving for unity through struggle, thereby resisting the homogenizing forces of society.

Adorno's critique, therefore, negates the transcendental value of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, underscoring that such products are equally subsumed by the logic of capital. They forfeit their unique "style," and artistic production thus loses its capacity for spiritual enlightenment. Modern artistic production is diametrically opposed to traditional art creation due to the disappearance

of the "Aura" within the artwork. Authentic art distinguishes itself from the reproductions born of artistic production. Art products devoid of "Aura" merely cater to popular tastes for profit, serving as instruments for the ruling class to suppress critical consciousness within the ideological sphere.

In engaging with the critiques levied by Adorno and other critical theorists associated with the Frankfurt School, a central dialectic within Benjamin's conceptualization of art production emerges. Benjamin posits that "the political tendency of art works depends on the relations of literary production, and literary techniques serve political realities," thus underscoring art's political instrumentality, yet concurrently, he appears to "banish" artistic autonomy. This erosion of artistic autonomy presents a complex duality. While it risks the homogenization of consciousness under the aegis of capital, Benjamin, with characteristic perspicacity, identified the revolutionary potential embedded within art objects amidst the inexorable advance of mechanical reproduction. The proliferation of art objects in the age of mechanical reproduction not only facilitates the democratization of art but also unveils the possibility of directing artistic tendencies toward a politically informed trajectory.[9] The unavoidable dissolution of the artwork's "Aura" precipitates the decline of artistic autonomy, a consequence of historical development. Unlike Adorno, who viewed this trend with skepticism, Benjamin located his optimism in the subject of art production: the masses.

2.3 The Self-Transformation of the Masses: The Subjectivity of the Masses from a Populist Perspective

Confronted with the ascendance of mass culture, Benjamin interrogates the potential for the self-actualization of the masses as a revolutionary subject, predicated on an analysis of technological transformations and the interplay of art and politics. The masses, within the modern epoch, embody a dual character: they are both consumers, manipulated by the machinations of capital, and potential agents of revolutionary praxis. While Benjamin acknowledges the alienation inherent in a society structured by commodity fetishism, he simultaneously emphasizes the undeniable revolutionary potential latent within the masses. Benjamin's sojourn in France profoundly shaped

his perspective on mass culture. The romantic cultural traditions of France informed Benjamin's approach to cultural critique, imbuing his theoretical framework with a historical sensibility. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin depicts 19th-century Paris and its denizens, with the arcades serving as a "city, a microcosm of the world, where the customer can find everything he desires." [10] The arcades witnessed the advent of the automobile, alongside theaters, shops, and the fashionable elite, effectively supplanting the older passages leading to the opera. Beneath this veneer of prosperity lay a decadent allure. Benjamin absorbed Baudelaire's poetic representations of marginalized figures; the Parisian streets were populated by "flâneurs," who immersed themselves in the city's commercial milieu to mitigate the decline of history and the isolation of the individual.

However, the ultimate trajectory of the "flâneurs" is assimilation into the crowd. The figure of the "flâneurs" gestures towards the "literati," the producers of art. The literati's integration into the crowd represents a confluence of the masses and the intellectual elite. The masses have, in effect, become the mentors of scholars, the intermediaries through which they access the world of commodities and cultivate empathy. [11] In the process of engaging with the public, the identity of the scholar undergoes a transformation—they walk alongside the public, yet maintain a critical distance. Within the social context governed by the logic of capital, scholars are compelled to produce cultural works that conform to the aesthetic standards of the general public in order to subsist. Yet, their inherent solitude preserves a degree of distance from the crowd, and within this distance resides the possibility of transcendence and transformation. The interaction between the masses and the literati has undoubtedly diminished the distance between the two. Benjamin's inquiry centers on how to transcend the constraints of capitalist hegemony and identify the positive elements within popular culture to effect social change and liberation.

Benjamin's theorization of the "shock experience" serves as a critical juncture for examining the potential for mass emancipation. He posits a psychological state wherein the subject's experiential framework proves inadequate to the exigencies of the external

world, precipitating a profound rupture. In the age of mechanical reproduction, the proliferation of new media facilitates unprecedented access to information and knowledge. This mode of reception, characterized by its rapid, "fast-food" nature, diverges significantly from the knowledge formation predicated on traditional experience, thereby generating a continuous stimulation of the senses. Confronted with such shock experiences, individuals are compelled to engage in a process of constant adaptation and perception, potentially engendering a capacity for transformative change.

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin analyzes Brecht's cinematic praxis. Traditional dramatic forms, with their mimetic representations of reality, are deemed insufficient to reflect the complexities of modern society and, consequently, to effect genuine impact. Conversely, film, through the technique of montage, can generate meanings that transcend the limitations of the individual shot. The abrupt shifts and juxtapositions inherent in this editing technique mirror the accelerated tempo of modern urban life, fostering a critical distance from the perceived reality. The film actor, performing within a technologically mediated studio environment, is compelled to negotiate the tension between human agency and the apparatus. Unlike the actor in traditional drama, who is expected to fully embody the role, the film actor retains a degree of rational control, thereby cultivating a critical engagement with the performance and, by extension, the audience. The mode of reception has shifted from "concentrated contemplation" to "distracted perception." This fragmented mode of engagement, paradoxically, mobilizes the subjective initiative of the audience, enabling the reorganization of informational fragments and the construction of novel rational frameworks.

The question of whether the masses possess the capacity for genuine awakening remains a contentious one. Benjamin's affirmative stance on the potential of popular culture distinguishes him from the prevailing pessimism of the Frankfurt School.

The advent of mass culture, a product of capitalist hegemony, inherently embodies ideological underpinnings. Through the mechanisms of mass media, the dominant class's ideological imperatives are subtly disseminated,

ultimately coalescing into a collective consciousness. Consequently, within the purview of elitist theorists, the audience of mass culture is often perceived as a populace characterized by intellectual immaturity and vulgar aesthetic sensibilities. This audience, it is posited, remains incapable of discerning the insidious ideological infiltration embedded within mass culture, passively accepting its tenets. Even cultural critique, in this framework, is constrained by pre-determined parameters, precluding any form of transcendence.

If mass culture functions as an instrument of the ruling class, does this render the masses a mere "disorganized mass"? The elite, harboring a preconceived prejudice against the masses, champion the notion of pure art as inherently elegant and devoid of reactionary influences. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the inextricable link between artistic development and technological advancement. Therefore, in the context of mass culture, which emerged alongside the proliferation of modern replication technologies, a paradigm shift is warranted. We must abandon our prejudices against the masses and critically examine the emancipatory potential inherent within this phenomenon. By recognizing the masses as both producers and consumers of culture, we can facilitate a critical reflection on social issues through the lens of "shocking experiences," thereby transforming cultural concerns into political ones. This approach allows for an examination of the revolutionary potential and power embedded within technology itself.

Benjamin's theoretical endeavors were fundamentally aimed at legitimizing popular culture within the prevailing aesthetic discourse of Europe, a domain traditionally dominated by elitist perspectives. Given the irreversible trajectory of cultural popularization, a re-evaluation of our intellectual framework is essential to embrace this reality and identify avenues of resistance. In the established binary opposition between scholars and the masses, intellectuals and mass culture, a novel "dialogical relationship"[12] has emerged. The traditional elite's posture of arrogance and disdain is no longer tenable in the face of contemporary cultural developments. Merely rejecting the origins of replicative art risks complacency, while the pursuit of an aesthetic utopia represents an evasion and obfuscation of reality.

In contrast to elitist perspectives, Benjamin viewed the masses from the vantage point of the common individual. He eschewed the elitist prejudices against the lower classes, forging alliances with marginalized intellectuals. While technology is often employed by the ruling class as a tool for ideological control, we can still seek "shocking experiences" within artistic products, thereby exploring the potential for rebellion and transformation that resides on the periphery of society.

For Benjamin, technology is a neutral instrument, and the masses constitute the primary agents of revolution, transitioning from aesthetic subjects to revolutionary subjects within the political sphere.

In Benjamin's view, technology is a neutral tool and the masses are the main body of revolution, leaping from the aesthetic subject in the aesthetic sense to the revolutionary subject in the political sense. Benjamin constructed a unique theoretical system, deliberately highlighting the revolutionary potential within the masses, thereby guiding art production towards art democratization. In the alliance between the masses and the literati, who were on the urban fringe, and in the "shocking experience" brought about by special artistic expression techniques, the revolutionary consciousness was awakened. However, it should still be noted that when Benjamin started his criticism from the topic of art, although he observed the revolutionary potential of the masses, he failed to develop it into the action of revolutionary practice. His so-called firm support for technology largely remained at the theoretical conception level. Benjamin longed for the realization of the revolution, but was unable to guide the progress of the revolution in reality. However, he was able to point out a possible path of liberation for us in the cruel reality, demonstrating his sense of responsibility for The Times.

3. Summary

As founding members of the Frankfurt School, Benjamin and Adorno, stood at a new juncture of a new era. Facing the current situation where the capitalist rule of modern society reshapes and erodes people's thoughts, both of them focused emancipation on the cultural revolution. They similarly recognized the crisis that the fascism's of political aestheticization posed to the mass ideology and carried out fierce

criticism. However, the views of the two on artistic production presented quite different appearances. When discussing the relationship between art and technology, Benjamin was severely criticized for being labeled as a "firm advocate of technology" due to his optimistic view of technology. In fact, his advocacy for technology was not a compromise or submission to the modern totalitarian and capitalist discourse systems, but a theoretical effort to seek a glimmer of revolutionary possibility where mass culture has been fully developed in the reality.

Technology itself has a dual contradiction: it is both an opportunity for the liberation of the masses and a breeding ground for in-depth alienation. Benjamin discussed the identity of artistic production and material production, with the intention of exploring the way to counter political aestheticization through the politicization of art. Art production has also developed along with the development of material production. The tools of art production have changed in the modern era: from engraving and printing to today's reproduction techniques such as film, photography and newspapers. This technological revolution have brought countless art products and a thriving mass culture.

With the development of artistic productive forces has changed relationships both between humans and objects, as well as among humans themselves. The changes in the relationship between people and objects are reflected in the fact that the masses, as consumers of art production, have the opportunity to culture participation and consumption. The art products of the replication era have lost the "light and charm" contained in traditional artworks. The worship value of artworks has gradually been disenchanting. People's attention has turned to their display value, promoting the process of art democratization. Similarly, the transformation of human relationships is also reflected in the process of artistic production. The distance between authors as producers and the general public as consumers has been shortened. The masses is no longer an irrelevant person excluded from the process of artistic production, but a creator who takes on social responsibilities. While replication technology has banished the "self-discipline" of art, the political value of artworks has been highlighted.

Behind Benjamin's advocacy of technology lies his great theoretical assumption of exploring the

potential revolutionary power within the masses from the perspective of the common people. There is a dual tension of affirmation and negation within the masses. Benjamin did not deny the alienated rule of mass culture over people under totalitarian rule. Instead, on this basis, he further exerted the negative power of art. Although his theory failed to evolve into truly revolutionary practice, he was eager for the realization of the revolution, which pointed out a possible path toward liberation for people in the cruel reality.

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