

The Time and Space
of the
Work of Art
in the
Age of “Electrickerery”

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Starting by returning to Walter Benjamin's idea in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that the technical reproducibility involved in the new media of photography and film would promote a "revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art", this paper looks at some of the suggestions as to what happened in the twentieth century to "traditional concepts of art" – 'art' understood in the broadest sense – as well as at how "concepts of art" are so often linked to - or mapped onto - concepts of time and space. What is 'the work of art'? *Where* is it? Where do we stand (or sit) in relation to it? The age of *youtube* and 'smartphones' has perhaps added a new dimension to such questions – or possibly just supplied material for a footnote to Benjamin's 1936 essay. Questions concerning what one might term "The Time and Space of the Work of Art" have been and continue to be discussed by theorists ranging from Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan to Paul Virilio, Zygmunt Bauman and Jacques Rancière in more recent times.

The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Walter Benjamin (1936)

“For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.”

Paul Valéry, “La Conquête de l’ubiquité”, 1931

“Technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. [...] 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.”

promotion of a *revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art*

“Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us 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 travelling.”



The Medium is the Message

McLuhan (1967)

“electricker”

– in Joyce’s Dublin

The electric age

Sequence yields to
simultaneity.

Allatonce



The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception

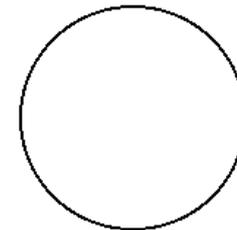
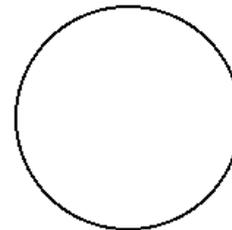
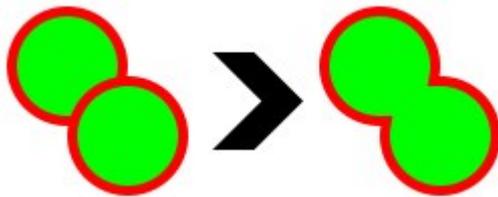
Adorno / Horkheimer (1944)

a change in the character of the art commodity itself ...
What is new is not that it is a commodity, but that today it deliberately admits it is one; that art renounces its own autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumption goods [...].

Cultural industry

vs.

Autonomous work of art



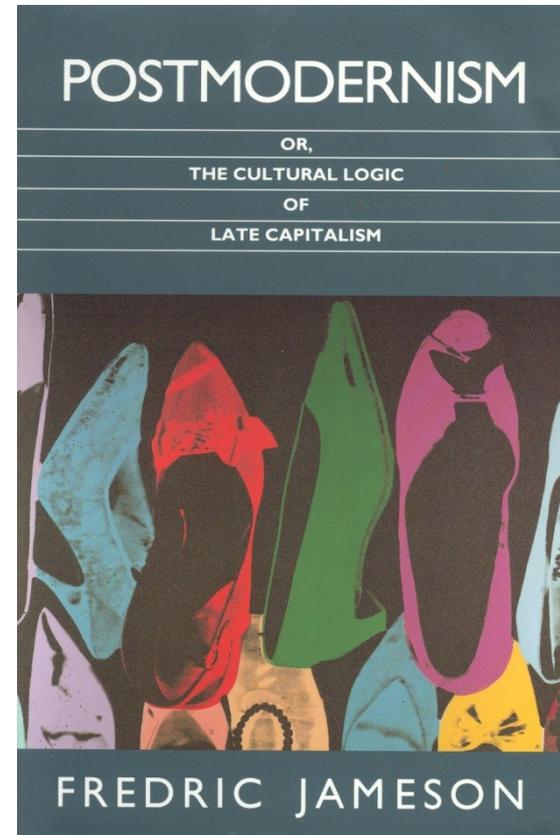
Postmodernism - The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism Jameson (1991)

Effacing frontier between high
culture + commercial culture?

Semi-autonomy of cultural sphere
destroyed by logic of late
capitalism

“Depthlessness”

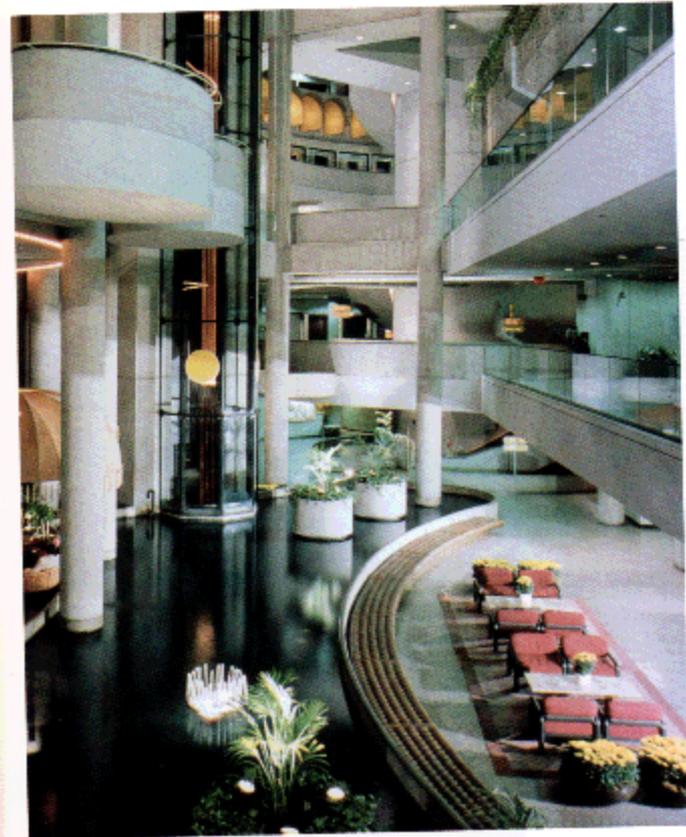
Abolition of critical distance



Postmodern hyperspace

finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the human body to locate itself ... incapacity of our minds ... to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.

The need for a map



The Westin Bonaventure, interior (Purtman)

Art as Far as the Eye Can See Paul Virilio (2007)

“everything dissolves into the indistinction, followed shortly by the indifference, then by the passivity, of a befuddled subject.”

the ‘centrifuge’

“the fatal moment comes when that human guinea pig suffers what is known as a ‘blackout’ in which he loses sight and faints [...]”



The Emancipated Spectator

Jacques Rancière (2009)

Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting....

The C19th joiner

Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations. [...] It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are 'equipped' to adapt to it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible.