



## 2007 Issue No. 15 — Walter Benjamin and the Virtual

### **The Horror of Disconnection: The Auratic in Technological Malfunction**

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You are travelling on a train. You are speaking on a mobile phone. The train enters a tunnel. The connection breaks up and is lost. What happens here? The conversation is abruptly curtailed; you are pained, frustrated – relieved? Whatever their nature, there will be affects. The telephone induces a defection and a crisis of the self: in telephonic communication parts of oneself, one's consciousness and senses, are donated to the other, one gives one's attention, one *gives ear*. And when the line goes down we are returned to the *hinc et nunc* of our physical circumstances without the phatic niceties ("thanks for calling, see you soon") that not only provide formal closure and break our communicative contract but prepare us for the psychic shock of being alone once more. But, as all who use this technology will know, in the event of disconnection, as the signal strength dies and the state of full, pristine connectivity bleeds into a rebarbative silence, a transitional sonic *disfiguration* occurs: the voice of the interlocutor suffers violent torsions, a garbled – oddly aquatic – strangulation. What happens here?

Perhaps this phase just prior to disconnection deserves no particular attention. But I suggest otherwise. What we hear as distortion is the reintroduction of distance into the binding warmth of vocal intimacy: the distortion screens and stifles the intimacy with the other by way of a monstrous manifestation of technology's own nature. And, symmetrically, as the other is distanced we feel the presence of the technical device itself: it is suddenly *there*. Its proximity to our ear is now absurd, perhaps abhorrent. The technology, now non-continuous with our desire, lacking that "extra" dimension of the virtual, appears opaque. No longer disappearing into its function, it solidifies into itself, into what it is rather than what it does. The virtuality and liveliness of the voice in our ear dissolves into the actuality of the compromised machine in our hand.

Given that technology always fails eventually, it is probably fair to say that in contrast to critical theories, both utopian and dystopian, that rely on the social fact – or prospect – of a properly working and productive technology, malfunction (quotidian rather than, perhaps, the spectacular) is somewhat under-theorised. This seems remiss for it is a given that a technology, whatever its level of sophistication, will, at some point or other, cease working. Knowing anything about technology means knowing not just how to make it work; it is also a matter of having the prudence – the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) – to act properly in the event of its failing. We come to know something essential about technology when it does not work and it is set right. There is something dignified in the artisanal being-on-hand to maintain a technology and return it to its proper state of functioning – just as much as there is something iniquitous in the "help-line" culture that has built up around the maintenance of what are poorly designed, over-complicated and mis-sold products. Failure is a fact of technological functioning and counteracting or containing failure is routinely incorporated in product design. Technologies become self-maintaining: auxiliary safety mechanisms are put in place to mitigate the consequences of failures in higher systems: computers now routinely update components, repair themselves and recover

lost work after a system “crash.”

Despite such assurances, technological failure remains a matter of huge public concern, and a science of probabilistic risk assessment, that – often very speculatively – sets potential risk against potential benefit, has built up around the need to gain some kind of mastery of what is, because of its inherent complexity or because of its vulnerability to human error or malicious intent, inherently unpredictable. We know that when we step into a car or an aeroplane we take a certain risk since we do not know with absolute certainty whether or not we will reach our destination in time or even at all; if we send an email or a text we cannot be sure that it will reach its intended recipient. A certain risk is attendant upon every deployment of technology.

But what *is* a technology when it behaves in unexpected or undesirable ways? In this paper I wish to attend closely to technology in the moment of its malfunction and try to discover deeper significance in such moments beyond the merely irritating. It would be a mistake, though, to hear in this project something like the tones of a Luddite *ressentiment*; malfunction is rather a component of our technological experience. And it is emotionally and psychically charged. Moreover, as I will hope to show here, malfunction is equivocal: it occasions frustration *and* delight; it is to be feared and at another level longed for. Notable also is that a failing technology is aesthetically appealing and is often treated as aesthetic material. In order to try and capture some of the significance of malfunction, I will attempt to think the moment of failure in relation to Benjamin’s notion of *aura*. The interpretation of technical malfunction as auratic stabilises our thinking of what are highly disparate phenomena and points us towards more profound questions. Aura alerts us to the possibility that technology is a site of the re-enchantment of consciousness, potential regression or, in some interpretations, something like a Utopian appearing. Our usual appraisal of the technological is that which banishes the cultic, destroys aura and reconfigures the real; all of which, if true, is only true insofar as technology behaves “properly” (as we intend it to), insofar as it *works*. I hope to show that technology is always haunted by an auratic dimension; aura is more or less suppressed, more or less overt, and ideologies, economies and systems – I have in mind the global media – that rely on technology will be dogged by a problematic auratic shadow.

Before developing that argument, I will review the Freudian interpretation of technical malfunction provided by Jean Baudrillard in his book *The System of Objects* (the auratic, it transpires, lies on the other side of this explanation). Baudrillard examines a variety of curious technical para-functions: pseudo-functionality (the “gizmo” which performs a task which need not be automated, i.e., the solar-powered boiled egg opener), the metafunctional (the robot, the most psychologically potent of all machines) and the dysfunctional. It is the latter that needs to be discussed here since in Baudrillard’s analysis, our response to the malfunction is ambiguous: it does not only occasion our pained acceptance of the weakening of our potential, but, taken further, occasions our delight. He writes: “A technical hitch infuriates us, but an avalanche of technical hitches can fill us with glee; if a jug develops a crack we are pained, but if it smashes to smithereens there is satisfaction in it” (131). The response of irritation we can recognise; but “satisfaction”? What is the reasoning here?

It might be that the destruction of an object arouses pleasure in us because it makes way for the newer object. With an object gone, there is the prospect that our material environment can be refreshed. But Baudrillard’s reading goes deeper. For him, objects are locked into our own conflicted psychic substrate; technology is continually bound into the role of answering, mitigating and assuaging particular psychological and social crises. Chief amongst them is the anxiety surrounding libidinal energies:

The unconscious economy of the system of objects is a mechanism of projection and domestication (or control) of the libido which brings an efficient principle to bear. The domination of nature and the production of goods are in effect a parallel benefit thereof. Unfortunately, however, this admirable economy carries a dual risk for the

human order: first there is the danger that sexuality might be in some sense conjured away and foreclosed in the technical realm, secondly the danger that this technical realm might in turn be disturbed in its development by the conflicted energy by which it has been invested. All the preconditions are thus assembled for the emergence of an insoluble contradiction, a permanent defection: the fact is that the system of objects as it operates today embodies an ever-present potential for consent to this sort of regression – the lure of an end to sexuality, its definitive absorption in the recurrence and continual forward flight of the technical order. (Baudrillard 130)

For instance, because of libidinal disturbances, pre-adolescent and “mid-life” males often demonstrate an interest in collecting or in mechanical toys and gadgets. Even popular psychology would take it that unless these stages are passed through, the subjects remain caught in a somewhat de-sexualised, neutered state: indeed, these objects (e.g., the train set or hi-fi equipment) might have the potential to “foreclose” and annex sexuality altogether, only to reappear in the irrational over-development of the objects themselves: technical objects must become ever more sophisticated, collections must be completed at all costs.

While underlying psychological conflicts go unresolved it is always likely that conflict reappears and is played out in the substitute technical object. Anxieties surrounding the technological are projections of our own essentially conflicted nature. The central conflict arises between Eros and Thanatos, a libidinal drive and the death drive, the progressive, procreative and pleasure seeking Eros and a deathly, regressive longing to return to an inert, inorganic state that undoes the self-sustaining drive of the ego. The object presents itself as a “temptation”: the temptation is to regress to earlier stages, to resign the project of progressing the self. The idea of destruction or the breakdown of machinery appeals because at some level, we want this for ourselves. It also illuminates why science fiction has so revelled in the image of a technology that *avenges itself* on the user, especially the idea that a computer or robot, in a sudden burst of self-consciousness – itself a malfunction of the mechanism – escapes the control of its master and ultimately destroys him. Indeed, the robot is the very demonstration of the disadvantages of a sense of self: the potential destructive power of the machine is released only as soon as it mistakenly acquires of a nascent ego and assumes the will to self-preservation, which only causes profound confusion and anxiety. Again, at some level, the level of drives, we want this destruction to be released in our direction:

[I]t is not the fragility of objects that is tragic, nor their death. Rather, it is the temptation represented by that fragility and that death. This temptation is satisfied in a way when an object fails us, even though this failing may at the same time inconvenience us or throw us into despair. This is the same kind of malign and vertiginous satisfaction ... projected into phantasies of revolt and destruction on the part of robots. The object takes its revenge.... This hostile volte-face may shock us and take us by surprise, but there is no denying that a submissive attitude soon develops towards this revolt, which we treat as inevitable, and as evidence of a fragility that distinctly appeals to us. (Baudrillard 131)

Baudrillard also asks the pointed question: do we even want technology that is infallible, that never failed, grew old or redundant? Does the promise of infallibility bring with it an anxiety no less acute than the event of our being abandoned by it? Our fear is that technological infallibility would coincide with our libidinal disinvestment:

The fact is that a world without fallibility would imply the definitive resorption of an inevitable fate – and hence of sexuality. This is why we greet the slightest hint of a resurgence of fatefulness with deep satisfaction: the slightest breach allows sexuality to revive, even if only for a moment, even if it takes the form of a hostile force (as it always does in this context), and even if its emergence in such circumstances means failure, death and destruction. (Baudrillard 132) [1]

Our ambiguous reaction to malfunction is a stigmata of an inner psychic fragility: it satisfies a death drive and it releases libido. But this interpretation leaves some aspects of the phenomena unaccounted for. If the destruction of an object is absolute, malfunction is temporary. Malfunction is liminal: its dominant mode of appearance is a kind of *flickering* between states, between working and non-working, and it is in this state that new and at times shocking dimensions of technical behaviour come to light. The dead object is one thing; the object that is shuddering to a halt or is spinning out of control is another. Malfunction discloses technology's metastability not its finitude. Even though technology behaves predictably for most of the time, so much so that it is regarded as "stable," it remains ever vulnerable to small perturbations in its environment or failures in its system. The malfunctions – just as those factors which cause malfunction – are nondeterministic, asynchronous and singular events. Malfunctions are therefore hard to catch: they are *non-reproducible*.

I will now attempt to argue that malfunction contributes to the production of *aura*. As I will show later, some dimensions of Baudrillard's psychological account can be incorporated in the auratic since aura itself communicates with the sense of deathliness. The persistence of the concept of aura in cultural and aesthetic theory stems from its dialectical relationship with the technical. In Benjamin's seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility," technological reproduction eliminates the "aura" that is associated with traditional artworks. My argument here is that even in technologically advanced contexts, even in the realm of digital technology and mediation, aura still clings to artworks and mediated communication by virtue of malfunction: through the noise and distortion that necessarily attend the functioning of the medium (indeed, digital technologies are probably more auratic than the analogue ones they supposedly replace and perfect. Digital noise and disruption is probably more ghastly and unfathomable than the noise and distortions associated with older analogue equipment).

Aura is, therefore, defined negatively: it is that which is eliminated once the work of art is technically reproduced. The aura of a work withers as the reproduction thereof thrives. What withers under reproduction is authenticity; the existential uniqueness, added to by historical endurance, the absolute preeminence of the presence of *that* particular work in this particular here and now (amplified by the frame, the pedestal, the occasion, and the ritual context). That exalted privileging of its being induces the aura which then surrounds the authentic object, an aura which occasions our awe and respect. By contrast, a mechanically reproduced work asserts little purchase in time and space, it makes no great claim on the space (physical or cultural) where it happens to be since there are a thousand others just like it elsewhere. We notice the unsatisfying effeteness of a framed reproduction with the frame over-valuing the contents of the frame. And equally unconvincing are those objects that are artificially aged so as to give them an "air" (really an aura) of the authentic. The reproduction is less cognitively demanding than, and therefore to be preferred to, the original object; the recording is less cognitively demanding than the live event.

Another dimension to aura is found in natural phenomena. Benjamin writes:

We define the aura of [natural objects] as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with 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 bases 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 "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction.... 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. (*Illuminations* 216-217)

The transposition of the “here and now” of the work of art into a “thereness” of the distant natural object seems problematic. How can these be aspects of the same phenomena? Aura, which announces a dignity and endurance in the bearing of beings, inclines us towards stillness. As Benjamin’s illustration hints at, it can be seen that the dispositions of the subject that allow for the perception of aura in both the natural object and the work of art are repose and receptiveness. Aura captivates us only if we are receptive to its possibility, a receptiveness that presupposes reverie and repose. The auratic distance which is added to the object – insuperable, unrecoverable – requires an arrest of movement if it is to be taken into consciousness. The work of art and the natural vista, in as much as they themselves are rooted, fix our attention and root us in our place.

By contrast, what Benjamin identifies as the modern – massified and massifying – compulsion to bring reality “closer,” cannot be accomplished without a corresponding increase in technical *velocity*. Brought about by virtue of motorised and electronic speed, the adjective “modern” always connotes a change of tempo and therefore an increase in the density of experience; more, faster, equates to “better.” Verbal discourse itself is no less subject to the logic of velocity. Language must keep pace with exchange culture and points should be pithy – preferably lurid – and rapidly assimilated by the consumer. In contemporary theory the appending of the prefix “hyper” to so many concepts (hyper-real, hyper-sexual, hyper-mediated, hyper-complex) accelerates their pertinences, renders them a veritable semantic *blur* (italicisation of a text fuses the visual acceleration – it presses forwards – while an emphasis is made by the deceleration of spoken delivery). Whatever they once meant they now mean even more, and perhaps even then they do not mean so much as inundate the intellect. The visual blur is what is beyond metabolism, nervous or psychic reactions. Blur, though indistinct and obscuring, is the very accomplishment of velocity and therefore a triumph.

Aura is anathema to velocity. The altar in a religious ceremony acquires aura by virtue of its distance from us, by its permanence and its fixity. We are taught to wait and prepare ourselves before approaching. Aura thrives when an inscription is made in stone (stalling time, aligning itself with immutable material and with anonymity) rather than in the shimmer of a mobile phone text.

Aura is a perceptual projection that is proper to the spatial senses of sight and sound. Sight only operates at a distance. Distance is all sight knows. Height also guarantees a sense of aura: height is beyond our capacity to challenge our physical circumstances. The mountain peak has an aura because it is out of reach. But we also raise our eyes to it. And if our eyes are lifted we are humbled. The auratic in the aural is found in wind, running water, the resonance of the large space – the cave, the cathedral – or as echo describes a distance. Sound contributes to the “atmosphere” of a space: crows in a churchyard or a church bell help define and reinforce a peculiar deathly aura. Sound connotes permanence when there is a murmuring, when there is a sense that sound is always there, that it is without beginning or end. This is the sounding of nature, an inarticulate, but immutable murmur.

It is possible to recognise here that aura tends toward the inert, the remote, and the bereft. Behind aura is something like death. This is confirmed when we consider that by contrast, the proximal senses, taste, touch and smell, are purely somatic, invasive, and side with Eros. They do not convey spatial distance (smell and taste, as readers of Proust will know, even confound temporal “distance”) but bind together and bring immediate pleasure. These are senses that respond to warmth, movement and repetition.

This differentiation owes much to Herbert Marcuse’s Freudian challenge to Freud in *Eros and Civilisation*. [2] Marcuse attacks Freud’s diagnosis of the central economy of civilisation which is summed up in the following principle: there can be no civilisation without repression. In all civilising processes, the gratification of desire must be delayed while other factors are put in place. The desire for warmth and protection can only be satisfied once we take possession of a home. We can only take possession of a home once it can be financed. We can only finance a

home once we have a salaried job and so on. In modern civil society the satisfaction of what appears to be a central human requirement is greatly delayed. Delayed also are all the somatic pleasures that a home would support – peace, repose and comfort. The attitude that this is as it should be, and that gratification must wait, is one of the normalised truths of our society, and one which Marcuse's Marxist critique seeks to overturn. And one point of weakness is the hierarchicalisation of sensory life this principle implies. The proximal senses are relegated behind the spatial and the latter control power (we are familiar enough with the authoritarian technology of the panopticon). Proximal senses are tabooed: look, don't touch.

Be that as it may, it is clear that aura belongs to spatial – and therefore authoritarian – sensory experience. Power (permanence, stability) seems to congregate in aura. Aura is present when something is absent: it only appears when erotic configurations – pleasure, contact and immediacy – are banished. As such, for Benjamin, aura itself promulgated dangerous ideologies that technical reproduction would do away with. Technical reproduction is democratising and decentring, it puts artworks in our homes and our hands: hence the revolutionary value of modern technologies.

My argument is, though, that even if the abolition of aura by technical reproduction was, for Benjamin, writing in the context of the 1930s, politically necessary, this abolition of aura cannot be achieved in any absolute sense because aura re-appears as and when technology malfunctions. In the next part of this paper I would like to examine some specific instances of technological malfunction and make some comment on Andy Warhol's oeuvre. I will attempt to draw out dimensions which accord to the definition of aura given above.

There is no more dramatic example of technology serving re-enchantment and mystification than the so-called "Electronic Voice Phenomenon". If a tape recorder is left to record an empty room (one can even disconnect the microphone), or if one records random radio static, the claim is that, after technical manipulation of various sorts (changes of play-back speed, filtering and amplification), now and then voices can be detected. Enthusiasts of the paranormal leap to the conclusion that these voices, rather than being the chance reception of an extremely attenuated radio signal (veiled by exorbitant amounts of noise), belong to the dead who have sequestered the tape recorder as a medium to reach the living. To be fair, examples of the "phenomenon" are extremely disturbing to listen to. As one might expect, pathetic, indistinct voices, urging their messages through a wall of distortion produces a rather shocking experience, and are more than capable of arousing fear and a sense of the uncanny. But it is not clear why such "voices" should be wrapped up inside electronic noise rather than availing themselves of a clear channel.

The "Electronic Voice Phenomenon" is an instance of *apophenia*, the tendency to identify forms and patterns in meaningless and random data, on a par with seeing the face of Christ in tea leaves or discovering "prophetic" textual messages encoded in the Torah. While this kind of phenomenon is the perfectly benign outcome of random natural events, heavily interfered with by technology and the interests of the investigator, the chilling nature of these tendencies belongs not so much to our beliefs regarding the afterlife but more to our uncertainty regarding the ontological status of electronic noise and our disquiet over the true purposes of the technological device.

Noise is an expression of technology in its state of nature. Noise is the natural outcome of a working technology. But noise has the quality of a *murmur* and for Benjamin this murmuring is charged with a deep natural sadness:

It is a metaphysical truth that all nature would begin to lament if it were endowed with language.... This proposition has a double meaning. It means, first, that she would lament language itself. Speechlessness: that is the great sorrow of nature.... This proposition means, second, that she would lament. Lament, however, is the most undifferentiated, impotent expression of language. It contains scarcely more than the

sensuous breath; and even where there is only a rustling of plants, there is always a lament. Because she is mute, nature mourns. Yet the inversion of this proposition leads even further into the essence of nature; the sadness of nature makes her mute. In all mourning there is the deepest inclination to speechlessness, which is infinitely more than the inability or disinclination to communicate. That which mourns feels itself thoroughly known by the unknowable. (*Selected Writings* 72-73)

The poltergeist in Spielberg's eponymous film first visits the little girl, around whom the story centres, through the impenetrable noise of a signalless, post-network shutdown television set. Here noise is the outcome of a subtraction: the reception devices have been relinquished by the forces that made use of them during the day and are somehow stranded. They are orphaned, hollowed out, and the negative space that remains invites psychological projection and fantasy. Just as with horror scenarios in which puppets and toys come to life, radios and televisions disentangle themselves from the bondage of mediation and are co-opted by forces unknown to us. Through a noise brutally denuded of meaning, and which seems to issue from the limitless fund of night, another voice can manifest itself.

A disconnected receiver is in that liminal state whereby it is neither properly working nor defunct. It is in this state that surplus effects are apparent. When a radio newscaster interviews a war correspondent from the field, the fidelity of the voice on the line is at a disadvantage: the mobile or satellite phone compresses and distorts the voice. There can be a time lapse between question and response (an effect of the latency of the channel) which makes communication hesitant and strained. The host voice, safe in a studio, is full, resonant and well defined in comparison to the remote and constricted voice of the imperilled journalist. The correspondent's voice has that distinctive telephonic timbre that connotes remoteness. Distance – not just geographic but political – appears in sound. In our unsuspecting and unwitting media acculturation we have learnt that political situations have a *timbre*. The centre reaches out to far flung places of the globe and brings back news, and this testimony has an authority because it is distorted by the telephone. And greatest drama of all: the losing of the line. The speaker's voice breaks up and vanishes. Notwithstanding the embarrassment of the newscaster, this is high drama and the mark of authenticity: the earnest and worthy struggle to relay information – the truth – has succumbed to the frailties of technology. And, ironically, the "authenticity" of modern technologically mediated testimony (another important Benjaminian theme) is proportional to its interference, to the poverty of its representation. We can see then that when horrific events and testimonies are technologically mediated (i.e., CCTV footage of the last sighting of a missing child; the increasingly desperate efforts of air traffic control to reach a hijacked plane; digital photographs, taken on mobile phones, of the London underground bombings; video declaration of suicide bombers; hostage beheadings) they are delivered by low fidelity, poor quality technologies and their representations are marked by the mute, asignifying, and indifferent patina of the functioning of the medium.

Andy Warhol's series of monochrome screen prints from the mid-1960s, the "Death and Destruction" series, are an aestheticisation of what the media performs on a daily basis. Reproducing newspaper images of fatal car accidents, an electric chair, an atomic bomb detonation and victims of food poisoning, the Warhol's appear to be an exercise in what Paul Virilio was later to call "pitilessness". [3] The main principle behind Warhol's paintings is in numbing the viewer to these contemporary horrors through the unfeeling repetition of a single, shocking image. But as with all Warhol's prints, the repetition of the source image is never absolutely identical: the technical reproduction procedure and the formal presentation *malfunctions* and introduces un-repeatable textural noise. The screen print technique introduces variations, subtle and blatant, into the reproduction. The image reproduced can be discerned through the patina of ink-blots and smears; sometimes the inking is too heavy, sometimes too light. And the repetitive grid format is also imperfectly constructed: one print might be out of line or overlap with another. When seen *en masse*, the information content of the image vies with purely aesthetic concerns of patterning, colour and presentational nuances.

Because the technical means draws attention to itself through the failure to repeat accurately, being with the picture means flicking between two aspects of our perception: the content and the form, the referent and the painterly surface. The two cannot be brought together into a single cognition and this holds our fascination. I want to read this effect as an auratic flickering, or perhaps a murmuring of consciousness. Or, since these paintings force us to come up against moral tolerances, perhaps we discern the murmuring of *conscience*. The picture is motionless, changeless, and yet it cannot be stilled.

The car crash pictures are particularly telling in this regard. Concentrated into them are all the themes addressed in this paper. In the most overt manner possible they make an obscenity out of velocity. The mangled bodywork of the car, distorted by impact, is the remains of speed. The smashed car discloses a dimension of itself, a horrible thingness. There is the deathliness of arrest: out of the wreckage the body of the driver sprawls preternaturally still and silent, the human body texturally indiscernible from the broken body of the machinery. One terrible instant caught as a physical form.

These pictures are vivid instances of what T. W. Adorno claims is true of the aesthetic experience as a whole: "If, as images, artworks are the persistence of the transient, they are concentrated in appearance as something momentary. To experience art means to become conscious of its immanent process as an instant at a standstill" (111). What is true of the mechanical catastrophe is true of the aesthetic production process: as we read the pictures we discern a movement from one image to the next – like the stills that constitute a motion picture reel – but the only movement (the movement is only virtual) arises from the aleatory variations in the material traces, themselves at a standstill, caught on camera as it were. The aura is the perceptual solution to this aesthetic paradox: the instant at standstill, this intimate distance. Malfunction, as that flickering between lively functionality and mute, deathly, materiality, produces aura for the same reason.

The critical response to aura need not occupy itself with fears of the authoritarian force latent within it. Rather, critical consciousness, if it attends to the murmur of aura hears something unstable and repressed. In the glib and garish hyper-mediated environment that assaults today, malfunction allows something to breakthrough. Aura is critical because it comes from disconnection, the disconnection of source and sound, means and end, expectation and actuality. Aura transpires when a phenomenon falls silent. And it is this silence, this halting, which proves critical.

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## Endnotes

1. Baudrillard makes a wider socio-political point which, though it takes the argument in another direction, is worth noting. He continues: "With the advent of our consumer society, we are seemingly faced for the first time in history by an irreversible organised attempt to swamp society with objects and integrate it into an indispensable system designed to replace all open interaction between natural forces, needs and techniques. The principal basis of this system would appear to be the official, obligatory and supervised demise of the objects that it comprises" (132).
2. See Marcuse, Herbert; *Eros and Civilisation* (London: Routledge, 1998). See especially pages



21-54.

3. See the first essay in Virilio, Paul; *Art and Fear* (London: Continuum, 2003).

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