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Philosophical Work in the Age of Digital Reproduction: A Continuation of Walter Benjamin's Discourse in the Digital History of Philosophy

Philosophical work in the age of digital reproduction has undergone significant evolution. Historically, philosophers and historians of philosophy have focused primarily on written texts as the core objects of study, engaging with manuscripts, books, essays, and other written documents that articulate ideas, arguments, and philosophical discussions. Over time, the methodologies for analyzing these texts have diversified, incorporating commentaries, archival research, contextual studies, and various other forms of textual analysis. Traditionally, the term 'text' within this discipline has been understood to refer specifically to such written material.

The development of digital humanities has introduced new methods across all humanities fields, including philosophy. This evolution has led to the development of new tools and research methods such as network analysis, data visualization, computational linguistics, and more. The transition of texts from printed or handwritten forms to digital versions marks a significant shift. While a digitalized book or paper may not differ significantly in content from its original version, texts created in multimodal languages have also become important objects in the contemporary history of philosophy.

Father Roberto Busa's Index Thomisticus was among the first digital humanities projects, aiming to electronically index every word in the corpus of Thomas Aquinas. This pioneering work, started in the 1940s and 1950s, marked the beginning of the digital history of philosophy. Today, the digital history of philosophy includes numerous ambitious projects representing various forms of digital texts, including hypertextual, pictorial, and other representations of historical and philosophical data.

The difference between traditional written and printed texts and digital screen projects that exist in multimodal screen languages is significant. Digital texts include a variety of visual signs and forms of information representation, including text, images, video, audio, graphs, memes, animations, graphics, and interactive hypertextual elements. This variety undoubtedly changes the models through which we consume philosophical knowledge. While traditional written text (e.g., a book or a manuscript) is also based on writing and reading as visual technologies, a digital work in philosophy offers many more forms of textual representations and changes the way we interact with them. The modern form of philosophical dialogues can be a Zoom lecture or Facebook chatting. The border between visual and verbal culture is more ephemeral than ever.

Analyzing the work of art in the era of mechanical reproduction, Walter Benjamin mentioned several significant transformations that occurred in the nature of art, its social function, and aesthetic value. Taking this as a starting point, I would like to apply his ideas to the transformations that have occurred with philosophical texts in the age of digital reproduction.

1.   Loss of Aura. According to Walter Benjamin, the mass reproduction of works of art has led to the loss of their aura and values. The content of philosophical work does not lose its sense and significance when digitally reproduced. Printed reproduction since the Gutenberg era has made it usual for us to work with copies, and we are aware that the

most important philosophical works of the Western canon, such as Plato's and Aristotle's, came to us through myriads of translations and interpretations. We can ask whether a digital copy of an archive and the original presence in an archive have the same scientific value for a researcher, but this also depends on specific research questions and needs. However, what will happen when we lose the ability to distinguish between philosophical work written by humans and by AI? Will the aura of a philosophical text be lost if we know it is written by a sophisticated imitator? What if machine-written Digital Meditations are more interesting to us than Cartesian meditations? What if the Digital Republic represents a better model of justice than Plato's Republic? And it doesn't matter to me whether we will or will not compete with digital solutions. More intriguing is whether we will preserve our creativity and originality. Will we still be able to pose a philosophical question to which AI does not know an answer? And will we have the courage to do this, not succumbing to the attractive laziness of mind, whose work will be replaced by digital assistants?

2. Transformation of Art's Function. Benjamin suggests that the function of art in the age of mechanical reproduction shifts from being based on its cult value (its religious, ceremonial, or magical significance) to its exhibition value (its ability to be shown to a wide audience). Philosophical work in the European tradition was not only a practice of thinking but also a practice of publicly pronouncing ideas. The increasing value of publicity as the necessary companion of our YouTube era shortens the time between the work and the public reaction to the work, with the human struggle for recognition, which is as old as humankind. However, this raises critical questions about the medium's impact: How does the medium through which philosophy is conveyed—be it text, video, or audio—affect its reception and interpretation? Do ideas that are more loudly or widely proclaimed gain more value, or does the essence of philosophical inquiry resist such simplification? This transition prompts a reevaluation of the intrinsic value of philosophical ideas in an era where the mode of delivery can profoundly influence their impact and perception.

3. Politicization, Reception, and Distraction. Benjamin proposes the politicization of art and the reception as the state of distraction when perceiving the object of art. I would suggest the term "digitization" as the state of both contemporary arts and humanities. Struggling for digital transformation, we see the positive and necessary perspectives that come from it: new tools for the preservation of our culture, free access and availability of all intellectual traditions, and their immediate exchange. The digital world is not about cross-border, it's about anti-borders in knowledge exchange. However, the massive production and consumption of digital products also represent the "digitologies" of society that make judgments on the values of ideas based on their ability to be fast reproduced through networks more than being analyzed through the prism of the scientific method. A model of rationality, born in modern times, slowly becomes overshadowed by data manipulations. The philosophical truth is easy to lose in the informational noise. Digital ideologies, implemented through technological determinism and dataism, lead to the decline of contemplation as one of the most essential philosophical practices. Being concentrated on the eternal collection of data and their analysis, we look more attentively at our screens than into the theaters of our minds. Our inner eyes are closed while we eternally watch the screen, which gives us endless data about the whole universe, leaving less time for introspective meditation.

Revisiting digital texts in philosophy reveals they three key changes: they are easier to access and use, they can reach people all over the world, and they help researchers talk

and work together online. Now, anyone with internet access can reach a vast array of philosophical writings, breaking down old barriers and allowing more people to join in the conversation. This easy access, along with the quick sharing of ideas across countries, brings new and varied thoughts into philosophy. Additionally, online spaces like forums and virtual meetings have changed how scholars talk and work with each other, making it easier for them to share ideas and collaborate. These changes have made the study of philosophy more open and connected, pushing us to think differently about how we create, share, and interact with knowledge in our digital world. However, it has also led to new challenges of digital inequality. Digital Humanities (DH) methodologies are now on their way to new developments, and it seems like soon we will be divided between those who can use them and those who cannot.

After the digital turn, neither wisdom, human nature, nor essential philosophical questions have changed. We have made a turn to the next informational revolution, which challenges our traditions. And just as Plato criticized writing for its impact on memory, we can make arguments against new technologies, intending to better understand the challenges they will bring to us. The new information medium, however, will change the modes of our understanding of the world around us. Every time, making the next turn into forms and methods of representation of knowledge, we open the doors not only to new opportunities but also to new responsibilities. Using digital technology, we aim to preserve the depth and integrity of philosophical inquiry, but the role of philosophy in our lives will be reimagined, as it has been many times before. However, the world should not be divided between those who use these technologies and those who do not.

Leaving this essay in open access as a draft for further reflections and extensions, I would like to conclude it in an optimistic manner. The changes that "digitalities" and "digitologies" bring to our lives still leave space for classical philosophical inquiry. It is time to rethink again the most essential philosophical concept—a concept of human being. In the new social reality, in the interaction between human beings and digital things, we have to turn our eyes from the ideal digital virtual world to the most essential task of the material world—to preserve human life and authentic human existence on Earth.