Valery: neither matter nor space nor time...

technical reproduction of social bodies and identities ?

substitution of "plurality of copies" for a "unique existence" (withering of the aura) (implications for the phallus, for ex, or for the cultural ideal of femininity) and re"reactivates (recontextualizes, reteritorializes the object reproduced by mobilizing it in a different situation (resulting in multiple originals). Reproduction lacks the time and place (situationality) of the original--loss of a home to run back to.

substantive duration vs transmutability of spaces and times (and identities), and resulting change in the authority of historical testimony of the (original) object (subject). What B terms the "liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage (same rhetoric used by hitler cues us to the type of dilemma we have here).   Benjamin was right in registering the liquidation of history in Germany in the '30s for what it was.

--we now live past (post) the historical manifestation of this fact

--register different investments in this process of liquidation

--recognize fascist appropriation of of this idea via the discourse of decadence;

Benjamin himself comes close to a discourse of degenerescence and decadence anchored in a notion of the natural when he reads mechanical reproduction as a process of cultural "liquidation," and when he approaches the historical object as if it were analogous to the aura of the "natural" object. He's reluctant to let go of the modern notion of history as comprised of objects bearing the same permanence and value as nature, and for good reason--fascism was obviously in its pragmatics a project of rewriting history. This is the contradiction of any nationalist totalitarian regime of signs: its fetishization of technologies at the very same time that it mobilizes remnant traces of a romantic notion of the"natural" socius. Perhaps Benjamin couldn't bring himself to say in public

that the "authority" of the traditional cultural heritage which he appeals to in the face of fascism is itself purely constructed--depending on its own class structures and techniques of representation for reproduction and enforcement. The (constructed) authority of this "original" heritage in the minds of the masses would be appropriated more easily than anyone could have imagined by fascist dream machines using the new technologies of mass reproduction, epitomized in the Nazi's use of broadcast radio and the newsreel--media Benjamin correctly recognized as new forms of armaments (213). The Nazi's genocidal program would demonstrate that history *could* be rewritten, in a matter of a few years, and that the "real" history that should have saved the world from the kind of contorted fantasy of national history and identity that was cathected onto Hitler had no *essential* authority whatsoever. Fascism, in fact, proceeds as a possibility from the very moment that the masses come to perceive themselves as the subject of nature, that is, the subject (not object) of a nature-as-history and of a history as the manifestation of "the natural."

The cultural phenomenon Benjamin was registering in 193x had two dimensions. One dimension involved the technological--and particularly machinic--determinations by which the subject of history became unanchored from an "authentic" history of rational logic. The other dimension which Benjamin maps incompletely in the essay but which is **imminent** everywhere in the text are the conservative nationalistic retrenchments which accompany that unanchoring and which work by projecting the rational logic of the modern subject of history (as the original and the natural) into the irrationality of an unverifiable "better" future and "purer" value of the cultural heritage (Arendt, 1968). The discourse of historical decadence is part of this dimension. In other words, what Benjamin was registering but would not live to see complete its manifestation was the transmogrification of late modernity's project of modernization and

its quest for (national) identity into the fascist signifying regimes that would mark the beginnings of the socius in postmodernity.

The history that was being replaced by the newsreel and the radio was the history of modernity, yet the technical means of replacement came from the political economy and technical phylum of modernity itself. My concern here in taking up Benjamin's line of questioning for the feminine in postmodernity is how women intersect this network of problematics which Benjamin began to identify at the threshold between modernity and postmodernity.

The changes in perception which Benjamin maps as the *forms of expression* of social transformations would come to characterize postmodern culture--the socius in the logic of late capital which Baudrillard would sum up as the "precession of simulacra" and the loss of the communal illusion in the authorized status of an original referent. The path was the same for social identities as for the work of art in the shift from market to consumer captialism. Semiotic regimes regulating social identities undergo a transformation from ethnic rituals to regimes regulating the politics of identity, just as the authenticity of the art object inscribed in ritual practices shifted with the art object's mass reproducibility into the field of political practices.

Technical phylum moves from coins to bronze weapons, from man-horse assemblages to man-steel machinic assemblages, from the reproduction of graphic arts to the aestheticization of ballistics. [Becoming killing machines?]

Benjamin notes that the aesthetic debates over the status of photography as "art" obscured the more crucial question of whether the invention of photography hadn't transformed the very nature of art. Similarly, the appearance of the public lesbian, particularly after World War II liberated her from a depression economics, raises the question of whether the "nature" of the feminine

hadn't substantively changed in twentieth-century culture. The point is that the political economy of mechanical reproduction technologies and technologies of simulation would alter not only traditional aesthetics but also traditional values and expressions of gendered social identities.

The subjective transformation that Benjamin was already able to identify in the years approaching the Second World War involved the relation of technologies of representation to the human body in regard to identification. In Benjamin's reading of the broader effects of photography and film, the audience's identification had shifted from the actor (Hitler) to the camera (technology). Technical reproduction not only changes the reaction of the masses to art, it calls the masses into being in their late modern and postmodern forms as subjects, not of nature, but of technology.

notes to reinsert in intro:

6.   The dialectic denotation/connotation undergoes the same critique: denotation depends entirely upon the myth of objectivity. Denotation differs in no way from connotation, but is in fact "the most attractive and subtle of connotations..." and "even the difficulty which arises in the case of the image (i.e., its nondiscreteness, the fact that its Sr and Sd form a continuum, etc.) poses no fundamental challenge to the rule of the equivalence of the sign" (*Critique* 157-8). Barthes likewise pointed out the ideologically replete distinction between the denotative and connotative when he wrote in *S/Z*, "denotation is not the first among meanings, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one that seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language" (*S/Z* 9).

7.   Nothing, not even the notion of human needs, exceeds this logic of exchange. Baudrillard writes:

> *Needs are not the actuating (mouvante) and original expression of a subject, but the functional reduction of the subject by the system of use value in solidarity with that of exchange value. Similarly, the referent does not constitute an autonomous concrete reality at all; it is only the extrapolation of the excision (decoupage) established by the logic of the sign onto the world of things (onto the phenomenological universe of perception). (Critique 155)*

8.   Walter Ong argues that it was print, not writing, that effectively reified the word. Typography "literally" made the word into a commodity (*Orality* 119, 131).