**Exhibitability and Cult Value**

Exhibitability [*Austellbarkeit*], after Walter Benjamin, names art’s potential to instigate change in the event of its being shared. The ‘unique existence’ of the modern work of art is forsaken but not art’s capacity to command a pluarlised ‘here’ in the ‘now’, or a mutual (whether actual or virtual) place in time.

Today, in the age of what we might call technological sociability, we may rethink art’s cult value without recourse to aura – reasserting its significance in conjunction with exhibition value and overshadowing exchange value. Art can serve ritual purposes without insisting on originality or authenticity, on the unique apparition of distance, or on individualistic contemplative absorption. If we free our understanding of ritual from notions of fixity, hierarchy and subservience, it may provide us with a renewed basis on which art – in a particular context, over a particular duration – enables an event-based experience of commonality, galvanizing coordinated action. Religiosity or spirituality need not, though they may, play a role. This cult value does not operate as a polar extreme in relation to art’s exhibition value, since politics, which ground the latter, are entangled with rituals as here implied.

Through its exhibitability, and its attendant cult value as well as exhibition value, art enables the negotiation of difference, with the capacity to challenge as well as reflect governance as regards difference. Its effectiveness lies in channeling that which can be seen as, or made to be, in common – in constituting collectivity.

Image caption: still from Werner Hezog’s film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010), on the prehistoric paintings in the Chauvet caves of Southern France

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