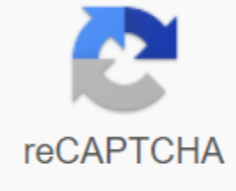




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## Art in the age of mechanical reproduction pdf

by Erik Larsen Introduction and Historical Knowledge Despite his relative shortness, Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* continues to attract significant scientific attention as a major work in the history of modern aesthetic and political criticism. The essay credits the development of an insightful interpretation of the role of technological reproduction in shaping aesthetic experience; More specifically, Benjamin catalogued the significant effects of film and photography on the decline of the autonomous aesthetic experience. After fleeing the Nazi government in 1933, Benjamin moved to Paris, from where he published the first edition of *The Artwork in 1936* (Brodersen XV). This publication was published in French under Raymond Aron as Volume 5, No. 1 of *zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. Benjamin later rewrote the essay and, after the editorial work of Theodore and Margarethe Adorno, was posthumously recognized in its commonly recognized form in *Schriften* in 1955 (Wolin 183-4). The basic themes and arguments Benjamin begins his essay by briefly separating his category from traditional aesthetic values, creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery (218). Instead, *The Work of Art* combines these tendencies with bourgeois and fascist ideologies and with the conditions inevitably created by capitalism itself, which raise revolutionary demands in art politics (217-8). To catalog and eventually overturn classical and romantic aesthetic ideals, Benjamin describes the process by which modern technological reproduction strips these institutions and their iconic works of art of their aesthetic authority. Benjamin argues that at one time the role of art has been to provide a magical foundation for a cult. Here, the value in use of the artwork was centrally located within the ritual and religious tradition (223-4). The statue or idol conveyed a sense of detached authority or the fearsome magical power that brought in (and only in) that very historical object. Reproduction of the mass of such an object would have been impossible, since its unique singularity produced the generosity of the ritual. To better describe this fictional quality, Benjamin introduces the concept of aura. As the term suggests, the aura contains a detached and over-the-top atmosphere of beauty and power that supports cult societies. It also contains a justification whose long historical existence is to his blessing. Benjamin writes: From the very beginning, the authenticity of the matter is the essence of the contagious, ranging from its material duration to the history it has experienced in its testimony (221). To clarify the idea, he compares it to natural We define later aura as a unique phenomenon of distance, no matter how close it is. If, on a summer afternoon, while resting, you follow with your eyes on the horizon a mountain range or branch casting its shadow over you, you will experience the aura of those mountains, that branch (222-3). Benjamin's example is noteworthy because, like a cult object, the aura of the linings seems to rest on something autonomous and human intervention-free. The statue is not like any other object produced or used in society; it seems free from the stain of ideological control or human intervention, as if its power, like the power of the mountain, were questions separate from the inside. The coming of modern times and the disappearance of the cult only partly signal the end of the aural art. Benjamin acknowledges the autonomy of contemporary art as he emphasizes the lingering cult of aura. In particular, the L'art pour l'art movement maintained and developed a sense of autonomy and distance from ancient religious works (224). In fact, it can be said that romantic and symbolic aesthetic ideals, derived in part from Kant's apothosis artwork autonomy, represent the ultimate attempt to compensate for the aura. Mallarmé's vision of pure artwork, for example, is something completely detached from everyday reality or social and political influences (Melberg 100). Much of the art and aesthetics of the 19th century thus represent a conscious attempt to defend the special status of a work of art from the banality of bourgeois capitalism. More specifically, the cult of pure art is the answer to the mechanical reproduction of works of art, which threatens to completely remove them from their auras. Benjamin acknowledges artistic reproduction throughout history, although he suggests that mechanical reproduction brought a whole new and revolutionary change to the experience of the work (218). With mechanical replicas visible in its most radical forms of film and photography, millions of images of the original circulate, all of which lack the authentic aura of their source. This process affects both changing social conditions and changes the impact of those in which all previously unique and sacred institutions have become equal (223). The general willingness to accept a copy instead of the original also means a reluctance to participate in the ritual aesthetics and politics of earlier times. For example, a photograph or film of a Catholic cathedral is its unique aura, transforming the role of participant into the role of viewer or potentially detached commentator. The film Although Benjamin deals briefly with photography, his argument focuses primarily on the revolutionary potential of the film as a state of mechanical reproduction. Unlike stage performers, a movie actor or respond to the public. The audience's view also becomes synonymous with the impertical perspective given to the camera. The net effect of these innovations is to put the viewer in the impersonal position of the critic – something previous cult experiences of art would never have allowed (229). The prevalence of film and other mechanical reproductions also creates a culture in which small experts are willing to judge art rather than loosen themselves in an inclusive ritual (231). Benjamin also notes that the film relies on a series of cut and attached images that need to be put together to form an aesthetic whole. The quick juxtapositions and movements of dadaist painting, like Dadaist painting, strike the viewer violently, disrupting meditation and the easy consumption of the image (238). Susan Buck-Morss further develops this point, commenting that Benjamin's art must restore the instinctive power of the senses of the human body for the self-preservation of mankind, not by avoiding new technologies, but by passing through them (5). The profound political and social significance of these reflections has developed briefly in Benjamin's epilogue, in which he recognizes the final and terrible formality of the L'art pour l'art movement from fascism. As a form of extreme capitalism, fascism ultimately does not change the structure of property relations. Instead, it replaces aesthetic expression in the world of politics, presumably giving the masses the right to self-expression. The result is the restoration of aura and cult values to political life, a process that inevitably ends in war (241-2). In a chilling final paragraph, Benjamin suggests that within fascism, self-alienation has become so extreme that the destruction of humanity becomes an aesthetic experience. In response to this complete aesthetic of politics, Benjamin writes that communism reacted with a supposedly positive gesture by politicising art (242). Reception and interpretation Numerous scientific articles and books continue to focus on Benjamin's works of art, and their positive and negative responses point to its general readership for many years to come. Ian Knizek, for example, criticizes Benjamin's essay by suggesting that the aura could be effectively transferred to reproduction (361). Adorno also criticized the essay by showing the way modern breeding methods produce less than more critical citizens. He also suggested that, in certain cases, an independent work of art excludes aura and produces greater self-rationalisation (Wolin 193-4). Other more recent critical works have explored Benjamin's claims in the context of modern debates about the unprecedented amount of art new forms of electronic media (Ziarek 209-25). Generally speaking, the essay a significant role in understanding how technology contributes to the aestheticisation of artwork in modern times. However, Miriam Hansen has combined her relatively optimistic attitude with technology and media, which has not been shared by many of Benjamin's timers, with the avant-garde aesthetic of the 1920s (181-2). The works quoted Benjamin, Walter. *Lighting: Essays and reflections*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans Harry Zohn. Schocken Books, 1968. Brodersen and Momme. *Walter Benjamin: Biography*. Ed. Martin Derviş. Trans Malcom R. Green and Ingrida Ligers. New York: Verso, 1996. Buck-Morss and Susan. *Aesthetics and anaesthetic: Walter Benjamin's artwork essay again*. October 62 (1992) : 3-41 October 1992 Hansen and Miriam. 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