

Collaborative Roadmap of Walter Benjamin's *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

1. Benjamin contextualizes his argument about how art changes through a Marxian lens of "capitalist modes of production" that affect the two structures (parts) of society: "substructure" or economic "base" (i.e. class divisions, relations of production property, division of labor, commodities) and the "superstructure" (i.e. art, culture, political power structures, roles, media, education, religion, ritual, law, kinship/family, etc.) of society. The "base" determines and affects how the "superstructure" functions. [Prof M]
2. Benjamin discusses how changes in the conditions of production have changed the "superstructure" in ways that affect art; rather than focus on "outmoded" (outdated) concepts no longer relevant, like "creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery which could dangerously be appropriated by Fascism", he claims that the purpose of art might be "useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art." [Prof M]
3. Art has always been able to be reproduced in some way. [GC]
4. With lithography and eventually photography, the rate of reproducing art has accelerated extremely and has become common. [GC]
5. Reproduction diminishes the temporal (history) and spatial (location-set up-ownership) context of an art. [RA]
6. Second paragraph claims that original works have authenticity than reproduced ones and manual reproduction would yield greater authenticity compared to mechanical reproduction, such as digital reproduction that brings reproduced works out of their contexts. [RA]
7. Third paragraph summarizes how the products of mechanical reproduction are degraded because mechanical reproductions disrupt their contexts. Thus, impair its authenticity. When this downgrade happens, the art's historical testimonies are altered which affects their authority. [RA]
8. Fourth paragraph says mechanical production dispatches the work of art from its traditions because it brings arts to more interpretations. Film as reproduction has been the most influential factor in liquidating cultures. [RA]
9. A reproduction of art can be an exact replica of the original but can never match its authenticity. the question is does authenticity always matter? [DA]
10. The form of art of that period of time is determined by nature and circumstance. Roman scholars were unwilling or unable to show social transformations expressed by changing art forms. Societies urge to bring things closer to us or reproduce objects results in the decay of the original object's aura. [DA]
- 11&12. When a piece of art is mechanically reproduced, it is separated from its tradition, aura, original use value and its cult. It also creates a situation where art is no longer dependent on its ritual function. Because of this art just becomes art with no other function. Originals are no longer important; reproductions are and can now be used for other means. [JC]
13. The different ways art is produced or shown change its value and our perception of it. Regardless of the passage of time, as ideals and values change, art becomes shown in different ways. New technology becomes a new form of art itself and consequently creates new ways to perceive forms art from the past. [MM]
14. Art in the past that may not have been considered art at the time of its creation today could be a masterpiece today. The value placed on art in the past grows over time. Art today, such as film and photography, show how emphasis has shifted: they are new art forms that were not plausible at a certain time in history. [MM]
15. Although exhibition value artwork is beginning to replace cult value artwork in different artistic forms, such as photography, Benjamin claims that cult value will never entirely become extinct--and becomes entrenched in the "countenance," or face: of loved ones & (in our times) of the icon (celebrity?). That is because cult value can promote particular feelings in the spectator. However exhibition value is more highly regarded as a superior value because it is more widely circulated in the media & more part of capitalism--it is seen by and known to a larger number of observers. [Prof M]
16. Photography and film are questioned as to whether they are art forms. Quotes support that film is an art. [GC]
17. Performance involving screen actors has two consequences compared to stage actors in live performance. First, a screen actor's performances are mediated through cameras. Therefore, the film constitutes scenes that are dictated by optical tests; the feature of cameras and their cinematic aspects construct a series of positional moves. Secondly, screen actors don't directly engage the audience. Instead, the audiences engage with what the camera sees. This results in critiques that aren't based from direct observation. [RA]

- 18 & 19. Sound films do not fix the problems initially caused by silent films. That problem is that the actor is performing for the camera and not directly to the audience. By watching film the audience is deprived of the actor's aura. An actor's aura is tied to his presence and cannot be replicated. [DA]
- 20, 21, 22, 23. When filming an actor, reproducing his personality, his fake personality is reproduced and not who he really is. Whoever he is when filmed has to be attractive to the people watching. Just like a commodity. When watching, sport, or anything else on TV, people can claim to be experts. Everybody can become an artist, writer, actor, Lessing the gap between artist and observer. [JC]
23. Film has an illusionary nature; its technology allows it to cut into our reality and create art out of what we already know. [MM]
25. The director of a film has a backstage hand in creating art; when watching a film you may not fully attribute what you see to the director, this is the "natural distance" between the director and the art being created. A painter penetrates the canvas and changes it with his own hand. When viewing a painting, you can see where the painter has left off, and made certain and different brush strokes. As if he left a trail of his thoughts, it is a map into his mind at the time of creation. [MM]
26. Film is argued to be more realistic vision, because its technology allows it to imitate our reality. Paintings cannot offer such a physical form, because it is purely a reality of the mind. [MM]
27. Benjamin argues that reproducing art will change the reactions of those who view it: these reactions can be "reactive" (painting) and "progressive" (film) and are inversely related. He explains that the "progressive" creates a direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert. Such fusion is of great social significance" (14). The less social significance art has for the viewer, the sharper the distinction between whether the public enjoys or criticizes it. We enjoy "conventional" art without thinking about it, and experience aversion to "new" art. Painting = 1 viewer at a time; Film = multiple viewers at a time, resulting in ability of art to influence an entire group simultaneously. [Prof M]
28. Paintings are not meant for large group observation. Benjamin claims that paintings were enjoyed by those esteemed enough to enjoy them. They are at a serious risk being collected by the masses. Paintings are being reacted to the same way as films when these art forms are enormously different. [Prof M]
- 29 & 30. Films allows a deeper analysis of what we see, through close ups, freeze frames, slow motion. Film allows us to see more, but also to deeper analyze our own actions. The camera opens our eyes for things that would normally remain unnoticed. [JC]
- 31, 32 & 33. Arts were created on demand, dada created a situation where the message of art was more important than the value. Dada created art for the public; to shock the public. [JC]
- 34, 35, 36, 37. Art, film can create two situations: it can distract, where a work of art is absorbed by the masses, or it can concentrate, where an observer is absorbed. Buildings have the purpose of shelter, so architectural art will remain. [JC]
38. Fascism introduces aesthetics into political life to trick the proletariat (working class) with false illusions of social power & economic equality by giving them "aesthetic expression"— the appearance of revolutionary power— instead of actual power. The abuse of the masses is paralleled by abuse of devices that contribute to the creation of "ritual values," i.e. technologies of mechanical production that reproduce "art" in ways to disillusion the masses. [Prof M]
39. The aestheticization of politics ultimately ends in war (i.e. think here of propaganda). [Prof M]
40. The technological devices used to reproduce art are the same as those that have created modern warfare. War retains the private property system & the class system, while using the speed & energy of reproduction technologies not unlike those that reproduce art, but instead of creating, it destroys (i.e. we might call this the rebellion of technology). [Prof M]
41. Fascism creates the situation by which humanity can experience its destruction as aesthetic pleasure. War supplies "the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology...the consummation of *'l'art pour l'art.'*"

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