

PRE-RESIDENCY READING DIARY

Notes on Selected Works by

Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Kittler,
and Jacques Derrida/Bernhard Stiegler

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A. WALTER BENJAMIN

“The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Harry Zohn, trans., in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., Schocken (1968)

1. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940)

- a. German Marxist literary critic and philosopher
- b. Associated with the Frankfurt School of critical theory
- c. Inspired by the Marxism of Bertolt Brecht (who was a German communist dramatist, stage director, poet)
- d. Inspired by the Jewish mysticism of Gershom/Gerhard Scholem (who was a German-born Jewish philosopher and historian)
- e. Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Benjamin

2. Main Ideas in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

- a. Increasingly, the work of art is designed exclusively for reproducibility.
- b. Art loses its “aura” as it becomes a medium for mass audiences.
- c. A paradigm shift in the traditional understanding of art is happening in the age of replication/mass commodification:

From	To
The authentic	The reproducible
Permanence	“Transitoriness”
Uniqueness	Mass distribution/ownership/commodification
The unapproachable (distance)	The manipulable (proximity)
Enabling historical narratives	Rewriting history
Aura based on cult value and ritual	Exhibition based on and reflecting market forces
Autonomy	Interdependence/interaction
Specialized training (initiation)	Polytechnic training (testing)
Entering a work of art w/concentration	Absorbing/consuming a work of art through distraction
Aestheticization of the political	Politicization of the aesthetic

