

# The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction by walter benjamin



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After reading the article on The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction by Walter Benjamin, it gives a lot of things to think about art these days and how it should be, whether the thinking of Walter Benjamin is relevant to our age of society these days is a different part of the story but how he interprets art in the article is a totally different thing, so let us view a bit about his article.

“ Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.”- Paul Valery, *Le Conquete de l’ubiquite*.

Since Walter started his article with this quote from Paul Valery, it is best if we start our review of what he thinks with it. From my point of view, this very quote is the starting point of his revelation towards writing this article. It expresses exactly though not wholly about what he wanted to interpret in what he wrote. The most important part that he had express in the article is about the new modes of perception and the aura that arises with it. He said <https://assignbuster.com/the-work-of-art-in-the-age-of-mechanical-reproduction-by-walter-benjamin/>

that the work of art in the modern-day-mechanical world loses the feeling of singularity in each of them and for an example, photography these days has taken us only to a part of a story or a scene but do us no justice when it leaves behind other details that might be, well, fairly important as the captured part.

I feel that he has a lot of valid points when he says that our mass production and reproduction of art does not contain the aura that it is supposed to be. This is true because reproduction does not give the audience a private feeling towards the work of art since it is not the real thing, it is only a reproduction. A whole new perception of art is introduced to us, but at the same time, it also gives a whole new meaning of the art and a mode of distraction to the audience. The aura of arts in the mechanical world, as Walter said, has been moved into a mythological space and into the cult of genius.

Moving on to the similarities between his article and the movie “ Shadow Magic” that has been directed by Ann Hu. When seeing the movie and trying to relate with Walter’s article, I think the most crucial and obvious part is about the aura that Walter has been mentioning again and again in his writing. Quoting what he said,

“...the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be.”

As I said before, the aura of art is different when human reproduces it because it has lost its aura because we do not experience the original thing and seeing that we can see almost everything at a gallery, it is totally relevant. In the movie Shadow Magic, it proven my point when in the last <https://assignbuster.com/the-work-of-art-in-the-age-of-mechanical-reproduction-by-walter-benjamin/>

scene, people were totally captivated by the view of the top of The Great Wall of China. The audience was not really at the top of the Great Wall but the feeling is different because there is not reproduction of the landmark. This means, the aura of it is still there though it is far away. This shows that what Liu and Walter thinks have similarities.

The next thing I noticed that is similar about the movie and Walter's article is when Liu tried to attract people to see Shadow Magic themselves and said that seeing is believing. The interesting part is when a man says, " Is it magic?". It totally goes hand in hand with this quote by Walter:

" This is comparable to the situation of the work of art in prehistoric times when, by the absolute emphasis on its cult value, it was, first and foremost an instrument of magic. Only later did it come to be recognized as a work of art."

There was also a scene when a servant told his master that the master's profit has dropped because of the reproduction of Shadow Magic by the westerners. It loses its ' magic' feeling after the reproduction by the westerners; just like what Walter had said, early civilization thinks that art is some kind of magic, by reproducing it, it loses its aura, its magic.

A good quote from the movie would be,

" We cannot escape what derives us".- Shadow Magic.

To me, there are a lot of things that Walter says is true and relevant but upon seeing the movie and trying to compare them both, I cannot help but to put this quote as a reminder to myself that although I agree with Walter, I <https://assignbuster.com/the-work-of-art-in-the-age-of-mechanical-reproduction-by-walter-benjamin/>

cannot go against what this new age of era has brought to me. No matter how, we must embrace new things and make use of what it bringing to us