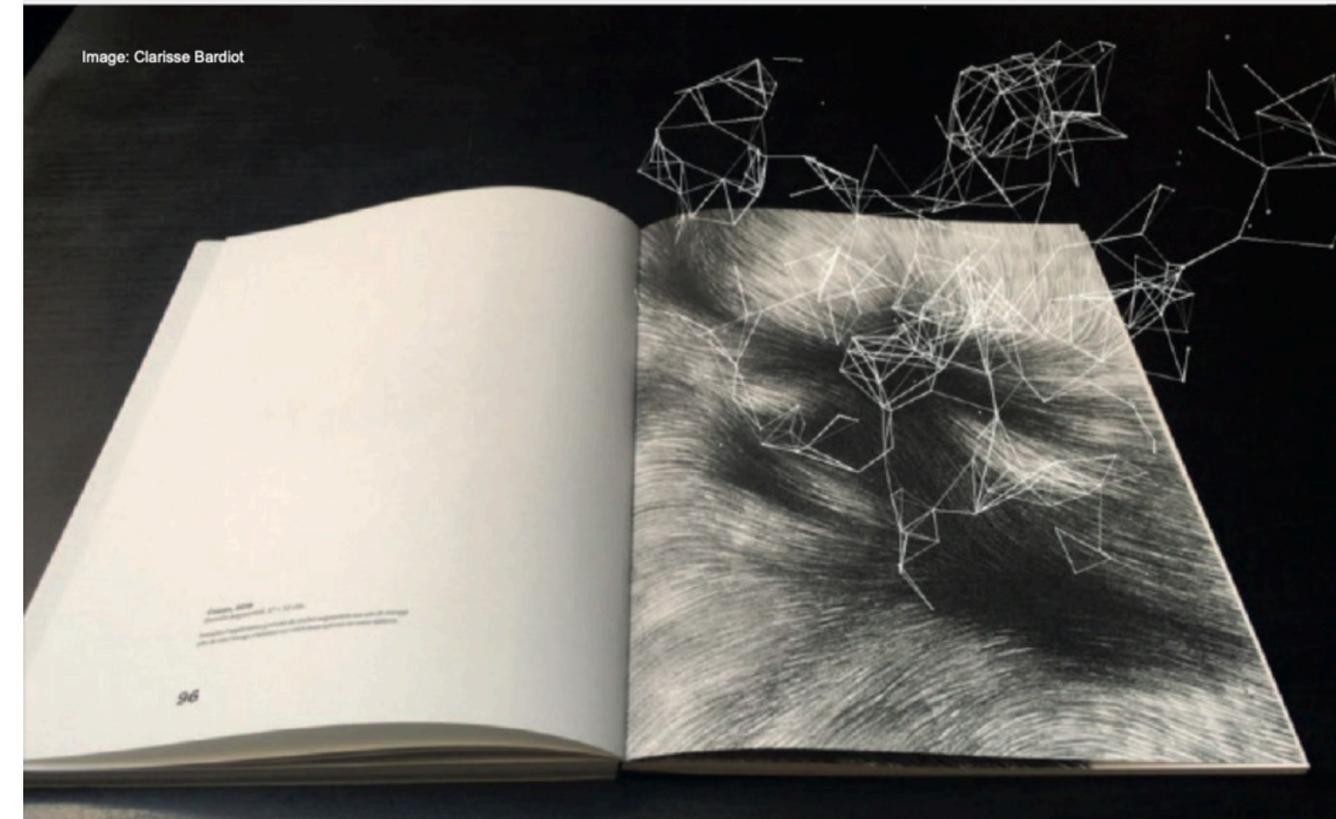


# Project 1: Publishing Forms



## Project 01

Publishing Forms

[Design Lab ARTD6116](#)  
[Launch: Week 1 30/01/25](#)  
[Crits: Week 5 24/02/25](#)

*"Once the book becomes electronic or hybrid, the permanence, immutability and stability typical of physical books is likely to mutate into dynamic, modular, and participative forms."*

– Digital Publishing Toolkit Collective, From Print to Ebooks:  
A Hybrid Publishing Toolkit for the Arts, 2014

### The brief

How might we re-imagine content beyond a static page?

Using the given text, create a published object that amplifies the content in new and exciting ways. This project explores different approaches to organizing, designing, and distributing information in a published form, online and offline.

### Overview

Today, "making [information] public" is not a fixed activity but something that can be hybrid and connected, offline and online. We share content through interactive channels that can communicate beyond the page. But is this activity lost within the noise of modern communication? What are the actual benefits of the digitization of content? Do some forms of content still work better on paper? Are we genuinely utilizing the full potential of digital formats?

We would like you to reflect on the book as an interactive object and an object of communication; books — novels, dictionaries, catalogues, instruction books, recipe books, travel guides, picture

# The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Walter Benjamin

For this project, I was assigned Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and asked to recreate its content in a format other than that of a regular essay. I did this by making a physical and a digital version.

The physical version consisted of extracting and separating specific passages from each section (preface-epilogue) of the essay and putting them on separate pages. For instance, the Preface on page one, Section 1 on page three, and so forth. On the even-numbered pages, I used an image of postage stamps intended to be from several countries. These stamps, as artwork, were utilised to demonstrate Benjamin's concept of the "aura" of original works of art being lost via mechanical reproduction. Throughout the pages, the stamp images progressively deteriorated in quality, with noise and stains appearing. To further the observation of the use of artwork for propaganda, I altered two of the following stamp designs superimposing more traditional-appearing stamps as if they were stuck over the originals, symbolising ideological revision or manipulation.

For the online version, I reproduced the full text of Benjamin's essay instead of using excerpts. I started with the same stamp image in its original format. Instead of a slow deterioration, I added AI-generated images to symbolize the mechanical reproduction theme in the digital technology era. The AI art was a visual metaphor for Benjamin's thesis: though machines (and now AI) can reproduce or create images, they lack the intangible "aura" of original human-made artwork. There were subtle clues in the AI-created images that were intended to suggest their artificial nature, reinforcing the fact that machine processes, no matter how sophisticated, continue to miss the essence of human art pieces.

# Experimentation/Idea development:

**The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction**

Historical context & reproducibility  
Ability to reproduce art through mechanical means has changed how people perceive & interact with art.

Important to understand how art is perceived  
Art loses its aura (unique presence in time & space) due to mechanical reproduction.

Technology impacts art - printing, lithography, photography  
art has shifted from being unique to being reproducible.  
This perception of it changed.

but, mechanical reproduction also makes art more accessible to the masses. It is no longer isolated & is tied to cultural, social & political life.

Initially, art was used for ritualistic purposes, but later shifted to political purposes. Transition is tied to mechanical reproduction of art.

art's potential to be used for political purposes: Mass media (film) can shape people's perceptions - this is related to the rise of fascism.

Art as propaganda  
Capitalism using technology to exploit people.  
Film is suited for distraction - since it is easy to consume.  
Film is a more revolutionary medium than painting.  
Audience's relationship with film is different from that of a live show.

Meaning  
Tone of voice: *Archaic* - *stagnant* - *stuffy* - *stale*  
Key words/adjective words: *stagnant* - *stuffy* - *stale*  
Narrative structure:  
- motives within structure  
- Adjective & design interaction

Art → ability to be mass produced → leaflets / flyers / mass production

reproducible } Code → not easy to understand  
perceptives +

write more adjectives

→ Create 5 min presentation

Continue

How might we

Core themes:  
- main of themes of each para  
- how they relate to each other  
- art

**EAP - Sketchbooks**

More details  
Use for better planning  
Take time to draw things  
Use pictures as well as notes  
Using pictures as well as notes  
Use pictures & draw fill art on top of them  
All the process is included - included creating patterns  
Used for experimentation & ideation

Show research in sketch book

BE MORE VISUAL! → try obtaining things more  
Include pictures/paintings instead of just writing notes  
from studio workshops, etc

STAMPS → lost their value over time, fewer have ones created since they were being mass produced.

Size: 21mm x 24mm  
Ranges from 10mm - 30mm

Pictorial stamps: animals, plants, landscapes, historical figures, original artwork; or abstract designs, allegories, representation of real world objects

Stamps as propaganda:  
Portraits of leaders  
Images of events

Read Harriet Publications

Folio

PSYCHOANALYSIS  
MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION  
REPRODUCIBLE  
DADAISM  
PICTORIAL REPRODUCTION  
PERCEPTIVE  
UNIQUE  
LITHOGRAPHY  
AUTHENTIC  
QUALITY  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
WAR  
MECHANICAL  
AURA  
FILM  
TRADITIONAL  
PUBLIC PRESENTABILITY  
RITUAL  
CONTEMPORARY  
CAPITALISTIC PRODUCTION  
POLITICS  
EXHIBIT  
CONSEQUENCE  
COMMON PROPERTY  
ILLUSIONARY NATURE  
REVOLUTIONARY CRITICISM  
DISTRACTION

Red Blue  
Art as propaganda + change certain stamps? Censorship?

15 subheadings + Foreword & epilogue cover

Forward (folded) Original postal stamps

1st copy → stamps

ABC R4 →

Who? → University students  
Text simplified, link to the entire thing online

A3

1. A3 → A4

A6 a b c d  
e f g h → A5

1. Cover 2. Preface 5. III 6. IV  
3. 4. II 7. V 8. VI  
9. VII 10. VIII 13. XI 14. XII  
11. IX 12. X 15. XIII 16. XIV

Booklet → 36 pages

I  
II  
III

17. XV  
18. Epilogue

THE WORK OF  
ART IN THE  
AGE OF MECHANICAL  
REPRODUCTION

Copy 1

Copy 14

XIV

VII

The nineteenth-century dispute as to the artistic value of painting versus photography today seems devious and confused. This does not diminish its importance, however; if anything, it underlines it. The dispute was in fact the symptom of a historical transformation the universal impact of which was not realized by either of the rivals. When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever.

The primary question - whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art - was not raised.



# Physical Version:

## The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

### I

In principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Manmade artifacts could always be imitated by men.

Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new.



### Preface

Marx directed his efforts in such a way as to give them prognostic value.

The result was that one could expect it not only to exploit the proletariat with increasing intensity, but ultimately to create conditions which would make it possible to abolish capitalism itself.

The concepts which are introduced into the theory of art in what follows differ from the more familiar terms in that they are completely useless for the purposes of Fascism. They are, on the other hand, useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art.v



### II

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.

technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself.

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura' and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.



### III

During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.



### IV

The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol.



### V

With the different methods of technical reproduction of a work of art, its fitness for exhibition increased to such an extent that the quantitative shift between its two poles turned into a qualitative transformation of its nature.

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. In the same way today, by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental.<sup>9</sup> This much is certain: today photography and the film are the most serviceable exemplifications of this new function.



### VI

In photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line. But cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance.

photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance.



## VII

The nineteenth-century dispute as to the artistic value of painting versus photography today seems devious and confused. This does not diminish its importance, however; if anything, it underlines it. The dispute was in fact the symptom of a historical transformation the universal impact of which was not realized by either of the rivals. When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever.

The primary question – whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art – was not raised.

16



## VIII

The artistic performance of a stage actor is definitely presented to the public by the actor in person; that of the screen actor, however, is presented by a camera, with a twofold consequence.

Guided by the cameraman, the camera continually changes its position with respect to the performance.

18



## IX

For the film, what matters primarily is that the actor represents himself to the public before the camera, rather than representing someone else.

The film actor, wrote Pirandello, 'feels as if in exile – exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice, and the noises caused by his moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence ... The projector will play with his shadow before the public, and he himself must be content to play before the camera.'

For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it.

Nothing more strikingly shows that art has left the realm of the 'beautiful semblance' which, so far, had been taken to be the only sphere where art could thrive.

20



## X

The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, as Pirandello describes it, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror.

While facing the camera he knows that ultimately he will face the public, the consumers who constitute the market.

22



XI

In the theatre one is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusionary. There is no such place for the movie scene that is being shot. Its illusionary nature is that of the second degree, the result of cutting. That is to say, in the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with other similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology.

There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law.



XII

Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art.

The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion.

The change that has come about is an expression of the particular conflict in which painting was implicated by the mechanical reproducibility of paintings. Although paintings began to be publicly exhibited in galleries and salons, there was no way for the masses to organize and control themselves in their reception.



XIII

This circumstance derives its chief importance from its tendency to promote the mutual penetration of art and science.



XIV

Dadaism attempted to create by pictorial - and literary - means the effects which the public today seeks in the film.

In the decline of middle-class society, contemplation became a school for asocial behaviour; it was countered by distraction as a variant of social conduct.<sup>18</sup> Dadaistic activities actually assured a rather vehement distraction by making works of art the centre of scandal.



XV

the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration from the spectator.

Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise.



Epilogue

The destructiveness of war furnishes proof that society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society. The horrible features of imperialistic warfare are attributable to the discrepancy between the tremendous means of production and their inadequate utilization in the process of production - in other words, to unemployment and the lack of markets.



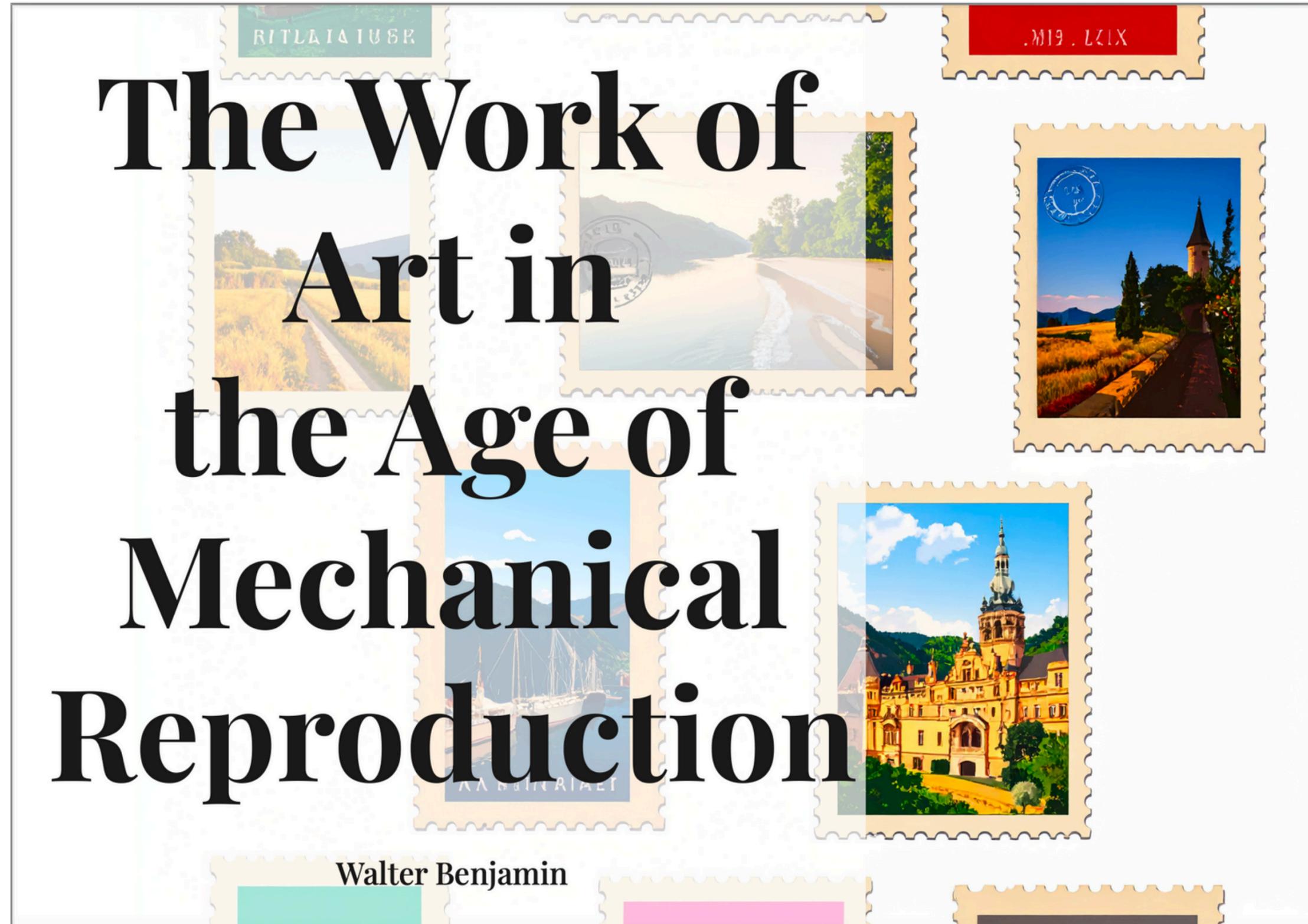
Scan to read the full essay

**Digital version:**

[Click to view](#)

# The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Walter Benjamin



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