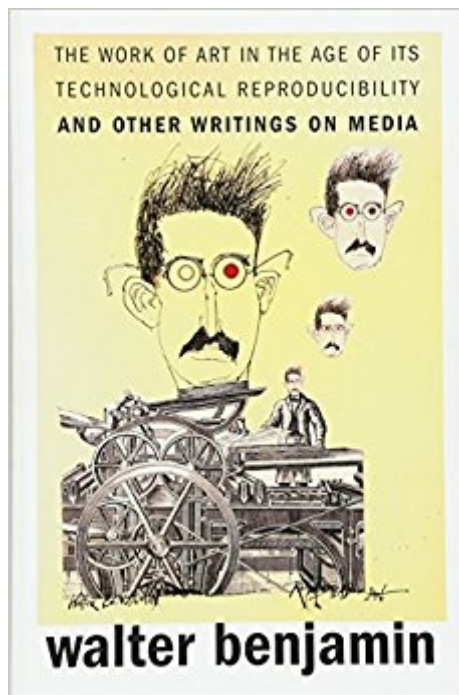




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The Work Of Art In The Age Of Its Technological Reproducibility, And Other Writings On Media



Synopsis

Benjamin's famous "Work of Art" essay sets out his boldest thoughts on media and on culture in general in their most realized form, while retaining an edge that gets under the skin of everyone who reads it. In this essay the visual arts of the machine age morph into literature and theory and then back again to images, gestures, and thought. This essay, however, is only the beginning of a vast collection of writings that the editors have assembled to demonstrate what was revolutionary about Benjamin's explorations on media. Long before Marshall McLuhan, Benjamin saw that the way a bullet rips into its victim is exactly the way a movie or pop song lodges in the soul. This book contains the second, and most daring, of the four versions of the "Work of Art" essay—the one that addresses the utopian developments of the modern media. The collection tracks Benjamin's observations on the media as they are revealed in essays on the production and reception of art; on film, radio, and photography; and on the modern transformations of literature and painting. The volume contains some of Benjamin's best-known work alongside fascinating, little-known essays—some appearing for the first time in English. In the context of his passionate engagement with questions of aesthetics, the scope of Benjamin's media theory can be fully appreciated.

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Customer Reviews

In wanting to be a great literary critic [Benjamin] discovered that he could only be the last great literary critic. ... He explained certain aspects of the modern with an authority that seventy years of unpredictable change have not vitiated. (Frank Kermode) Walter Benjamin's work, fragmentary and

partly esoteric as it is, fully withstands a comparative measure, and surpasses any of its rivals in philosophic consequences. There has been no more original, no more serious critic and reader in our time. (George Steiner) In recent decades, Benjamin's essay on the work of art may have been quoted more often than any other single source in an astonishing range of areas -- from new-left media theory to cultural studies, from film and art history to visual culture, from the postmodern art scene to debates on the future of art, especially film, in the digital age. The antinomies and ambivalences in Benjamin's thinking, his efforts to explore the most extreme implications of opposing stances, are still invaluable for illuminating the contradictions in today's media environment. Anyone interested in the fate of art, perception, and culture in the industrialized world must welcome this collection of Benjamin's writings on media. (Miriam Hansen) This one-volume gathering of Benjamin's dialectical writing on media of all kinds, ranging from children's literature to cinema, has at its heart the second, most expansive version of his path-breaking essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.' Readers familiar only with partial versions of this piece, where Benjamin began to record the melancholy loss of aesthetic presence at the turn of the twentieth century, will find their understanding transformed-- for this second version, like all the essays and supplemental texts included here, explores a set of latent, utopian possibilities inherent in mechanical means of art-making. Benjamin, the visionary magus of particulars, reveals profoundly, and repeatedly, both the grounds and the consequences of our ever-changing image of the made world. (Susan Stewart) A juicy selection of [Benjamin's] many short pieces on pop culture. (George Fetherling Seven Oaks 2008-04-08) Until recently, Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, was available to English-speaking readers only in the version that appeared in the 1968 collection *Illuminations*. Harvard's new volume of the German cultural critic's writings on media offers as its title-piece an earlier, edgier incarnation--the second of three composed between 1935 and 1939--in a superior translation... Throughout *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, Benjamin's startling, often oblique language reveals his subjects from unexpected angles... This volume amply demonstrates the keenness and ingenuity of Benjamin's intuitions at the dawn of modern media culture. (Ross Benjamin Times Literary Supplement 2008-07-04) Freshly translated (it used to be called "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which, although more lumberingly Teutonic, has the virtue of evoking an image of robot sex) and newly packaged with an assortment of his other "writings on media" in a hipster-friendly paperback, Benjamin's best-known work is...well, as they say on Facebook, it's complicated. Man, is it ever complicated. The essay begins by describing the ways film and photography have changed human perception. Benjamin

argues that because such exact simulacra of reality can be mass-distributed and mass-consumed, we have a new, more distant relationship to authentic reality--and he concludes that these changes in perception clear a path for fascism. Not exactly cheerleadery, then. And while it's easy to be distracted by Benjamin's dusty examples--Chaplin's films and Picasso's paintings--and therefore lulled into thinking he's describing a different world...well, don't be. Substitute blogs and social-networking platforms and Twitter and YouTube and Wikipedia for film and photography, and the nearly century-old essay becomes a relevant, piercing alarm. (Emily Gould Technology Review 2008-09-01)

The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and other Writings on Media reflects Benjamin's most salient thoughts on media and on culture in general in their most realized form, still maintaining an edge under the skin of everyone who reads it. The visual arts morph into literature and theory and then back to images, gestures and thought, Here the editors have situated this essay as the cornerstone of a vast collection of writings that demonstrates what was revolutionary about Benjamin's explorations on media. He was so prescient, and mind you, Virginia, he was alive only until 1940. We are now talking about 2008 and his work is not just timely, but powerful, important, clairvoyant, and necessary. This is the second and most daring version of the 'Work of Art' essay which tracks Benjamin's observations on the production and reception of art; on film, radio, and photography; on the telephone, on children's books, on Charlie Chaplin and so much more. He was not a critic for the 20th century, he was a theoretician for all time. This volume will probably become a text for some classes, but it is an introduction, a force that must be dealt with by anyone interested in culture, in the media, in the arts, to debates on the digital age. He could explore implications of these themes and be so prescient about what we are experiencing today. Oh, if he were alive today, he would tell us about the future, I am sure. This is a must for anyone who wants to be introduced to Benjamin, or one who wants more and more of what he has to say--and this one is thankfully in English. (Umbrella 2008-06-01)

The editors and publisher of this volume deserve credit for organizing its contents thematically rather than chronologically. Such a format encourages readers to approach Benjamin's work discursively, thereby fostering a superior sense of the recurrent ideas, themes, motifs and concepts that Benjamin employed time and again. (Noah Isenberg The Nation 2008-11-03)

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was the author of many works of literary and cultural analysis. Michael W. Jennings is Class of 1900 Professor of Modern Languages at Princeton University. Brigid Doherty is Associate Professor of German and of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University. Thomas Y. Levin is Associate Professor of German at Princeton University.

This compilation of Benjamin's famous--and not so famous--essays is brilliant. The best translations I've seen, and I've read them all. Excellent, intelligent commentary, and clearly presented format. Essential for anyone interested in the granddaddy of post-modernism, the most humane and exciting of the cultural philosophers of the twentieth century.

This is one of the most comprehensive collections of his writings, it really a wonderful book! Anyone interested in contemporary or modern art should have this in their library.

It's o.k., a rehash of old Benjamin stuff with some bits and pieces I haven't seen. Nothing great about the translation though I'm sure it plods accurately along. Jim Ryan

This is the classic text everybody has to read to understand not only the history but the functioning of the contemporary media, too.

A very good collection of essays by Benjamin, and a lot of the stuff he says eerily have been progressively coming to fruition. Specifically his thoughts on art, literature, and even media. This is a useful tool for any philosopher, social critic, or chronicler seeking to understand how a movement can drastically change from one to another, and how sometimes it is necessary, and other times, greedy and corrupt. The translations are excellent, although some of the essays have only this translation, regardless, it is still easy to read and very informative. To educate oneself to history and understand how things came to be, and to understand that history is written by those in power is to understand society better than most, this is the goal, this is what Benjamin seeks to say, and this...is what needs to be understood.

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