Mediation: Short Source Lenses

Art Appreciation · Semester 1

Reading windows:

Read the ten Benjamin sentences December 2 for December 4. The other lenses support class explanations: McLuhan December 2, culture industry/ Greenberg December 21 and Danto December 22. These later writers are not extra required A4 reading. The introductions, glosses and questions are authored course commentary.

Benjamin: source quotations:

Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, second version. Supplied PDF, sections II–IV, actual PDF pages 2, 3 and 5; printed pages 20, 21 and 23. Ten sentences selected from longer sections. Omitted passages are marked; a footnote indicator after the aura definition is omitted. Source spelling is retained.

In principle, the work of art has always been reproducible. Objects made by humans could always be copied by humans. Replicas were made by pupils in practicing for their craft, by masters in disseminating their works, and, finally, by third parties in pursuit of profit. But the technological reproduction of artworks is something new.

[Passage omitted.]

In even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject. This history includes changes to the physical structure of the work over time, together with any changes in ownership.

[Passage omitted.]

What, then, is the aura? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye—while resting on a summer afternoon—a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch.

Benjamin: support:

Reproducibility is the possibility of making copies. **Here and now** concerns the particular object's existence and history. **Aura** is not simply beauty or price; Benjamin connects distance and a particular encounter. His examples extend beyond artworks to a landscape.

Test the passage against a named ukiyo-e impression. Separate the design, blocks, physical sheet and digital image. The design was made for repeated printing, while a particular sheet has its own material condition and ownership history. A digital image can make features available without carrying that sheet's whole history. Ask which claim needs an object record. Do not assume every multiple lacks value or every reproduction destroys meaning.

McLuhan: support:

The original unit uses McLuhan's short formulation, “the medium is the message.” The working idea is that a medium organizes the encounter as well as carrying content. Compare going to a desktop internet connection with constant phone access, or the different rhythms of Vine, TikTok and Reels. These are historical/comparative examples, not a claim that every user has the same attention span. Return to an actually observed Godard choice in viewpoint, sound or stereoscopic space.

Culture industry: source quotation:

Theodor W. Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” English translation by Anson G. Rabinbach, New German Critique 6 (1975), pp. 12–19. Open text.

The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above.

Culture industry: support:

Adorno's later account clarifies a critique developed with Max Horkheimer in the 1940s. Culture is planned, produced and distributed as a commodity. **Standardization** means recurring formulas. **Pseudo-individualization** means differences that suggest personal choice while preserving a repeated structure. Entertainment can extend habits of work and adjustment rather than offer complete independence from them.

Test a repeated formula and a meaningful exception in a specific commercial image system. Ask what is controlled by producers and what viewers can still do. Popularity alone does not establish this critique, and pleasure is not evidence of failure. For an optional A4 route, read the

	opening three paragraphs and the paragraph beginning “The concept of technique” in the open text before December 18, with vocabulary support. This is a choice, not another common assignment.
Greenberg: source quotation:	Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939), Partisan Review VI, no. 5, printed p. 44. Original page. Where Picasso paints cause, Repin paints effect.
Greenberg: support:	Greenberg contrasts an effect recognized readily in a scene with a response developed through attention to form. Use Repin's Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks and Picasso's The Poet to test the claim. They are teacher-selected illustrations, not works named in his hypothetical comparison. **Kitsch** is a disputed account of formula and supplied effects, not a synonym for everything a student dislikes. Explain the claim before judging its fairness.
Danto: source quotation:	Arthur C. Danto, “The Artworld” (1964), The Journal of Philosophy 61, no. 19, p. 581; PDF page 12. Source text. It is the role of artistic theories, these days as always, to make the artworld, and art, possible.
Danto: support:	**Artworld** here means the artistic theories and historical knowledge that make an interpretation possible. A museum's permission alone does not explain the Brillo problem. Distinguish a visible resemblance from what the artwork means within an artistic history. The later **end-of-art** account concerns the end of one necessary narrative of development; artists continue working. **Pluralism** allows different practices and relevant criteria, rather than making all judgments equally convincing.