

“... *THE OPTICAL UNCONSCIOUS*”: ABOUT ART AND TECHNIQUE IN WALTER BENJAMIN'S WRITINGS ON PHOTOGRAPHY

“... O INSCONSCIENTE ÓTICO”: SOBRE ARTE E A TÉCNICA NOS ESCRITOS SOBRE FOTOGRAFIA DE WALTER BENJAMIM

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to claim with Benjamin the importance of photography as a philosophical object. Therefore, this analysis requires the treatment of three basic questions: (1st) why photography constitutes for Benjamin such an essentially new method of reproduction that it cannot be compared to any previous artistic procedure; (2nd) how the very possibility of photography is linked to the recognition of its antagonism with the work of art; and (3rd), in which terms the impact of photography on the worlds of art and politics should be interpreted. With this analysis, we intend to make visible the reasons that still determine its novelty in a century that some are quick to describe as post-photographic.

Keywords: Photography. Art. Walter Benjamin. Optical Unconscious.

Resumo:

O objetivo do presente artigo é reivindicar com Benjamin a importância da fotografia como objeto filosófico. Para tanto, esta análise requer o tratamento de três questões básicas: (1^a) porque a fotografia constitui para Benjamin um método de reprodução tão essencialmente novo que não pode ser comparado a nenhum procedimento artístico anterior; (2^a) de que forma a própria possibilidade da fotografia está ligada ao reconhecimento de seu antagonismo com a obra de arte; e, (3^a), com quais termos o impacto da fotografia nos mundos da arte e da política deve ser interpretado. Pretendemos, com esta análise, tornar visíveis os motivos que ainda determinam sua novidade em um século que alguns se apressam em qualificar de pós-fotográficos.

Palavras-chaves: Fotografia. Arte. Walter Benjamin. Inconsciente ótico.



Introduction

Walter Benjamin's *Kleine geschichte der photographie* (The Little History of Photography) was first published in *Die Literarische Welt* in 1931, preceding by five years his most recognized work *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility). *The Little History of Photography* anticipates some of the concepts he first outlined in this seminal work. Albeit slightly, the hypothesis that, in the 1931 text, Benjamin began, in his terms, critical thinking is assertive. Both texts were later retrieved by theorists of photography and, probably, of the visual arts in general. It was only with Susan Sontag's essay *On photography* that Benjamin, as an art critic, was brought to light again. The ideas and analyzes of the German philosopher that come to us through Sontag are like the reproduction of a painting, but they are not the painting itself, although, to paraphrase Benjamin himself, the reproduction can often be more impressive than the original. “To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed” (SONTAG, 2005, p. 2). To read and, above all, to express Benjamin, is to appropriate his constellational structure of thought to such an extent that, far from just repeating it, in the most rigorous dialectical tradition, it is to surpass it from within (*Aufhebung*).

In the 1930s, cinema, photography, etc., were considered artistically minor phenomena. They were a subculture. Hence the value of the analysis and defense of photography for Benjamin: “for the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual” (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 24). Benjamin, in turn, criticizes the principles of a photographic theory pointing to its rudimentary character. What we find in this 1931 text is the peculiar inversion of a set of very current statements: (1) Benjamin refuses to identify art and photography, to the point of recognizing in this relationship a tension that must be constantly faced; (2) the invention of photography is considered a change that makes history, an event that requires renewing the rupture that the emergence of this medium meant for art. For Benjamin – and this is, in our view, the crucial thesis of the text – the very concept of photography is inseparable from the historical polemic that gave rise to its invention. In fact, the entire history of photography is determined under the sign of that original controversy with art.

The first reproduced human beings entered the viewing space of photography [*Blickraum der Photographie*] with integrity-or rather, without inscription. Newspapers were still a luxury item which people seldom bought, looking at them more often in the coffeehouse; the photographic process had not yet become the tool of the newspaper, and very few human beings had hitherto seen their names in print. The human countenance had a silence about it in which the gaze rested. In short, all the potentialities this art of portraiture rest on the fact that contact between actuality and photo had not yet been established (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 279).

The interest of this dual approach, as well as its frontal opposition to current “post-modern” photography theorists, is precisely the object of our work proposal, whose analysis requires the treatment of three basic questions: (1st) why

photography constitutes for Benjamin a method of reproduction so essentially new that it cannot be compared to any previous artistic procedure; (2nd) how the very possibility of photography is linked to the recognition of its antagonism with the work of art; and, (3rd), in which terms the impact of photography on the worlds of art and politics should be interpreted. The aim of our work here is, above all, to claim with Benjamin the importance of photography as a philosophical object, thus recalling what historians of this medium strive to forget in the sterile debate on the artistic value of photography. *In fine*, we intend to make visible the motifs that still determine its novelty in a century that some are quick to describe as post-photographic.

A look at the *The Little History of Photography*

Benjamin begins his article with a recurring motif in the photographic literature of the 1920s, namely, the comparison between the invention of photography and the press:

The fog that surrounds the beginnings of photography is not quite as thick as that which shrouds the early days of printing; more obviously than in the case of the printing press, perhaps, the time was ripe for the invention, and was sensed by more than one-by men who strove independently for the same objective: to capture the images in the camera obscure, which had been known at least since Leonardo's time (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 274).

Like the press, photography is presented to us as an invention whose time has really come. But Benjamin does not clarify what is in the question of photography comparable to the invention of the printing press, because the imperative of its appearance was, too, evident. The origins of photography, for our author, raise a philosophical question: the presence of an index that links the nature of the photographic procedure to the understanding of its history. They also put us in front of a *medium* whose novelty seemed evident (*the time was ripe for the invention*) and, however, produced a homologous perception to that of *déjà vu*, that is, to the feeling that its historical appearance had occurred much before (*which had been known at least since Leonardo's time*).

First, how to explain the parallelism drawn by Benjamin between photography and the invention of the press? One possible attempt to clarify this relationship is provided by Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Formation of Typographic Man* (1972). In his brilliant analysis of the historical impact of the emergence and development of the press, even though Benjamin's name never appears, McLuhan highlights the importance of technique as a decisive agent in the process of reforming human understanding.

The difference between the man of print and the man of scribal culture is nearly as great as that between the non-literate and the literate. The components of Gutenberg technology were not new. But when brought together in the fifteenth century there was an acceleration of social and personal action tantamount to "take off" in the sense that W. W. Rostow develops this concept in *The Stages of Economic Growth* "that decisive interval in the history of a society when growth becomes its normal

condition” (McLUHAN, 1962, p. 90).

Would it not be the technology of the press that would have inserted man into the literacy process characteristic of modern societies, which would proclaim mechanization applied to knowledge and would confirm and expand the first processes of capitalist mass production? If the understanding of a given period can be found perfectly mediated by a technical invention - and the main merit of the book is to take this axiom to its ultimate consequences - wouldn't something similar have happened in the case of photography? If we look at Benjamin's facsimile, couldn't photographic reproduction be seen as a novelty as decisive as the revolution that allowed the creation of infinite pages with a set of movable types?

Now what happens is something more complex. In Benjamin's view, the emergence of photography brings with it a change that cannot be understood simply in terms of a history of ideas. A change that makes history and profoundly and irreversibly modifies the experience of the world, as it amounts to a true reform of the organ. The stripping of the veil from the object, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose “sense for all that is the same in the world” has so increased that, by means of reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 23-24).

A reproductive procedure like photography, based on the simple mechanical repetition of images, cannot fail to mark our perceptual regime in a radically new way. What it reveals is not a simple image of the world, but something else: the very conversion of the world into an image, its pure reduction to that “sense for all that is the same in the world” so characteristic of what Benjamin describes in other texts such as *Erfahrungsarmut*, i.e., as “poverty of experience”³. And yet photography is not limited to offering a world of mechanically reproducible images. It does not only try to guarantee in the forms of perception a world of merely repeatable objects, of pure identity, because, although they bring with them an impoverishment of visual sensibility, they “are a technique of diminution that helps people to achieve a degree of mastery over works of art-mastery without which the works could no longer be put to use” (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 290).

In other words, Benjamin sees photography as a technique that has the power to reveal details that the human eye cannot show, to make visible other worlds that live in great works, and even to give art a genuinely political dimension. Far from being interpreted in terms of decadence or as a necessarily negative phenomenon, the very impoverishment that photography is responsible for is strictly related to the discovery of all those potentialities related to the work of art.

With the photographic technique, however, art as reproduction came to be thought, with Benjamin, in an entirely different way, no longer as a reproduction of an object or theme, but as a production of the work itself. For him, the key is that photography is intrinsically reproducible. This implied a shake-up in tradition, a break with it, thus launching modernity into another paradigm, according to which what counts is no longer imitating - nature or the great models - or being original, but the fact of there is no longer a single, closed identity of the work, its producer and what it may eventually represent (SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2012, p. 124).

Indeed, the technical improvements that photography introduces in the

reproduction mode in relation to the previous procedures are so indisputable that no one is surprised that a work of art lends itself to being reproduced in a photographic image much better than reality. From this invention come the effects as devastating as those traditionally associated with the emergence of the printed book. Therefore, the Benjaminian *analogon* between photography and printing is far from being a mere rhetorical device. On one hand, it underlines the fundamental idea that photography, like any other technical procedure, is based on a fundamental theoretical category – reproducibility; on the other hand, it introduces the problem of the relationship between art and photography, because, contrary to what is technically reproducible, the work of art presents a different logic, a mode of image production based strictly artisanal process.

However, what is truly interesting about the simile is the way in which both ideas are articulated. About photography, Benjamin suggests that his invention does not arise *ex nihilo*, but rather part of a historical process that must be clarified but is unequivocally related to writing and its technical extensions. As for the work of art, it is evident that it can no longer be analyzed without integrating the issue of reproducibility. Regarding the first point, Benjamin does not hesitate to identify reproducibility and writing. What is remarkable in this thesis is the displacement that operates, the change in perspective that it entails, i.e., there is a visual grammar, completely foreign to the language of art, that we must know if we are to read this new physis presented by photographic images. All of this allows us to relate *Kleine geschichte der photographie* (1931) with other texts by Benjamin that, apparently far from photography, explicitly deal with the concept of writing, for example, *Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen* (1916), *Einbahnstraße* (1928), *Lehre vom Ähnlichen* (1933), *Erfahrung und Armut* (1933) or even *Über das mimetische Vermögen* (1933).

On the other hand, in *The work of art in the time of its technical reproducibility* Benjamin develops the radical novelty of the photographic technique in relation to the artisanal means known until then, including engraving, which has limited reproducibility and whose matrix is made by hand. Not even painting, its historical development, can be understood without this reference to the emergence of photography and, more precisely, to the functioning of a medium that directly leads to the exclusion of the artist's hand. Through a process of plastic reproduction, the hand discharges for the first time the most important artistic concerns that from now on only concern the eye that looks through the lens. Photography represents a novelty in the history of reproductive media, as it represents a decisive break with the tactile. From the moment the photographer delegates his vision to the camera, the image he returns from the world paradoxically becomes a strange look – that look which looks at us perfectly synthesized by Benjamin in an emblematic term: “optical unconscious”. On its own terms:

For it is another nature that speaks to the camera rather than to the eye; “other” above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to one informed by the unconscious. While it is common that, for example, an individual is able to offer an account of the human gait (if only in general terms), that same individual has no knowledge at all of human posture during the fraction of a second when a person begins to take a step. Photography, with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals this posture to him. He first learns of

this *optical unconscious* through photography, just as he learns of the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis. Details of structure, cellular tissue, with which technology and medicine are normally concerned—all this is, in its origins, more closely related to the camera than is the emotionally evocative landscape or the soulful portrait. Yet at the same time photography reveals in this material physiognomic aspects, image worlds, which dwell in the smallest things—meaningful yet covert enough to find a hiding place in waking dreams, but which, enlarged and available for formulation, make the difference between technology and magic visible as a thoroughly historical variable (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 277-279).

Thus, what constitutes the irreducible peculiarity of photography, which makes this technique unique in relation to any previous reproductive procedure, is its ability to present a new reality, to point to what is truly objectifying in the eye. It is in these terms that the clairvoyance of Arago evoked by Benjamin must be understood: "When inventors of a new instrument [...] apply it to the observation of nature, what they expect of it always turns out to be a trifle compared with the succession of subsequent discoveries of which the instrument was the origin" (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 275). Indeed, although the invention of photography responds to the historical development of certain purposes, the artifact as such is prematurely emancipated from the intentions of its inventors, opening a field of possibilities hitherto unpublished. The photographic technique will represent the unfolding of a set of potentialities totally alien to the instrumental nature of the medium. The problem with Arago's prophecy is that it will be incomprehensible to most of his contemporaries, to the point that the true scope of photography, the decisive consequences of its technical innovation, will not be easily assumed by a significant part of the theoretical literature of the nineteenth century. Benjamin says:

And no matter how extensively it may have been debated in the last century, basically the discussion never got away from the ludicrous stereotype which a chauvinistic rag, the *Leipziger Stadtanzeiger*, felt it had to offer in timely opposition to this black art from France. "To try to capture fleeting mirror images", it said, "is not just an impossible undertaking, as has been established after thorough German investigation; the very wish to do such a thing is blasphemous. Man is made in the image of God, and God's image cannot be captured by any machine of human devising. The utmost the artist may venture, borne on the wings of divine inspiration, is to reproduce man's God-given features without the help of any machine, in the moment of highest dedication, at the higher bidding of his genius". Here we have the philistine notion of "art" in all its overweening obtuseness, a stranger to all technical considerations, which feels that its end is nigh with the alarming appearance of the new technology. Nevertheless, it was this fetishistic and fundamentally antitechnological concept of art with which the theoreticians of photography sought to grapple for almost a hundred years, naturally without the smallest success (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 275).

The debates to which Benjamin refers appeal to the essentially technical dimension of photography, to a reproductive model whose mechanical character constitutes a real threat to the work of art. For the first time in a long time, the sacred

precinct of art, a temple that has happily survived since its construction in the Renaissance, with its back to any of the later technical-scientific advances, is desecrated by the new empire of photography. In the 19th century, the camera was seen as a machine capable of petrifying everything with the gaze, as if it were a device so faithful to reality that it could eradicate the possibility of mimetic art. It matters little that the realism of the photographic image is interpreted as the closest thing to the death of art (Hegel). Benjamin recalls that the historical development of this dispute presents a moment as decisive as it is ironic: at the beginning of the period of industrialization of photography in 1860, the same procedure that had called into question the foundations of the work of art is now forced to be justified "the very tribunal he was in the process of overturning" (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 275).

Benjamin highlights the aesthetic concern of the commercial photographers of the time, the photographic industry's obsession with making this medium a mimetic art, the artificial recreation of the aura of the original photographs. Dichromated gum, oil, printing on bromelain and carbonyl, printing on platinum paper, or platinotype, etc., are certainly some of the procedures in charge of erasing any distance between photographic and pictorial images. So much so that the oldest rules of painting are transformed into photographic law. Thus, photography from 1860, far from representing a threat to art, will constitute one of its main means of expression. From that moment on, photography that is intended to be considered as art should be used artistically, that is, to remove its mechanical character from photography.

It is in this scenario that the philosophical dilemma of the *Little History of Photography* is built. The dilemma posed by Benjamin to twentieth-century readers is clear, namely: either they start to value the historical novelty that photography represents, that is, its reproducibility and its impact on the work of art, or they condemn this technical medium to submit to in an entirely new and unfair way for the court of painting, with the consequent suturing of the old gap between art and photography. The first option means rethinking the terms of the debate. Thus, the decisive question cannot remain whether photography is an art or not. What must be judged, according to Benjamin, is whether art can be made with photography, or not. The second option places us, on the contrary, in a scenario in which art and photography intend to coexist as if there were no tension between them. The objective of *The Little History of Photography* is precisely to broaden the historical horizon, so that the reader can clearly see the consequences that this technical innovation represents in the field of reproduction. Photography must become the new court from which to judge the very possibility of art from now on.

Nowadays we have the internet and social networks that present this same phenomenon that was presented by the function that photography represented in the mid-century. XX. The question that opens is the following: did the phenomenon of social networks bring a new look at our conception of image or art in photography? In other words, would social networks, as a technical innovation, be a new court where we could judge another new form of possibility of art?

Art and Photography: A Historical Disagreement

When Benjamin published *Little History of Photography*, several works, most of them illustrated, about his beginnings and his first teachers were also on the

scene. We are facing a movement to rediscover history and reassess the pioneers of photography. All the protagonists of photographic literature at the time, from the defenders of the *Neues Sehen* (New Vision) to the supporters of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), did not hesitate to live this moment as a return to the purest origins of photography. The new medium would have been born perfect and the first years of the daguerreotype, the calotype or collodion, until then despised as a period of strictly technical experimentation, now appearing as a kind of photography's golden age. The qualities praised in these original images become the essence of a medium for which an unmistakable artistic condition is recognized. However, the Benjaminian reading of this golden period could not be more opposite. What does Benjamin highlight about the beginnings of photography? The answer seems to lie in the calotypes of New Haven fishermen, made by English portraitists Robert Adamson and David Octavius Hill, between the years 1843 and 1848:

With photography, however, we encounter something new and strange: in Hill's Newhaven fishwife, her eyes cast down in slick indolent, seductive modesty, there remains something that goes beyond testimony to the photographer's art, something that cannot be silenced, that fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in "art" (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 276).

Benjamin reveals that the basic difference between early photographs and artistic images is the emergence of a different temporality: Hill's calotypes are outside the *continuum* and empty time, completely alien to his current record, so that they constitute his *hic et nunc*. This peculiar relationship with time forces us to ask the name of the person portrayed, induces the viewer to respect their identity, fixed in that particular and unrepeatable photographic moment that, despite not existing, remains. It is a search that exorcises the art of portraiture, as *never consent to be wholly absorbed in "art"*. Consequently, what we can see with Hill's calotypes is a completely new phenomenon: something unique and unrepeatable refuses to disappear in the image and that mysterious component of the photograph makes the represented figures, despite their anonymity, invoke the presence of a Name.

Benjamin also points out that the first images are printed with a time stamp (*Die Gestaltung des Zeitmomentes*) that cannot fully enter the art world. In fact, in photographic reproduction, the peculiar textures, the hand strokes, the traces of handcrafted tools, the signs of the passage of time are conveniently hidden, and it is because of this concealment that everything seems to indicate in the first images the emergence of a new temporality, completely irreducible to the work of art. As Benjamin points out, what gives photography that magical value that painting lacks is that "a photographer of 1850 was on a par with his instrument" (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 281). In the first decade of photography, "in this early period subject and technique were as exactly congruent as they became incongruent in the period of decline that immediately followed" (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 266), that is, the first photographers are still aware of the demands of the new reproductive medium and are ready to let it work, such as its logic or its protohistory allows it. Acting in this way, they do not ignore the specificity of the environment, or the potentialities derived from its development. Quite the contrary: the pioneers of photography were quick to decree the possible incompatibility of this medium with art.

In his interpretation of the photography of his contemporaries, Benjamin again highlights this fundamental principle: "what is again and again decisive for photography is the photographer's attitude to his techniques" (BENJAMIN, 2008, p. 283). Without going any further, what determines the virtuosity of a Sander is the ability to live up to the violent coercion imposed by the environment. Benjamin understands the photographer's technical prowess in a similar sense to Adorno's, as an ability to abandon oneself to the thing, to subject oneself to the immanent logic of matter; or, to put it another way, as your ability to let things write themselves. Although the photographic avant-garde is certainly far removed from the ingenuity of the first photographers, what is essential in authors like Sander lies in the still pure character of their observation.

Benjamin celebrates the simplicity of a photograph that, apart from the artistic experiments of the *Neues Sehen* movement, still allows for a teaching: a delicate experience that is intimately identified with the object and thus becomes a true theory. On the surface of the faces photographed by Sander, Benjamin notices the result of a precise writing. Here, as in the first photos, a temporary impression is still observed, but now the mark is printed in repeated gestures or expressions, due to circumstances or habits that make up a certain social reality, the attitudes of a time imposed by class or profession. Sander's entire project is based on this physiognomy of the acquired in which the physical marks become as univocal and legible as the social body that produced them. Benjamin does not hesitate to attribute a political meaning to this physiognomic gallery. Sander's photographs would constitute a comparative *atlas* capable of offering us something more than a simple portrait of the German people: they would put in writing what a certain historical moment was forced to repress.

Far from praising the photographer's artistic gifts for capturing the models most significant moment and expression, Benjamin highlights Sander's ability to take his hands off the camera and surrender to the instrument's logic. The fundamental dimension of the photographic gesture is not to make the deep psychology of the person portrayed palpable, but to enable the emergence of a radical strangeness which is intimately identified with the object. Faced with the expressive force of the medium, Benjamin bets precisely on the necessary evacuation of all subjective intention. It is, at bottom, the same attitude that Atget adopts in front of the camera: as in Sander, there is an attempt not to put oneself above not the instrument, to allow a type of writing that, like the pioneers of photography, has the virtue of breaking out as if it were pure nature. So much so that if something seems to oppose the radical novelty of the photographic medium in Benjamin, it's the pretension of submitting this instrument to the subject's will. This intrusion assimilates photography to art, transforms the photographer's performance into pure creativity.

Benjamin recognizes that the photographer raising the banner of creativity expands the object's vision to the point of excluding any political, scientific, or physiognomic interest. Once the camera is no longer conceived as a research and analysis tool, its function can only be reduced to a simple technique of beautifying reality. *Die Welt ist schön* is the terrible toll that, according to Benjamin, photography is forced to pay to soften the effects of its old controversy with art. From there, there is a risk that its radical novelty – its physiognomic, political, or scientific value – will finally be annihilated in the pantheon of a history that does not belong to it. Only

then is it possible to see on his face the signs of premature aging – those that derive precisely from the submission of photography to the fashion imperative. Benjamin knows that the only way to avoid this threat is to rewrite a history of photography in which the artwork is forced to face the problem of its inauthenticity.

Conclusion

Today, at the time of its technical obsolescence, we could ask ourselves what is still alive in photography, what a reading like Benjamin's means for our present. However, *Little History of Photography* inverts this perspective and invites us, rather, to ask ourselves what our hyper-technological present means in Benjamin's eyes. Insofar as the text recognizes in photography a truly unprecedented potential for reproducibility, it shows us in modernity the abysses of an anthropological mutation – that reform of the basic infrastructure of our experience – in which we are still immersed. As the bases for a radical antagonism between art and photography are established, it is a sine qua non that we rethink the status of the artwork in the era of hyper-reproducibility of digital media. Insofar as the refusal to understand the history of photography as a history of media, technical progress, the question of photography's innovation continues to challenge us with more force than ever.

Such an assertion contrasts sharply with the vehement refusal of post-photography theorists to consider both the peculiar historicity of this invention and the extent of its radical antagonism to the work of art. On the contrary, his purely instrumental conception of technique – the iron conviction that technology is limited to conditioning expressive horizons – seems to renew, to unacceptable extremes, the old identification of photography with an artistic medium. On the other hand, its superficial analysis of new social practices, its own predisposition to embrace the multiple uses those digital images offer and its processing by computer, seem to relegate the status of photography to the level of a simple appendix in the new world of hypermedia: they lead us inexorably to the end of its own story, as well as its possibilities as a mean.

So, if it makes sense to turn to Benjamin, it is certainly not an attempt to preserve the still-distant aura of old photographs from the 20th century. *Kleine Geschichte* gives us a kind of comparative polarity from which we can broaden the scope of our perspective. First, it reminds us that photography does not only imply a radical historical change in the mode of perception, but also a problematization of the meaning and function of the work of art. Secondly, since it was accepted that photography presents itself as a questioning of art, where even its very possibility of living or surviving is put into play, it shows us how, conversely, the photographic risks aging when it becomes something equivalent to ancient art – which Benjamin identifies with the intrusion of creativity and subjection to fashion. Finally, he reveals to us the scriptural dimension of photography, that is, if the painter kept the drawing machine in his device, the body's contact with light, photography strips his procedure of all authenticity, of all forms of subjective interference. In short, it has an exceptional ally which is the easiness of its technique, that is, its reproducibility. Furthermore, a history of photography at the height of its radical innovations must demand a history of the reproducibility of technical means. This will happen in 1935, when Benjamin finishes writing one of the most influential and determining

philosophical texts of the 20th century: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*.

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³ See BENJAMIN, Walter. *Selected Writings: volume 2: 1927-1934*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 731-736.

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