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Benjamin's Challenge: If art is no longer the same after film, then what about history?

Abstract:

If one had to sum up Benjamin's art work essay in 25 words or less, one possible reading would be this: The question is not whether film can be an art, the question is what art is if and when there is film. For Benjamin, film is the paradigm of technical reproduction. As such, it renders traditional notions of art obsolete. But if art is no longer the same once the technology of film redefines the status and experience of the work of art, then what about history? How does the emergence of film around 1900 affect established notions of history, historiography and historical experience? Siegfried Kracauer first addressed this question in his essay on photography and returned to it in his last, ultimately unfinished book about history and historiography. Picking up where Kracauer left off and boldly going where Benjamin did not dare, or care, to go, this paper explores, or at least proposes to begin to explore, how the emergence of the technical medium of film impacts on, and affects, established notions of history, historiography and historical experience in the 20th century.

CV:

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