



The Slide Lecture, or the Work of Art "History" in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Robert S. Nelson

PDF PDF PLUS



The Slide Lecture, or The Work of Art *History* in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Robert S. Nelson

Around 1900 technical reproduction had reached a standard that . . . permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public. . . . Nothing is more revealing than the nature of the repercussions that these two different manifestations—the reproduction of works of art and the art of the film—have had on art [history] in its traditional form.

—WALTER BENJAMIN, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

For a bit more than a century, teaching and lecturing about art has relied on photographic slides, but what is commonplace today is about to be digitalized into oblivion. New computer technologies will make classrooms "smart" and more efficient and will greatly extend access to the visual for the audiences of well-equipped and well-endowed universities and museums. In the nineteenth century when photography moved beyond the domain of science, the consequences were similar. Processes evolved quickly and in so many directions that for some time it was not

The first version of this essay was given as the keynote address for the Humanities Open House at the University of Chicago in October 1998. My thanks go to my audience on that day, especially Wayne Booth, and to W. J. T. Mitchell, Joel Snyder, and particularly Margaret Olin, who read subsequent drafts, and to my colleagues Yuri Tsivian, Tom Gunning, and Reinhold Heller for useful discussions.

Critical Inquiry 26 (Spring 2000)
© 2000 by The University of Chicago. 0093-1896/00/2603-0009\$02.00. All rights reserved.



Critical Inquiry
Volume 26, Number 3
Spring, 2000

Article DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1086/448973>

Permissions

[Request permissions](#)

Views: 140

Total views on this site

Citations: 49

Citations are reported from Crossref

Copyright 2000 The University of Chicago

PDF download