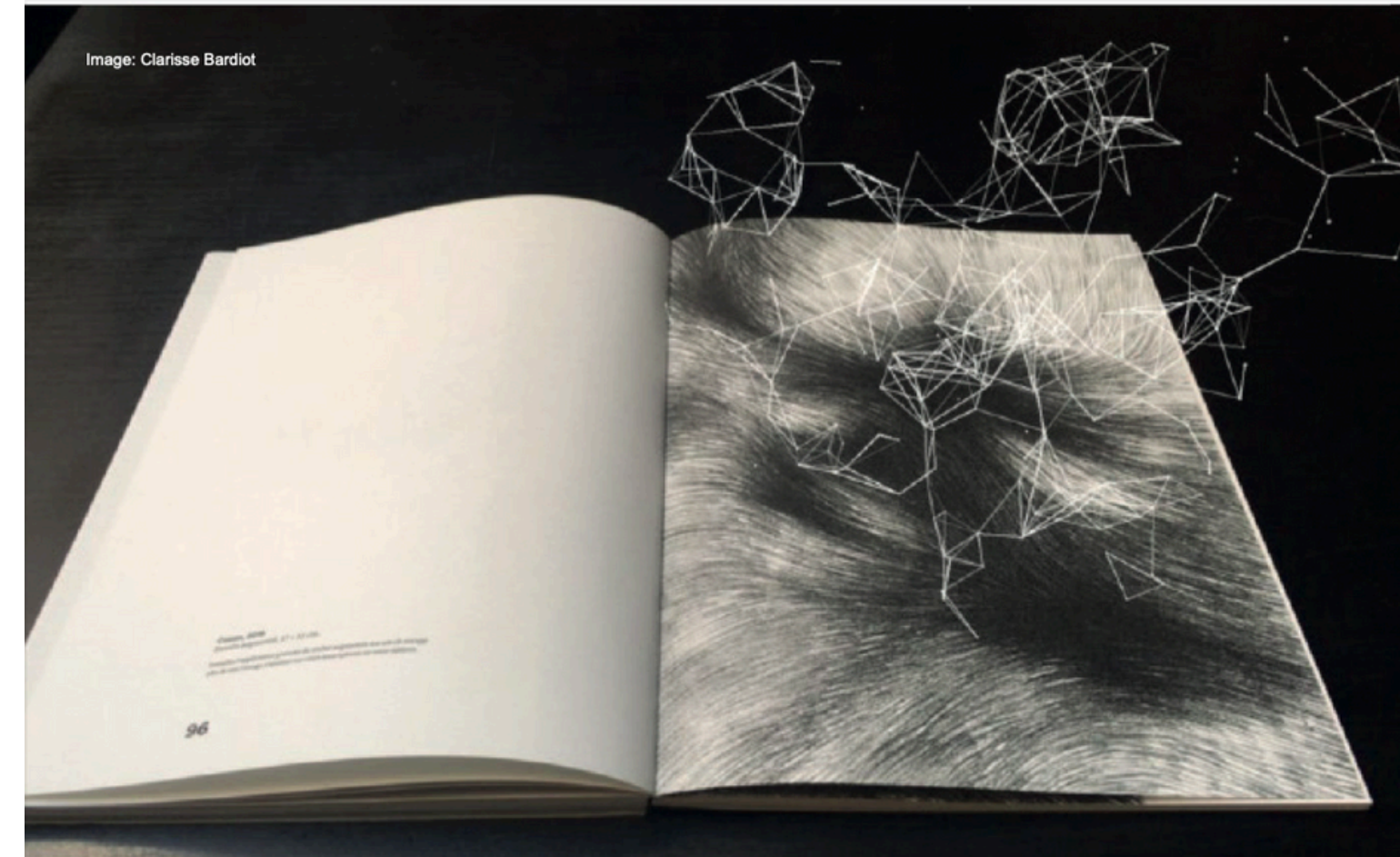


# Project 1: Publishing Forms



## Project 01

Publishing Forms

Design Lab ARTD6116

Launch: Week 1 30/01/25

Crits: Week 5 24/02/25

*"Once the book becomes electronic or hybrid, the permanence, immutability and stability typical of physical books is likely to mutate into dynamic, modular, and participative forms."*

– Digital Publishing Toolkit Collective, From Print to Ebooks:  
A Hybrid Publishing Toolkit for the Arts, 2014

### The brief

How might we re-imagine content beyond a static page?

Using the given text, create a published object that amplifies the content in new and exciting ways. This project explores different approaches to organizing, designing, and distributing information in a published form, online and offline.

### Overview

Today, "making [information] public" is not a fixed activity but something that can be hybrid and connected, offline and online. We share content through interactive channels that can communicate beyond the page. But is this activity lost within the noise of modern communication? What are the actual benefits of the digitization of content? Do some forms of content still work better on paper? Are we genuinely utilizing the full potential of digital formats?

We would like you to reflect on the book as an interactive object and an object of communication; books — novels, dictionaries, catalogues, instruction books, recipe books, travel guides, picture

# The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Walter Benjamin

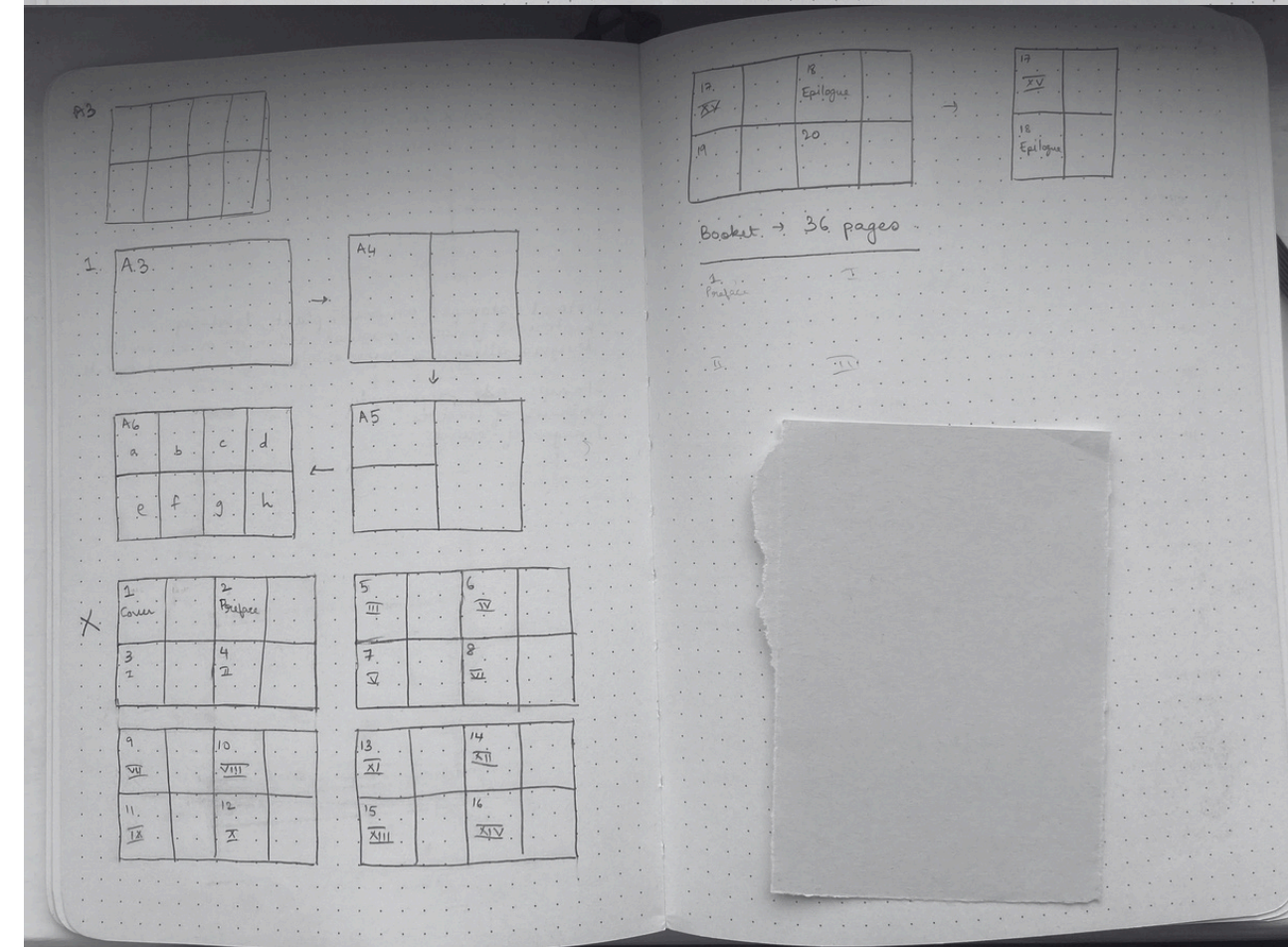
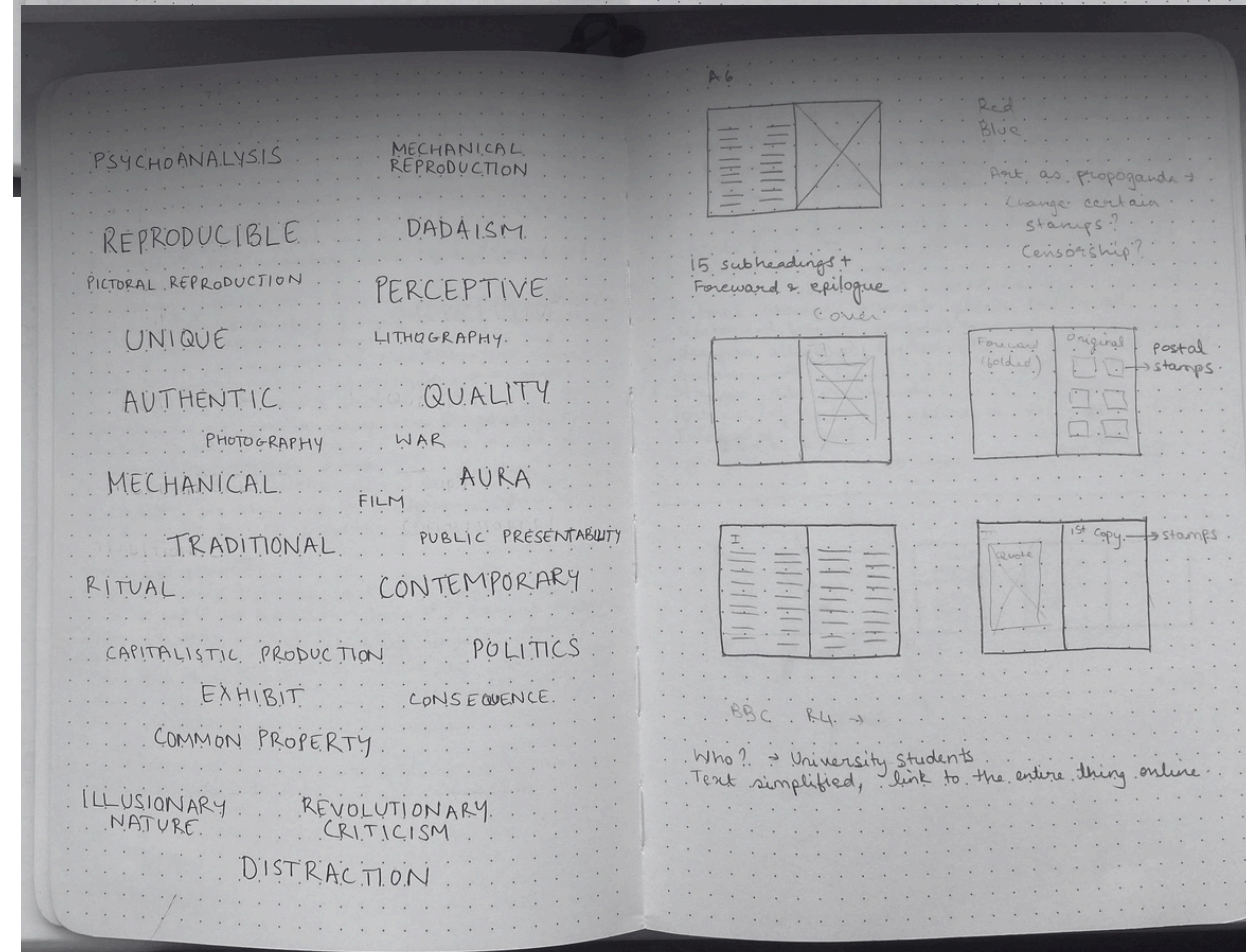
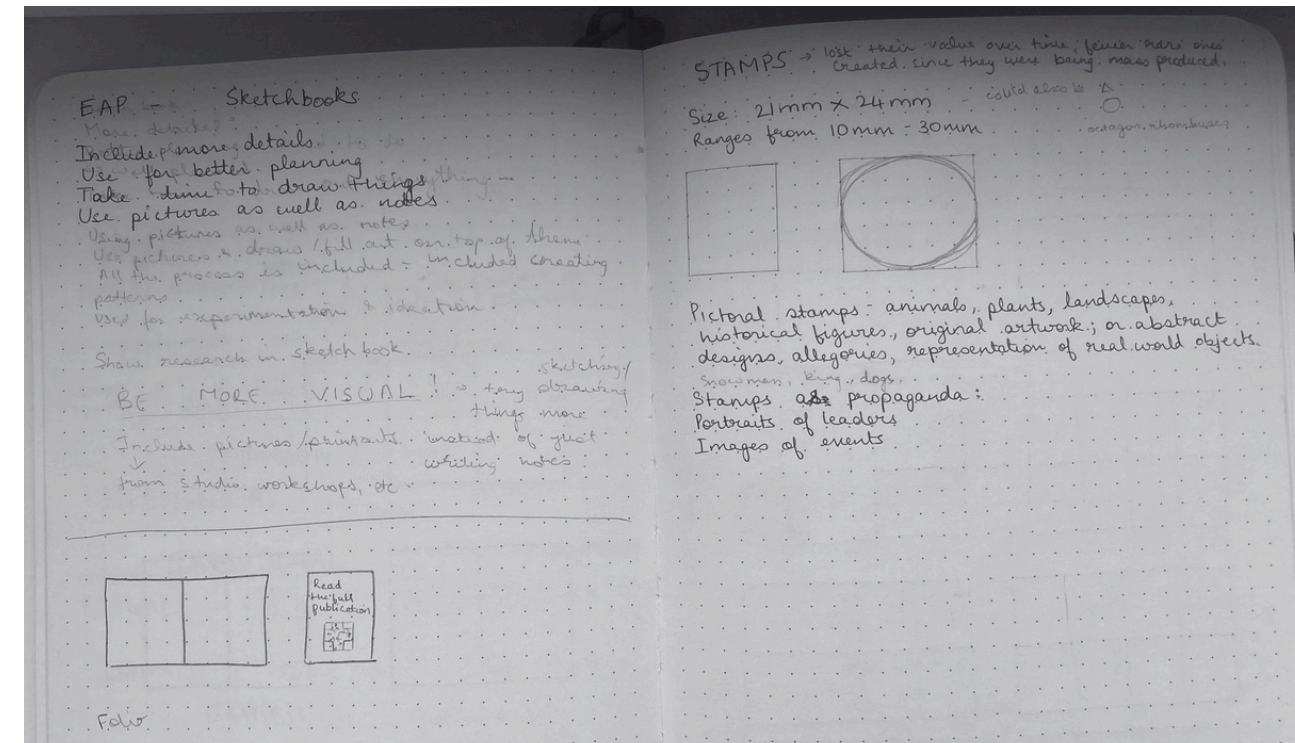
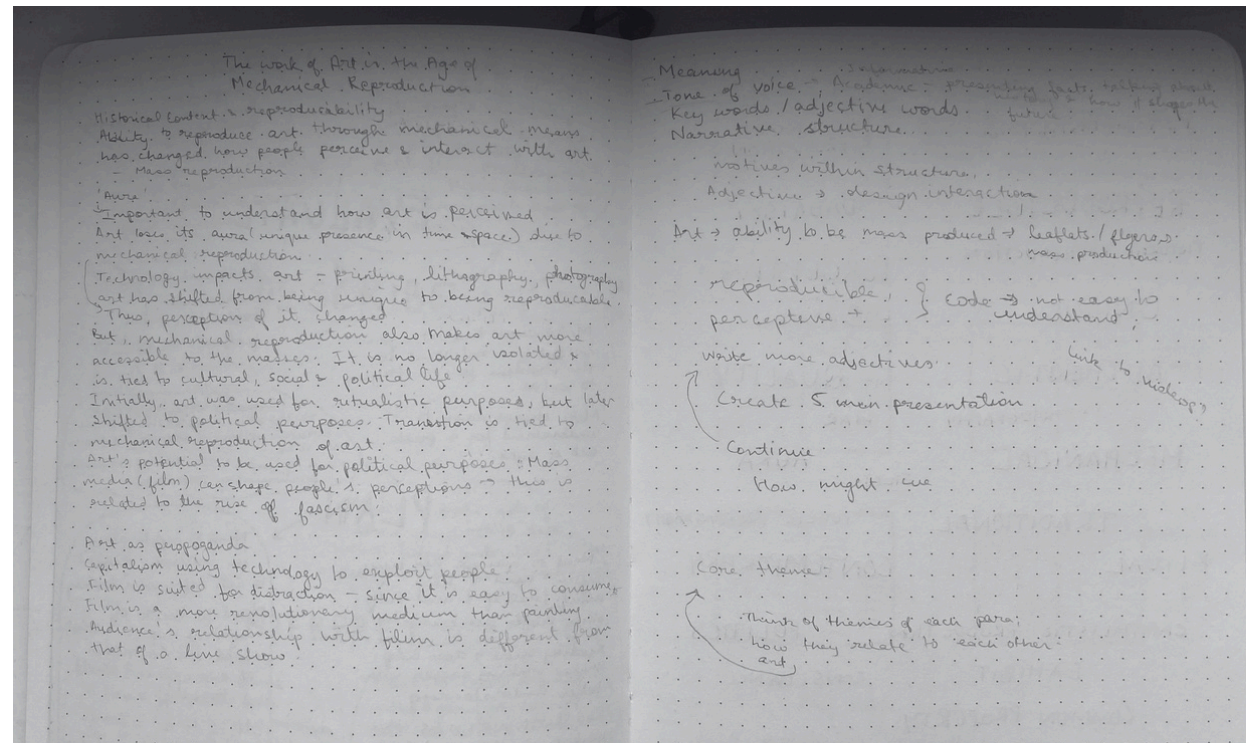
For this project, I was assigned Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and asked to recreate its content in a format other than that of a regular essay. I did this by making a physical and a digital version.

The physical version consisted of extracting and separating specific passages from each section (preface-epilogue) of the essay and putting them on separate pages. For instance, the Preface on page one, Section 1 on page three, and so forth. On the even-numbered pages, I used an image of postage stamps intended to be from several countries. These stamps, as artwork, were utilised to demonstrate Benjamin's concept of the "aura" of original works of art being lost via mechanical reproduction. Throughout the pages, the stamp images progressively deteriorated in quality, with noise and stains appearing. To further the observation of the use of artwork for propaganda, I altered two of the following stamp designs superimposing more traditional-appearing stamps as if they were stuck over the originals, symbolising ideological revision or manipulation.

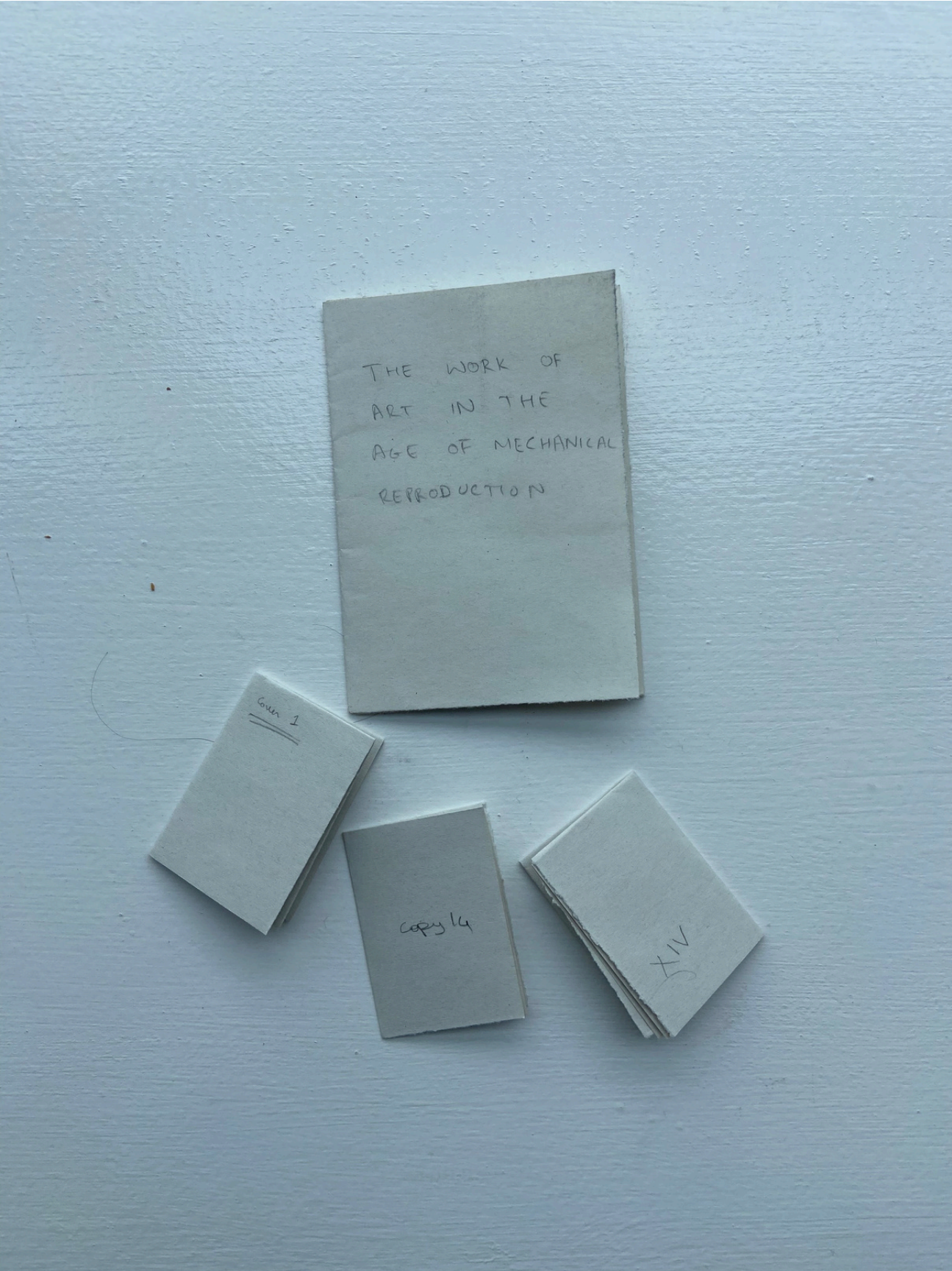
For the online version, I reproduced the full text of Benjamin's essay instead of using excerpts. I started with the same stamp image in its original format. Instead of a slow deterioration, I added AI-generated images to symbolize the mechanical reproduction theme in the digital technology era. The AI art was a visual metaphor for Benjamin's thesis: though machines (and now AI) can reproduce or create images, they lack the intangible "aura" of original human-made artwork. There were subtle clues in the AI-created images that were intended to suggest their artificial nature, reinforcing the fact that machine processes, no matter how sophisticated, continue to miss the essence of human art pieces.



# Experimentation/Idea development:

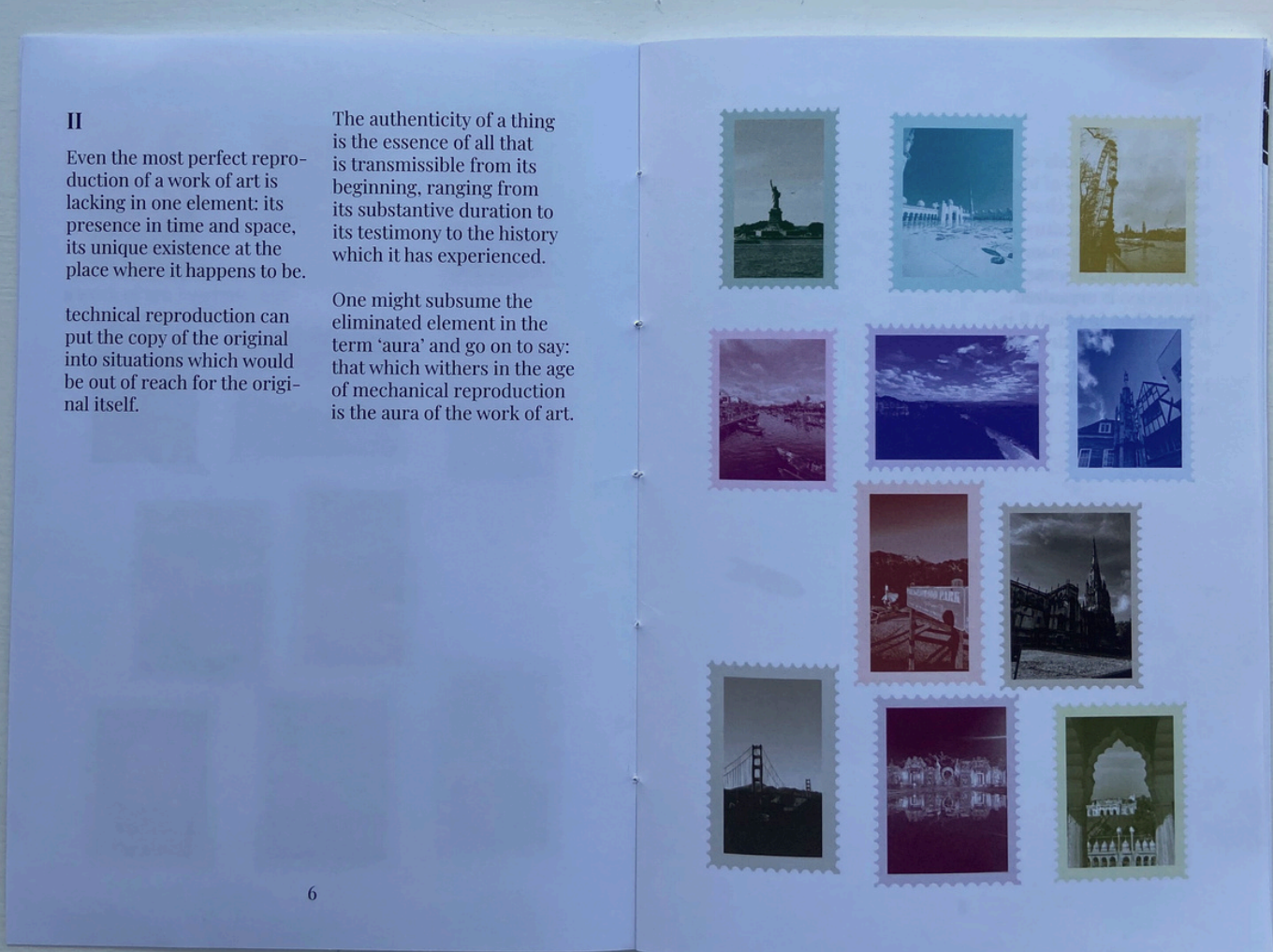
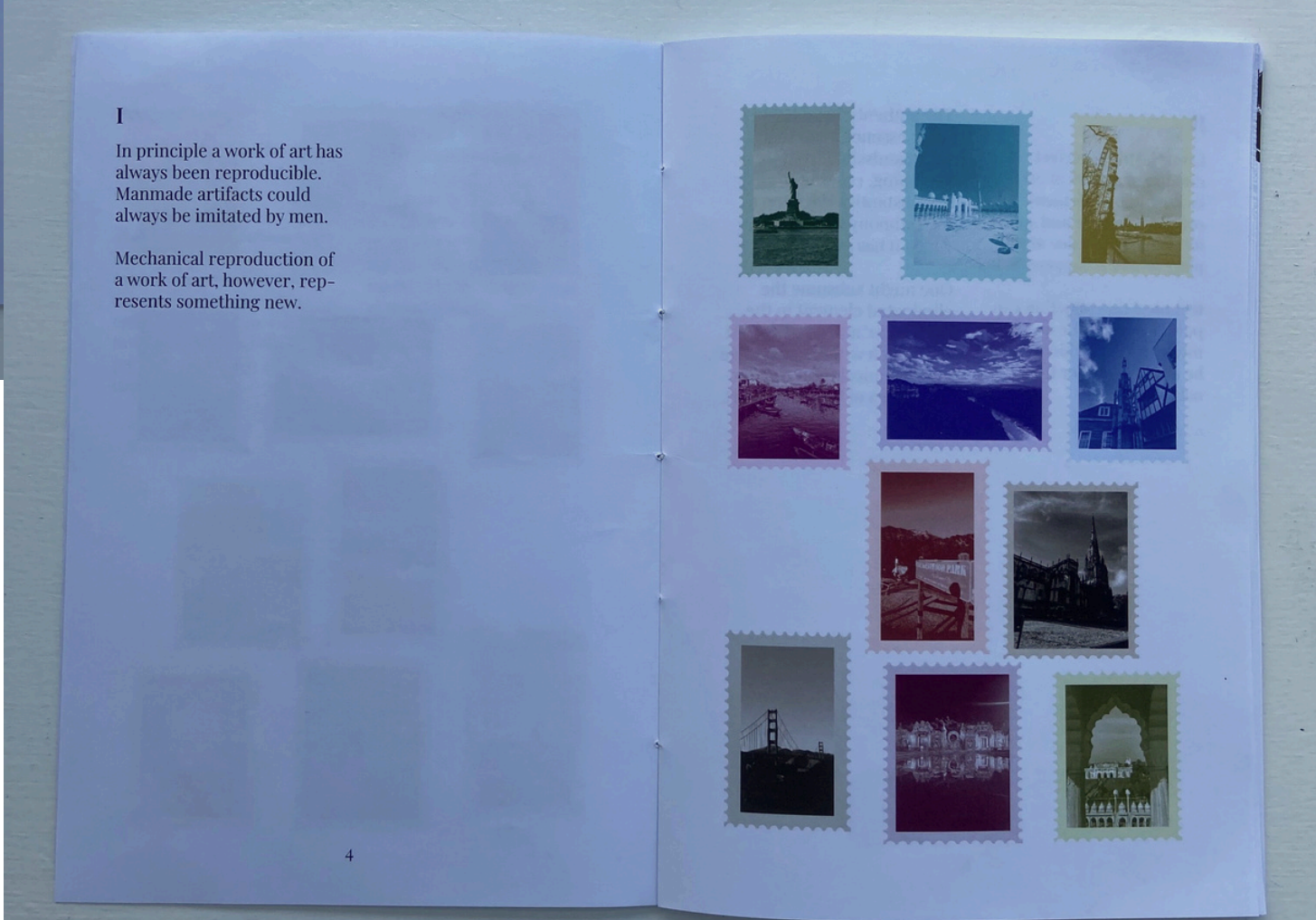
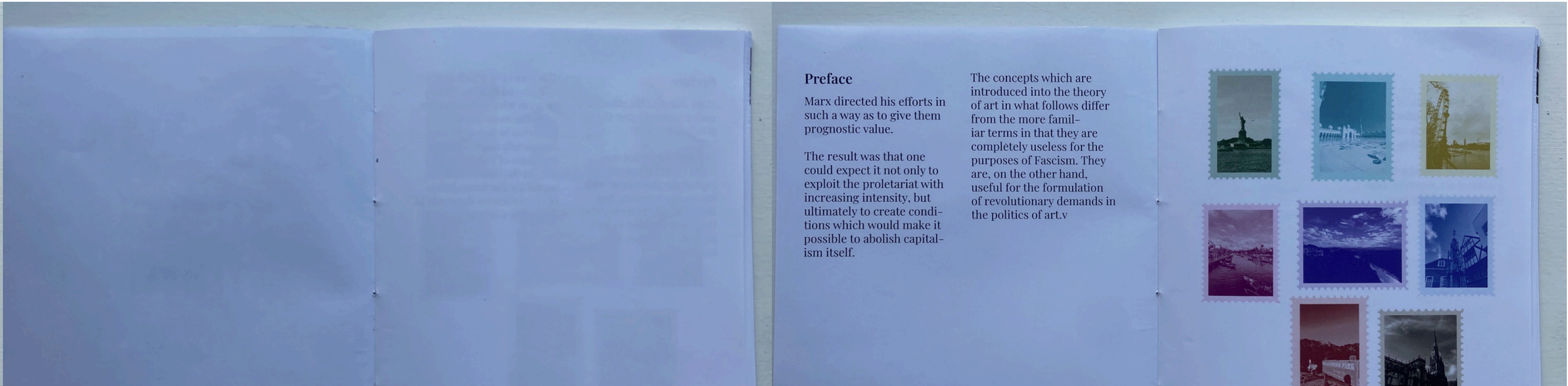
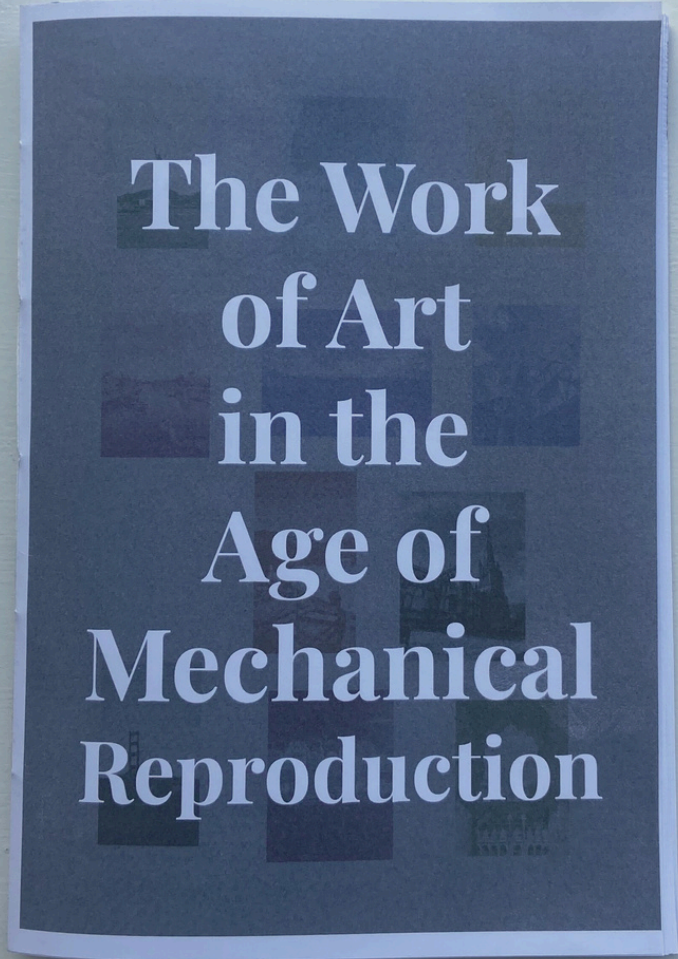








# Physical Version:





### III

During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.

8



### IV

The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol.

10



### V

With the different methods of technical reproduction of a work of art, its fitness for exhibition increased to such an extent that the quantitative shift between its two poles turned into a qualitative transformation of its nature.

This is comparable to the situation of the work of art in prehistoric times when, by the absolute emphasis on its cult value, it was, first and foremost, an instrument of magic. Only later did it come to be recognized as a work of art. In the same way today, by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental.<sup>9</sup> This much is certain: today photography and the film are the most serviceable exemplifications of this new function.

12



### VI

In photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line. But cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance.

photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance.

14





## VII

The nineteenth-century dispute as to the artistic value of painting versus photography today seems devious and confused. This does not diminish its importance, however; if anything, it underlines it. The dispute was in fact the symptom of a historical transformation the universal impact of which was not realized by either of the rivals. When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever.

The primary question – whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art – was not raised.

16



## VIII

The artistic performance of a stage actor is definitely presented to the public by the actor in person; that of the screen actor, however, is presented by a camera, with a twofold consequence.

Guided by the cameraman, the camera continually changes its position with respect to the performance.

Also, the film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience during his performance, since he does not present his performance to the audience in person.

the audience takes the position of the camera;

18



## IX

For the film, what matters primarily is that the actor represents himself to the public before the camera, rather than representing someone else.

The film actor,' wrote Pirandello, 'feels as if in exile – exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice, and the noises caused by his moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence ... The projector will play with his shadow before the public, and he himself must be content to play before the camera.

For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it.

Nothing more strikingly shows that art has left the realm of the 'beautiful semblance' which, so far, had been taken to be the only sphere where art could thrive.

20



## X

The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, as Pirandello describes it, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror.

While facing the camera he knows that ultimately he will face the public, the consumers who constitute the market.

Under these circumstances the film industry is trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations.

22





## XI

In the theatre one is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusory. There is no such place for the movie scene that is being shot. Its illusory nature is that of the second degree, the result of cutting. That is to say, in the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with other similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology.

24

There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law.



## XII

Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art.

The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion.

26

The change that has come about is an expression of the particular conflict in which painting was implicated by the mechanical reproducibility of paintings. Although paintings began to be publicly exhibited in galleries and salons, there was no way for the masses to organize and control themselves in their reception.



## XIII

This circumstance derives its chief importance from its tendency to promote the mutual penetration of art and science.

28



## XIV

Dadaism attempted to create by pictorial – and literary – means the effects which the public today seeks in the film.

In the decline of middle-class society, contemplation became a school for asocial behaviour; it was countered by distraction as a variant of social conduct.<sup>18</sup> Dadaistic activities actually assured a rather vehement distraction by making works of art the centre of scandal.

30





## XV

the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration from the spectator.

Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise.

32



## Epilogue

The destructiveness of war furnishes proof that society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society. The horrible features of imperialistic warfare are attributable to the discrepancy between the tremendous means of production and their inadequate utilization in the process of production – in other words, to unemployment and the lack of markets.

34



35



Scan to read the full essay

36

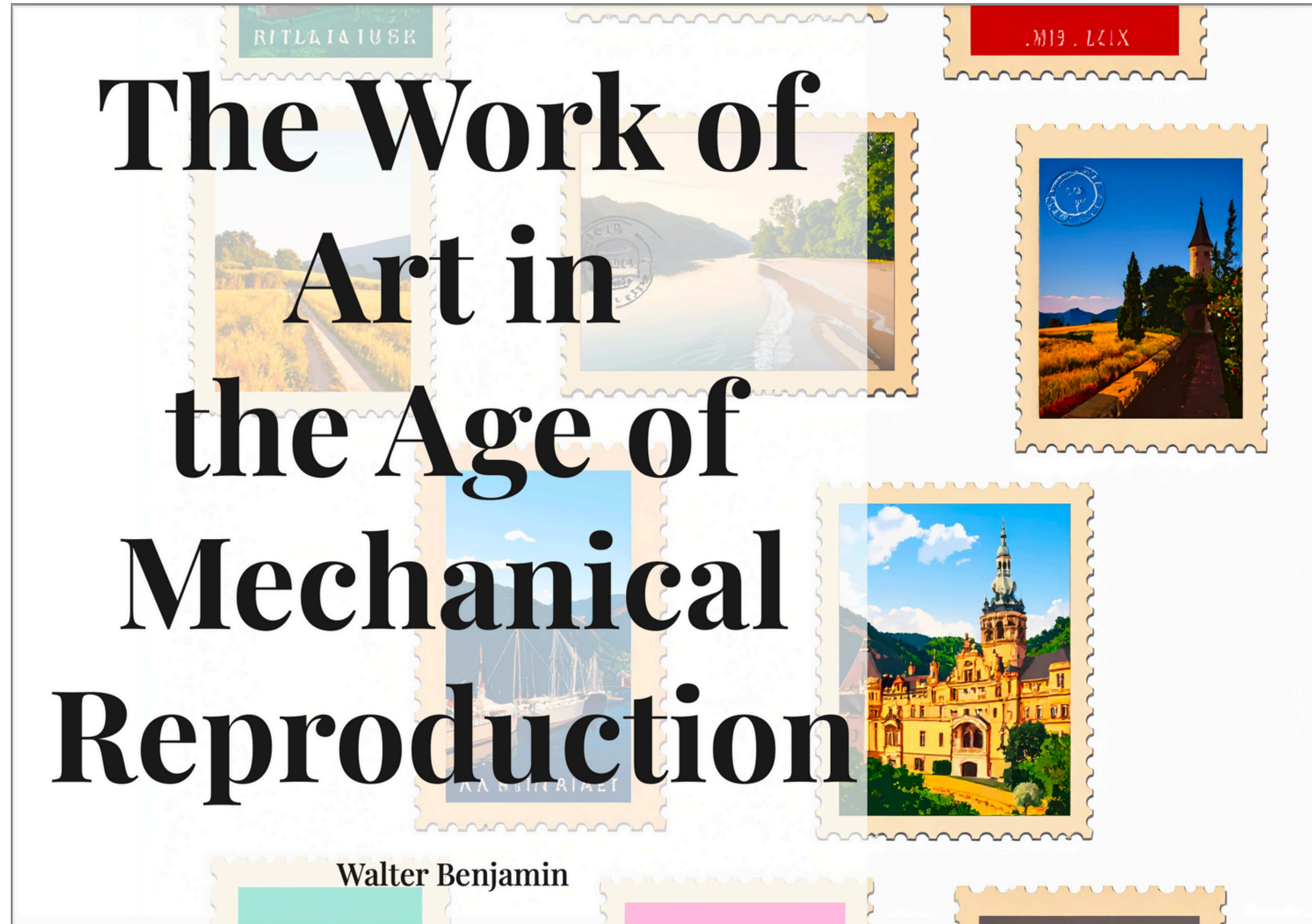


**Digital version:**

[Click to view](#)

# The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Walter Benjamin





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