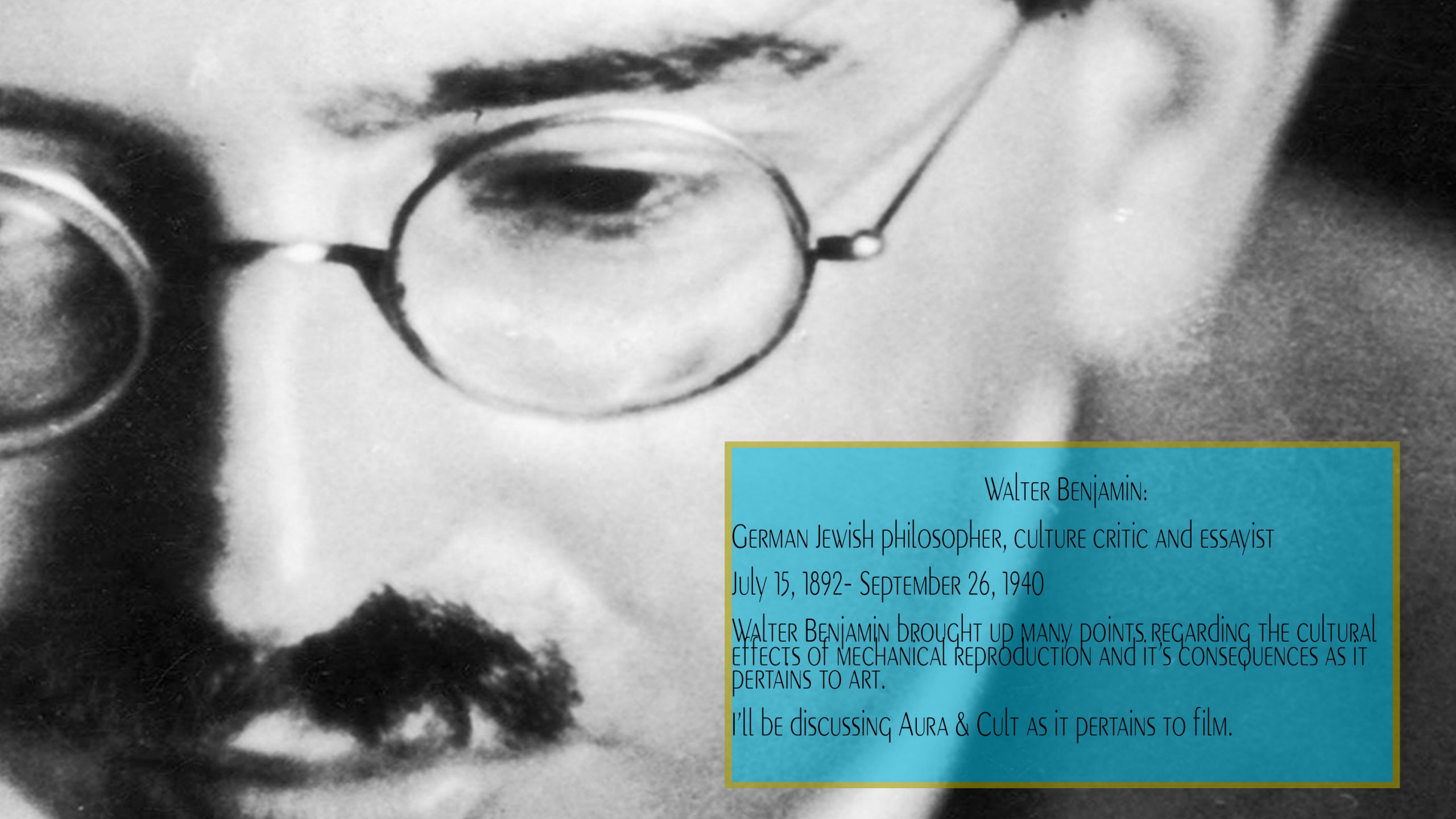




WALTER BENJAMIN: AURA, CULT & FILM

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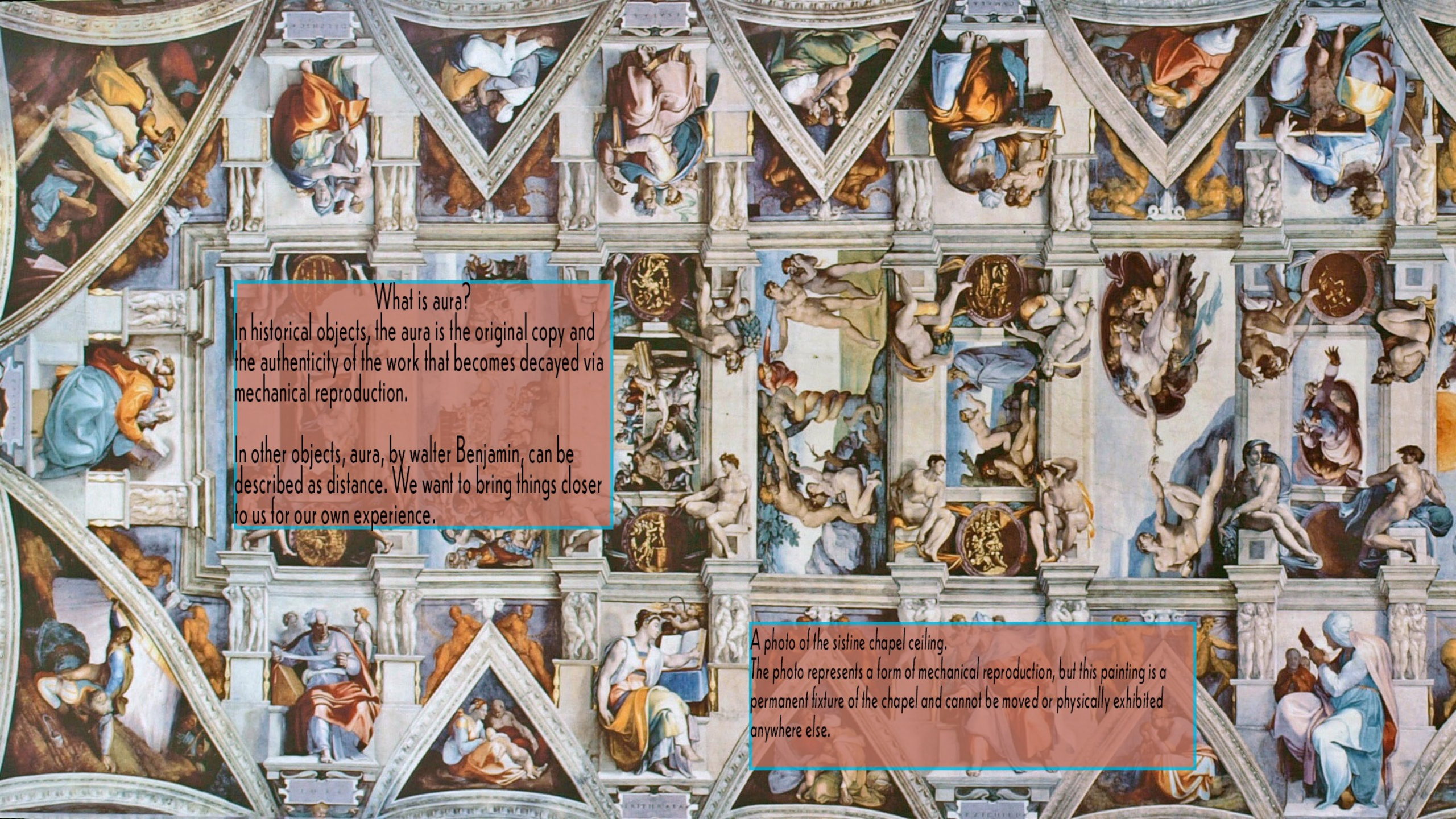
WALTER BENJAMIN:

GERMAN JEWISH philosopher, CULTURE CRITIC AND ESSAYIST

JULY 15, 1892- SEPTEMBER 26, 1940

WALTER BENJAMIN BROUGHT UP MANY POINTS REGARDING THE CULTURAL EFFECTS OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES AS IT PERTAINS TO ART.

I'LL BE DISCUSSING AURA & CULT AS IT PERTAINS TO FILM.



What is aura?

In historical objects, the aura is the original copy and the authenticity of the work that becomes decayed via mechanical reproduction.

In other objects, aura, by Walter Benjamin, can be described as distance. We want to bring things closer to us for our own experience.

A photo of the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

The photo represents a form of mechanical reproduction, but this painting is a permanent fixture of the chapel and cannot be moved or physically exhibited anywhere else.

Cult Vs. Exhibition

Cult is a value of art that is meant to stay hidden and sacred.

Cult works of art were constructed for a time and place as well as specific people.

Exhibition is a product of mechanical reproduction and allows for various pieces of art to be on display at multiple places at any given time.

Three separate statues of "Mercure rattachant..." by François Rude. Art loses cult value once reproduced.



Aura & Cult On-stage

Stage plays can easily retain their cult value given that each night presents opportunity for changes and an authenticity. The actors also have the ability to adjust their performances to the audience.

This logic also applies to how plays maintain their aura. They present a physical distance (Broadway/Theatre district). Even if the plays travel, adjustments are made that make the performances authentic to the occasion/location and audience and cast energy is different.

"What made *The Wiz* surprisingly moving the first time around was that its creators found a connection... and the pride of urban black Americans.... It had something to say and it said it with verve and integrity." - Frank Rich



Aura on Stage

Was the aura of Hamilton diminished by being more accessible? Is it not the same play/art form?

Hamilton on Stage vs. On-Screen: Hamilton on stage possessed an aura due to it bearing a physical distance, only being available in 1 location for months.

It was recently released for streaming, breaking the distance and making it available to a wider audience.



When applied to historical films, aura is destroyed because the traditions of cultures are on display. With mechanical reproductions of these movies, the traditions are permanently exposed.

Cher & Bo Derek appropriating different cultures for artistic purposes.

Bo Derek has been called one of the first women to popularize cornrows for white women.





Fences on Broadway was nominated for 10 Tony Awards and won 3- two for the performances of Viola Davis & Denzel Washington.



Fences the film only received 4 nominations in comparison & Viola Davis was the only award winner and was less favorably received by audiences compared to the play.

The Stage Actor vs. The Film Actor:

The difference in aura between stage and film is that the audience takes the place of the critic in film. The aura is detached because the film is made up of bits and not a single unbroken performance.


The Aura of an Actor



Marilyn Monroe cultivated relationships with gossip columnists to tailor her public image while making her screen persona match that of a blonde bombshell: naive, dimwitted and sexually available.

To make their on-screen transformation noticeable, film actors have to present a different personality. Since the performance is out of their hands and they aren't able to connect with their audience, this causes anxiety.

The aura shrivels so a cult value must be created by the studios as a shelf for their personality.

A photograph of Jennifer Lawrence on the set of the movie American Hustle. She is sitting on a chair, wearing a white dress and a large fur coat, looking down at a script. The background shows a busy set with other people and chandeliers.

Jennifer Lawrence on the set of American Hustle by dir. David O. Russell.

David is known for making last minute changes to the script and scenes, often changing the tone and theme of the film resulting in re-shoots and heavy editing to get the story in the right place.

Walter Benjamin states that performances in film aren't presented by the actor, but by the camera. And these aren't single performances, but normally multiple performances scaffolded by lights, set designs, props and other forms of movie magic to create a realistic image.

The process of making a film is disjointed. Scenes that appear concurrently in a film are normally shot days, weeks or even months apart and tricks are used to trigger performances.

A film is essentially a string of singular events that on their own, do not make sense, but when combined become coherent.

At the time of Walter Benjamin's writing (1936) he and Franz Werfel agreed upon the fact that film "had not realized its true meaning, its real possibilities... these consist in its unique faculty to express by natural means and with incomparable persuasiveness all that is fairylike, marvelous, supernatural."

Storytelling was relatively limited to history and epic tales shot in black and white.



The 1930's saw a shift in film as sound became more prominent with color following suit. The Wizard of Oz is an example of film successfully utilizing tools to transport viewers to a different reality.



Walter Benjamin said that film is a work of art because of the camera's ability to penetrate multiple parts of a scene.

This simple scene from *American Beauty* signals the power dynamic switch between Lester & his wife, Carolyn.

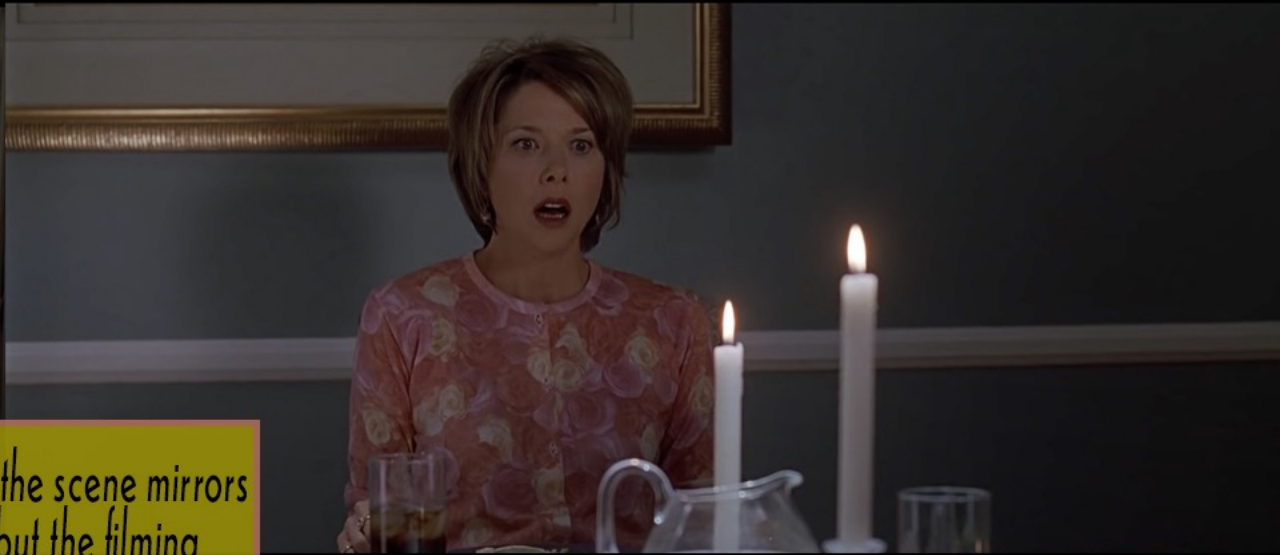




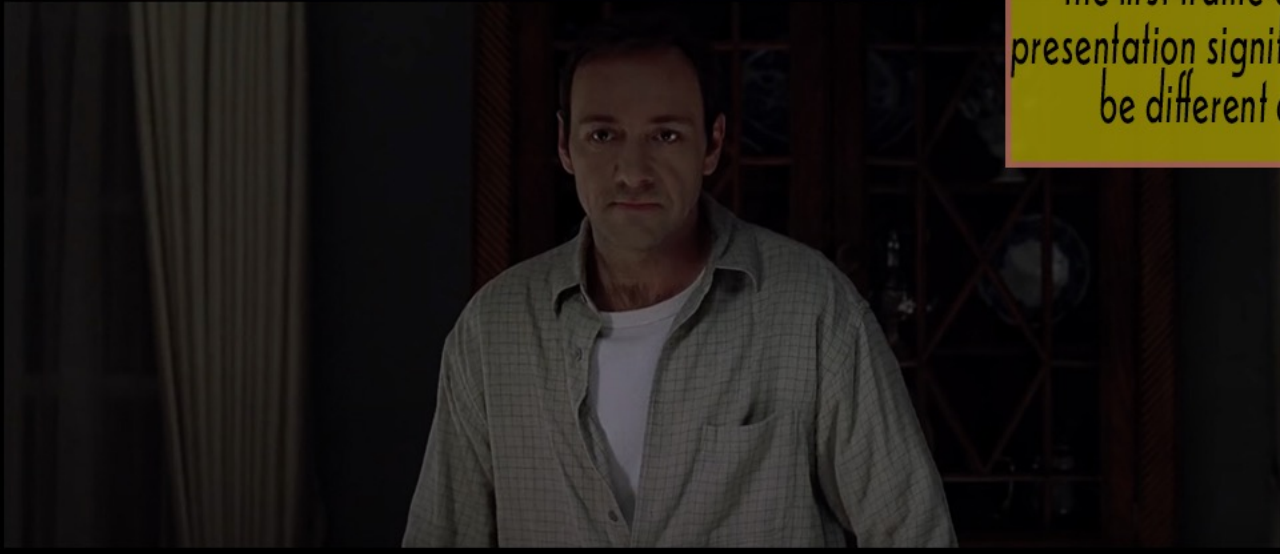
With the camera's potential to capture multiple parts of a scene, the different angles and takes can be combined to give a practical image of reality, better than what a painter is capable of.

Low key lighting, simple framing, and slow zooms are used to guide the viewer through the power shift.





The final frame of the scene mirrors the first frame but the filming presentation signifies the movie will be different afterwards.





The term "cult" has been adapted for modern times and is used to refer to films created for or that attract a certain niche of people.

Rocky Horror Picture Show gained its cult value after it was initially pulled from theaters for not being successful. Years later, it was suggested that the film be screened at midnight. Eventually moviegoers who dressed in character were admitted to the movie for free, thus checking the box for catering to a specific group of people.

The film "The Room" was also pulled from theaters after not being successful. Many people who had seen the movie and mocked it encouraged the director to host more screenings. These cult-like screenings, hosted by the director for the audience to make fun of, resulted in the notoriety of the film.





THE END