

16 Ways of Looking at a Photograph

Class Exercise: Chapter 5, The Aura

To access a key aspect of Walter Benjamin's theory of the work of art and the "aura" you will need to locate a statue on your campus. Walk to the statue. Hang out for a while, looking at the statue, taking notes about it. Of what is the statue made? Where is it placed? Is there a plaque? How long has it been there? What does it signify in the context of your college campus? Now take out your phone and snap a shot of the statue. Return to the classroom. Open your phone. What is different about the experience of looking at the statue on your phone screen? Make notes about the difference. For example, it is likely that the image of the statue on your phone screen is much smaller than the actual statue. Start with the *most obvious* differences and work from there to more subtle differences about how it feels, as an experience, to be in the presence of the statue versus how it feels to open the image of the statue on your phone screen. Do not delete the photograph. A week or more later, go back to it, and look at it, but don't do this in the classroom. What are the different places where you can open your phone screen and look at the statue? Waiting in line to buy coffee? Riding the bus? How does this mode of accessing the statue differ from actually standing next to it?