

Nähere Informationen / Kontakt:  
<mailto:iz1@uni-wuppertal.de>

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## From Reproduction to Hallucination: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay and Contemporary Fascist Epistemologies

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Maren Behrens  
(Twente)

In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," whose final authorized version was published in 1939, Walter Benjamin reflected on the impact of photography and film on human perception. The text is probably best remembered for coining the term aura for a unique aesthetic experience, but its main themes are political aesthetics and political epistemology; it even contains a rudimentary theory of fascism. In the epilogue, Benjamin claims that the "logical end result of fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life," because fascism "seeks to give [the masses] an expression while preserving" existing hierarchies.

Taking this claim as a starting point, I draw on Benjamin's essay to answer two related questions: Are there genuinely fascist epistemologies, and if so, what makes them fascist? How do these epistemologies take advantage of current technological capabilities, such as 'social media' and 'artificial intelligence'? I suggest that Benjamin's concern with mechanical reproduction can and should be updated into a concern with hallucinatory production: our current technological capabilities allow us to effortlessly create and maintain realities of our own will and choosing.

**BUW | Campus Griffenberg**  
**Raum K.12.20**  
**Gaußstraße 20**  
**42119 Wuppertal**



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