Walter Benjamin and Film as Lit

In his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin argues that the mass reproduction of art as a result of technological advancements diminishes its authenticity for no longer uniquely existing in one space. He claims that by changing the context of a piece of art, something is taken away from the original, he calls this its "aura". He goes on to illuminate the way in which he sees the rising fascists and futurists of the time rendering aesthetic the realm of politics and calls instead for a "politicizing of art".

It really is a great essay and I recommend giving it a read if you have a few minutes to spare, but I decided to post it not for its politics, but because it addresses some of the issues we discussed in 170 Monday morning on whether or not film should be considered literature.

When it comes to drama, Benjamin seems to think that the highly mediated and reproduced nature of film takes away from the "aura" or essence of the stage actor, therefore the performance as a whole and he addresses the points prof. Schacht and Eric made about the role of the camera in film: "The audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera." I don't think that this excludes film from literary criticism, however. It seems to me to be merely a shift of perspective, which is not a decrease in its amount of artistic merit or authenticity. He also contends in the favor of film being able to be criticized as literature when he points out that, "In comparison with the stage scene, the filmed behavior item lends itself more readily to analysis because it can be isolated more easily."

Benjamin goes on about the essence of art and how if something is mass produced it loses its essence, but I don't buy it. Excluding big Hollywood movies clearly made for mass distribution and profit, I think that a movie can contain an essence of its own through mediums other than which traditional art is used to.

Any thoughts?