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A Technique of Closeness, an Art of Straying: Reading with Walter Benjamin

Simone Stirner

A CITY “OPENS ITSELF TO [the *flâneur*] like a landscape, it encloses him like a room,” writes Walter Benjamin in an introduction to Franz Hessel’s *Walking in Berlin*.¹ Reading Benjamin’s city texts—from “Berlin Childhood Around 1900” to the *Arcades Project* itself—one often gets a feeling similar to that of a space opening up and then enclosing the reader within.² Be it the miniatures from “Berlin Childhood” or the segments in the *Arcades Project*, the texts seem aerated like the arcades and courtyards Benjamin repeatedly describes. In “Berlin Childhood,” the short prose segments often condense around a specific memory or the atmosphere of a place—the loggias, a winter morning, the corner of Steglitzer Street and Genthiner Street. The white spaces between these texts are like the crack beneath the door in the vignette “Departure and Return,” interstices that open up a space for reverie. Texts themselves become what Benjamin once called “the limitless theater of *flânerie*.”³ In the *Arcades Project*, an agglomeration of scenes and impressions from historical and contemporary Paris expands to include voices of others, citations, and archival notes next to Benjamin’s own comments and reflections. Like the Parisian arcades that are open to the movement of people and goods, of air and dreams, Benjamin’s work does not settle on a steady narrative but creates open-ended structures that invite flexibility of thought.

The analogy between the landscape of *flânerie* and Benjamin’s texts has been drawn frequently. Rolf Tiedemann has suggested that the fragments of the *Arcades Project* “can be compared to the materials used in building a house, the outline of which has just been marked in the ground.”⁴ Andreas Huyssen presupposes a direct influence between cityscape and the text when he posits the metropolitan condition as “formative” for the very structure of Benjamin’s fragmentary style.⁵ Often such comparison ends with the structural analogy between city and text. The aesthetic of the texts picks up the features of the city; the open, aerated layout, for instance, recalls the layout of the arcades.

Against this background, the following note from “Berlin Chronicle,” which addresses less the structure of the city than the structure of experience particular to the one moving through it, invites a different approach:

Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance—nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city—as one loses oneself in a forest—this calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, and bars must speak to the wanderer like a twig snapping under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its center. Paris taught me this art of straying; it fulfilled a dream that had shown its first traces in the labyrinths on the blotting pages of my school exercise books.⁶

If Paris taught Benjamin the art of straying, and if his texts structurally mirror elements of this place, what instructions do we receive from his writings? If the *Arcades Project* is structured like the Parisian arcades, how do readers move among its fragments? How do we stray in textual arcades? What kind of schooling—or possibly unschooling—is required for us to lose ourselves in a text? What, in other words, would it mean to read like a flâneur, and what is at stake in doing so?

This essay takes the relation between the perceptive experience of flânerie and that of reading Benjamin’s own writing as its point of departure, tracing what I contend to be fragments of a theory of reading from Benjamin’s early writings on perception to the *Arcades Project*. The underlying hypothesis is that the theory of flânerie is developed parallel to—and ultimately also constitutes itself as—a theory of reading. This theory interlinks notions of embodied perception with the possibility of experiencing sudden nonlinear temporal recollections of the past in the present of reading. It is a strange theory of reading that straddles the divide between disembodied and embodied perception as it follows the surface of a text as if it were the surface of a city. It envisions a reader-flâneur who learns the art of straying, listening to unanticipated sounds, reading street signs like snapping twigs, embodying a form of reading in which mastery is undone, where being lost is not a state to be overcome but rather the precondition for a new kind of perception. This idiosyncratic theoretical constellation of reading and flânerie anticipates current theories in critical hermeneutics that turn away from symptomatic models of interpretation, which assume a hidden or repressed meaning in a text, and toward forms of reading that replace critical mastery and distance with an intimate closeness between text and reader.

These recent modes or methods of reading include Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “reparative reading,” Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus’s “surface reading,” and Heather Love’s work on description in the pages

of this journal.⁷ Best and Marcus's term "surface reading" functions like an umbrella term for a series of different types of reading that "refuse the depth model of truth" and turn to the surface of a text, be it in the form of a text's materiality, its affective and sensuous dimensions, or anything else that is taken to be "there" instead of hidden and repressed.⁸ To speak of "surface" in this context is to some extent a misnomer. The term implies a shallowness that does not give credit to the depth of textual engagement that goes along with the modes of reading that fall under this name. If there is a moment of "flatness," it might be located in the breaking down of the typical hierarchy of interpretation: the shift away from goal-oriented interpretation means giving up mastery, letting oneself become undone, "unschooled" maybe. Sedgwick offers such an alternative to what Love calls "familiar academic protocols like maintaining critical distance, outsmarting . . . refusing to be surprised" in her vision of "reparative reading," which entails a susceptibility to surprising encounters in the process of reading.⁹ Susan Sontag is repeatedly invoked as an early precursor to this tradition. Her 1966 essay "Against Interpretation" disavows depth hermeneutics for what she calls an "erotics of art" and replaces Freudian and Marxist models of interpretation with a call to experience art in its "sensuous immediacy."¹⁰

The argument that Benjamin anticipates current theories of "surface reading" might itself come as nothing new—Sontag was, after all, an avid reader of Benjamin. But the intent of my engagement with Benjamin is not to situate him as the genealogical forefather of a hermeneutic tradition. (If anything, he taught us to be suspicious of such linearity.¹¹) By untangling some of the complexities of what I consider to be scenes of reading in his works (readings both of texts and of the cityscape), I suggest that Benjamin conceives of reading in a way that foreshadows the embodied, affective, material dimensions of "surface reading," as well as its emphasis on a resistance to mastery. Yet Benjamin's model of reading also differs from surface reading in important ways. Immersive and affective as the ways of reading he confronts us with are, they are also keenly oriented toward historical realities. Benjamin imbues the surface of cities and texts with the depth of history, intimating that the attitude we take up in reading ultimately exceeds the text and informs the way we relate to past, present, and future realities.

I develop my essay in three steps. I begin by turning to Benjamin's early writings on perception; I show how a theory of embodied perception, which will later find fuller expression in the figure of the flâneur, also articulates a form of reading that entails an experience of cross-historical contacts and constellations. Second, I turn to Benjamin's own engagement with Marcel Proust and show how Benjamin reiterates

paradigms of the flâneur's affective and temporal experience in his own experience of reading Proust's text. Third, I bring Benjamin into conversation with current critical hermeneutics that turn away from depth models of truth. I contend that Benjamin anticipates the attitude of non-mastery and embodied attention that constitutes a core feature of these theories while also showing their potential attunement to the depth of history. Both the notion of a "technique of closeness," which Benjamin develops in the *Arcades Project*, and his relation to the notion of reification help us in understanding this link. My final section turns to the fragmentary, convoluted aesthetic of the *Arcades Project* itself and considers how it engenders a "closeness reading" on the part of the reader. On the way, we come to see that Benjamin envisions reading as a practice that opens our lives to an intimate nearness with history.

As this essay's final section will show, such an engagement with theories of reading is complicated. What does it mean to speak of a *theory* when speaking of Benjamin? His writing invites us to question the ideal of a theory that would be autonomous of the writing itself. To speak of Benjamin's theory of reading, then, is not to speak of a fully-fledged theory that can be turned into a generalized prescription for a critical practice to be implemented elsewhere. Instead, it means to consider the force of his own writing as bearing the capacity to provide theoretical insights and to acknowledge that instead of looking for theoretical concepts in his writing, one might have to turn to the realm of the figural. For Benjamin, as Judith Butler puts it, "the figural is the means by which the conceptual is fulfilled."¹² With regards to reading, the flâneur is one such figure, and it is in following his steps that we come closer to understanding Benjamin's theory of reading.

"His soles remember:" Surface Reading Paris

In her reading of the above passage from *Berlin Chronicle*, Carol Jacobs notes that for the one straying in the forest, "signs, names, people, and objects alike cannot be read as one learns at school. They must, rather, be disarticulated and disread."¹³ In the extensive, categorically unwieldy *Arcades Project* in which the individual items—notes, fragments, scraps of historical data, interpretations—constitute a "world of secret affinities," a forest of their own, we find the following note on the figure of the flâneur that describes a similar form of "unlearning" modalities of knowledge:¹⁴

But the great reminiscences, the historical shudder—these are a trumpery which he (the *flâneur*) leaves to tourists, who think thereby to gain access to the genius loci with a military password. Our friend may well keep silent. At the approach of his footsteps, the place has roused [ist . . . rege geworden]; speechlessly, mindlessly, its mere intimate nearness [innige Nähe] gives him hints and instructions. He stands before Notre Dame de Lorette, and his soles remember: here is the spot where in former times the *cheval de renfort*—the spare horse—was harnessed to the omnibus that climbed the Rue des Martyrs toward Montmartre. Often, he would have given all he knows about the domicile of Balzac or of Gavarni, about the site of a surprise attack or even of a barricade, to be able to catch the scent of a threshold or to recognize a paving stone by touch [das *Tastbewußtsein*], like any watchdog. (AP 416)

This passage confronts us with two ways of getting in touch with the past through two different ways of reading the city. On the one hand, there is the tourist who relates to the history of an urban site by way of “military passwords.” On the other, we find the *flâneur* whose way of reading the city implies a different modality of knowing. The *flâneur* stands before Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, and “his soles remember.” What Benjamin calls “*Tastbewußtsein*,” recognizing “by touch,” is valued more highly than any cognitive recollection. Similar to the young Benjamin who listens to street names or signs as if to the call of a bittern or a snapping twig, the *flâneur* reads the city and its past in a way that exceeds semantics. In fact, the place is silent, and the *flâneur* too “may well keep silent,” attuning himself to this environment. Instead of language, it is the *flâneur*’s steps that elicit a response from the place. The city’s response echoes the embodied presence of the *flâneur*: the place has roused, “*ist . . . rege geworden*,” an expression that in German figures the site itself as a body that moves in small gestures of awakening. Signals, hints, and instructions are given by way of an “intimate nearness” that gets figured as a form of corporeal touch, gathering both the remembering subject and the past in the immediacy of the present, embodied moment. A particular kind of perception becomes visible in this scene, where the present moment opens onto the past, and the perceiving subject is susceptible to the emergence of mnemonic events. This perception hinges upon a temporal and phenomenological structure linked to a modality of knowing and remembering that relies not on “passwords” but on sensory cues, in a way similar to Sontag’s gesture of differentiating between “interpretation” and “erotics.” In “Against Interpretation,” Sontag describes the former as “a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code,” translating a set of textual elements along the lines of previously established rules in order to reveal the “true meaning” of a text. “Erotics,” on the contrary, focuses less on “what [the artwork]

means" (AI 5, 13) and rather on the way we come to experience it—a shift that entails an increased attention to its sensory dimensions.

It might appear counterintuitive to read Benjamin in dialogue with Sontag's notion of an "erotics" of art and to imply that the ways of reading with which he confronts us rely on forms of embodied attention. Benjamin is not often read with a strong focus on corporeality.¹⁵ The centrality of his theory of the image—be it through the notion of the dialectical image, the allegorical imagination, or the thought-image—has contributed to the emphasis on the visual and imagistic realm in much of the secondary literature.¹⁶ What, then, are we to make of this corporeal dimension of Benjamin's scenes of reading? As I will show throughout this essay, the corporeal dimension ultimately has less to do with focusing on reading *as* physical activity, but rather with conceiving of reading as something that retains certain characteristics of physical touch as it opens a subject up to a form of intimacy with the past that precedes cognition and conceptual understanding.

Trying to get a better grasp of this relation between reading and corporeality, Benjamin's early writings prove instructive for they develop a striking—if fragmentary—theory of embodied perception, writings that prefigure the experiential mode particular to the flâneur. Consider the following moment from an early fragment on perception: "We extend into the world of perception with our feet, not with our head" [Wir ragen in die Wahrnehmungswelt gleichsam mit den Füßen hinein, nicht mit dem Haupt].¹⁷ The figure of the flâneur embodies this kind of perception—walking, reading street signs like snapping twigs under his feet, remembering with his soles, surface reading the city in his own idiosyncratic way as the following scene from the *Arcades Project* shows:

The street conducts the flâneur into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward—if not to the mythical Mothers, then into a past that can be all the more spellbinding because it is not his own, not private. . . . In the asphalt over which he passes, his steps awaken a surprising resonance. The gaslight that streams down on the paving stones throws an equivocal light on this double ground. (*AP* 416)

The flâneur walks and experiences the city, its surface, by moving from point A to B. It is in the middle of this movement that a different spatiotemporal model breaks in and the forward movement is transposed by the sudden experience of a co-presence of different times and places. This temporal structure constitutes a repeated concern for Benjamin in the early writings. As Gershom Scholem reflects, "Even then [in the summer of 1918], he occupied himself with ideas about perception as a reading in the configurations of the surface—which is the way prehistoric

man perceived the world around him, particularly the sky.”¹⁸ Scholem refers here to a note by Benjamin titled “On Perception in itself,” which contains the following three observations: first, “perception is reading”; second, “readable is only that which appears in a plane” [lesbar ist nur in der Fläche (E)rscheinendes]; and third, “plane . . . is configuration.”¹⁹

Following Scholem, these early fragments contain the seeds of what will, by 1933, reemerge in Benjamin’s “Doctrine of the Similar” as “reading from stars”: “The perception of similarity . . . offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars. The perception of similarities thus seems to be bound to a time-moment (*Zeitmoment*). It is like the addition of a third element, namely the astrologer, to the conjunction of two stars which must be grasped in an instant. Here the astronomer is cheated out of his reward, despite the sharpness of his observational tools.”²⁰ The flâneur who looks down onto the pavement stones, suddenly overwhelmed by the experience of similarities between times and places, finds a predecessor in the early astrologer who is offered the fleeting, transitory vision of a constellation of stars. Where the flâneur perceives that which the tourist with all his military passwords cannot access, here it is the astrologer who cheats the astronomer and his observational tools out of his reward. In both cases, Benjamin describes ways of reading that work without interpretative tools, relying instead on a perceptive attitude that entails a form of embodied attentiveness and susceptibility to emergent constellations. In “Doctrine of the Similar,” Benjamin points out that objects meet in language and “enter into relationship with each other . . . in their most volatile and delicate substances, even in their aromata,” and that in reading we give our mind over to a certain kind of speed, “letting the mind participate in that measure of time in which similarities flash up fleetingly out of the stream of things.” Against this background reading takes on a peculiar shape: it appears to be a process of immersing oneself in an atmosphere where one might catch the scent of a threshold, like a watchdog, moving rhythmically through time like the flâneur moves through the city.²¹ Flânerie—in its rhythmic walk and free-floating attention that does not decode the city but enters into an intimate nearness with it—appears as a surface reading of a different kind, one in which the contact with the surface of a city might suddenly open up to deep time, emergent configurations, and cross-historical formations.

“Bread of My Imagination”: Reading with Proust

Reading in a way that perceives constellations—as the early fragments have it—is a reading attuned to anachronistic affiliations, to the inti-

mate nearness of different strata of time. This sudden perception of a constellation and of “similarities” is less a homogenizing process or the revelation of something already unified. Rather, it is the event in which distant times but also places, objects, and people are drawn into a structure of belonging that evades and ultimately disturbs the linear logic of historical time. In the accounts of Benjamin’s drug experiments, a similar dynamic is at play when he documents a scene in Marseille in which he found himself immersed “in an intimate contemplation of the sidewalk . . . which, through a kind of unguent (a magic unguent) which I spread over it, could have been—precisely as these very stones—also the sidewalk of Paris.” Picking up on a biblical idiom, he continues: “One often speaks of stones instead of bread. These stones *were* the bread of my imagination, which was suddenly seized by a ravenous hunger to taste what is the same in all places and countries.”²² To “hunger” for what is the “same in all places and countries” alerts us yet again to the presence of a perceiving body, suggesting that the subject might, by incorporating that which “is the same,” form part of that structure of belonging too. As the city reveals yet again a double ground, a temporal depth opening up from within the flat surface of the city sidewalk, this scene ties back to other moments, in which the experience of a condensation of times or places was linked to the perceptive attitude of the flâneur. With this particular scene, however, another figure moves into view: Proust. Two scenes from his *In Search of Lost Time*, which became paradigmatic for the experience of involuntary memory, appear mapped onto one another in Benjamin’s scene. The taste of the bread and the ravenous hunger to taste “sameness” recalls what Benjamin himself described as Proust’s experience of an afternoon when “the taste of a kind of pastry called *madeleine* . . . transported him back to the past.”²³ The cobblestones of Marseille, which to Benjamin open up to a constellation in which different places suddenly overlap, invoke the famous scene in which Proust’s narrator, stumbling upon a cobblestone “in an absent-minded state” in the courtyard of the Guermantes’ town house, is suddenly subject to a mnemonic event:

I put my foot on a stone which was slightly lower than its neighbour, all my discouragement vanished and in its place was that same happiness which at various epochs of my life had been given to me. . . . The happiness which I had just felt was unquestionably the same as that which I had felt when I tasted the madeleine soaked in tea. . . . And almost at once I recognized the vision: it was Venice, of which my efforts to describe it and the supposed snapshots taken by my memory had never told me anything, but which the sensation which I had once experienced as I stood upon two uneven stones in the baptistry of St Mark’s had, recurring a moment ago, restored to me complete with all the other sensations linked on that day to that particular sensation. . . .²⁴

The cobble stones of St. Marks, the taste of the madeleine, the intoxicating feeling of happiness—this scene resonates on multiple levels with Benjamin's depiction of the ways the flâneur comes to encounter past times and distant places.

The relation between Benjamin and Proust in general and the affinity between the spatiotemporal model of the constellation and Proust's "involuntary memory" in particular have been discussed before—guided by Benjamin's own engagement with Proust.²⁵ Michael Taussig notes that the flash-like appearance of the dialectical image has "Proust's fingerprints all over," speaking to the fact that it echoes Proust's involuntary memory in its temporal and phenomenological structure.²⁶ Famously, Benjamin states in "On the Concept of History" that "the true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again."²⁷ When Benjamin himself quotes Proust's note that the past is "somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us)," these lines recall the experience of the flâneur who gains access to the past through physical contact with the surface of the steps of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, catching the "scent of a threshold" and foregoing all "knowledge" of historical dates.²⁸ Having read Benjamin's writing on Proust against the background of the above reflections, it is then striking to see that Benjamin's essay not only reveals the affinity between the temporal dimension of the flâneur's experience and Proust's thinking about time in *In Search of Lost Time*, but that Benjamin also seemingly turns himself into a reading flâneur of Proust's own writing, reiterating paradigms of the flâneur's experience in the very experience of reading Proust's text.

Like other moments in Benjamin that reflect on reading, his discussion of reading Proust is marked by a seemingly irreconcilable contradiction between embodied perception and disembodied processes of reading and imagining. In "The Image of Proust," Benjamin emphatically stresses: "physical contact [die Berührung]. To no one is this gesture more alien than to Proust. He cannot touch his reader either; he could not do so for anything in the world."²⁹ Yet Benjamin also repeatedly employs metaphors that emphasize the very embodiment that is seemingly denied in reading. We hear, for instance, that "no one's text is more tightly woven than Marcel Proust's"—a remark that points us to the materiality of texture rather than the sign-character of a text. We also hear that Proust's work is planned "as the lines on the palm of our hand," and that his "syntax rhythmically and step by step reproduces his fear of suffocating"—images that not only tie the corporeal experience of the author to the structure of the text but also suggest that the readers too might take up the rhythm of its syntax, walking the text, "step by step."³⁰

In another idiosyncratic account of his engagement with Proust, Benjamin suggests that in reading Proust “images emerge.” This ostensibly points to a nonphysical gesture, and yet such a conception is troubled when he explains that Proust’s images are not there to be seen but “happen,” in reading, “detach[ing themselves] from the structure of Proust’s sentences as that summer day at Balbec . . . emerged from the lace curtains under Françoise’s hands.”³¹ Benjamin ties the process of image formation to the felt perception of the curtain’s fabric. How do we feel the texture of these tightly woven sentences? How do we read in a way that takes up the quality of the gesture of Françoise’s hand? What surface reading is implied in this articulation of reading Proust? No moment in Benjamin’s discussion of Proust is more challenging with regard to the connection of disembodied reading and felt perception than the following reflection from the very end of “The Image of Proust”:

Anyone who wishes to surrender knowingly to the innermost overtones in this work [*In Search of Lost Time*] must place himself in a special stratum—the bottom most—of this involuntary memory, one in which the materials of memory no longer appear singly, as images, but tell us about a whole, amorphously and formlessly, indefinitely and weightily, in the same way as the weight of his net tells a fisherman about his catch. Smell—that is the sense of weight of someone who casts his nets into the sea of the *temps perdu*. And his sentences are the entire muscular activity of the intelligible body [das ganze Muskelspiel des intelligiblen Leibes]; they contain the whole enormous effort to raise the catch.³²

The fact that Benjamin likens Proust’s sentences to fishing nets echoes his previous analogy between the text and tightly woven textile, as well as his comparison of Proust’s sentences and Françoise’s lace curtains. As Taussig notes in his discussion of this passage, we get the “weight of the catch, not the catch itself,” a form of reception that emphasizes a felt sense of perception but also implies a peculiar way of orienting oneself toward something without prior certainty of when it will arrive and what exact shape it will take.³³ The sudden appearance of “smell” in this passage responds to Benjamin’s discussion of the relevance of smell in Proust’s novel, but also recalls Benjamin’s peculiar treatment of language in “Doctrine of the Similar,” in which objects enter into relationships with each other in their “aromata.” When Sigrid Weigel, in a different context, speaks of the “metabolic exchange” between matter and image in Benjamin, she touches upon the very entwinement between these two domains that resonates through figures such as the image detaching itself as from lace under a hand or that of “bread” of imagination.³⁴ Benjamin’s discussion of reading Proust ultimately reveals something more: both the fisherman feeling the weight of his net and

Francoise's hands on the lace curtain are figures for engagements with textiles that mirror the readerly contact with a text, revealing that the reader too is implicated in this metabolic exchange. In reading Proust, Benjamin becomes the flâneur, enmeshed in the "aromata" of words, following the rhythmic steps of the text's syntax, giving himself over to their speed. And it is in following the gait of Benjamin's flâneur that we come to participate in that other measure of time where the past might emerge to form a constellation with the present.

Closeness Reading

Benjamin's early fragments, the theory of flânerie, and his own reading of Proust intimate that reading can be the site of an encounter with the past by way of a sudden experience of constellations. In reading we might find ourselves suddenly in the presence of something that once seemed temporally or spatially distant. Texts and textiles, as Proust's Françoise teaches us, can bind us up with Balbec. For Benjamin, reading is like walking: feeling the weight of the sentences implies the shift toward a sensory, corporeal engagement with a text. First and foremost, however, these figures of corporeality affirm a readerly attitude that necessitates unlearning one's habitual perception of the world, particularly in one's reliance upon the intellect for goal-oriented meaning-making. Similar to the way that Proust posits the intellect's role in conjuring up the past as "futile" or the way that Sontag—whose "erotics of art" again resonates here—critiques the "hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability," Benjamin repeatedly envisions scenes of reading in which the subject lays down any tools of analysis and interpretation. The subject instead experiences reality "speechlessly, mindlessly." In what follows, I want to consider in more detail how this idiosyncratic way of reading that Benjamin proposes foreshadows but also exceeds and adds to what has become known as "surface reading," as he negotiates ways of reading that entwine nonteleological attention with the experience of cross-historical constellations, imbuing the surface of the text—like the surface of the city—with the depth of history.

A little discussed segment of the *Arcades Project* among his notes on the figure of the collector condenses, I suggest, different dimensions of Benjamin's theory of reading. Benjamin delineates a curious "method" of relating to the past that grants the past the agency to present itself: "The true method of making things present is to represent them in our space (not to represent ourselves in their space). . . . The same method applies, in essence, to the consideration of great things from the past—the

cathedral of Chartres, the temple of Paestum—when, that is, a favorable prospect presents itself: the method of receiving the things into our space. We don't displace our being into theirs; they step into our life" (*AP* 206).³⁵ The emergence of the past is not something that follows a process of *em*-pathy, of entering into it. Getting in touch with the past is not dependent on knowledge; in fact, as in the case of the one whose "soles remember," ordinary cognition and intention are suspended. The past appears without any preceding process of goal-oriented anticipation and gives itself to the perceiving subject with an immediacy that carries the mark of a corporeal touch. The "we" of Benjamin's writing—the subject in front of "great things from the past"—gives up mastery, opens itself to the entrance of "things" that come from elsewhere. In another moment, Benjamin reiterates the same model of "letting things step into our life," this time speaking of a "technique of closeness" [*Technik der Nähe*].³⁶ For Benjamin, this technique expresses itself most clearly in the ways we read and listen to anecdotes, hence aligning the process of reading the city directly with a process of reading texts:

The constructions of history are comparable to military orders that discipline the true life and confine it to barracks. On the other hand: the street insurgence of the anecdote. The anecdote brings things near to us spatially, lets them enter our life. It represents the strict antithesis to the sort of history, which demands "empathy," which makes everything abstract. The same technique of nearness [or "closeness"] may be practiced, calendrically, with respect to epochs. Let us imagine that a man dies on the very day he turns fifty, which is the day on which his son is born, to whom the same thing happens, and so on. If one were to have the chain commence at the time of the birth of Christ, the result would be that, in the time since we began our chronological reckoning, not forty men have lived. . . . This pathos of nearness, the hatred of the abstract configuration of history in its "epochs," was at work in the great skeptics like Anatole France. (*AP* 545)

Once more, we find the warning against an "empathetic" relation to the past, a relation that abstracts and ultimately keeps its distance from it. Instead, Benjamin gives us the model of a technique of "nearness," of "closeness" that seems to function *sym*-pathetically, walking with the past, being attuned to it, susceptible to its demands. Past things come to the fore, but they do so of their own account, in their own time, in their own place. At stake in what Benjamin calls the "pathos of nearness" is also a form of remembering, a readerly attitude that might perceive "what is the same in all places," might seize anachronic intimacies and thereby break through a linear division of history into epochs.³⁷ The above segments provide us with a model for a textual engagement in which we stop digging for hidden meanings, where our interpretative

categories become undone, and where we are rerouted instead toward the possibility of a perceptive attitude that replaces the depth model of close reading with a technique of closeness—a closeness reading, maybe.

We can see echoes between Benjamin's way of reading and the contemporary trend in critical hermeneutics identified as "surface reading" on multiple levels. There is, for one, the shift away from an attitude of mastery brought toward a text. Reading, in Benjamin, is not a process of interpretation but a form of experience, an attitude of nonteleological attentiveness toward the world. Reading like a flâneur entails surrendering oneself to what a text, an object, or a site might bring to us. This echoes what Love describes as scholars' "focus on the need to suspend routine activities of unveiling and demystification" and their attempts to "train" themselves out of habits of paranoia and suspicion.³⁸ Sedgwick's notion of "reparative reading," for instance, envisions a reader who "surrender[s] the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new" and instead opens herself up to surprise (*TF* 146). Benjamin too envisions the reader as open to surprises, to the "startling call of a bittern," to the past that "step[s] into our life," or to the suddenly felt weight of a catch in a fisherman's net. This gesture does not, however, take shape as what Love describes as "ethical heroism," that is, the attitude of a critic "who gives up his role of interpreting divine messages to take up a position as a humble analyst and observer."³⁹ It is not a position of remote, uninvolved observation. Rather it is an opening of the self toward being moved and affected by something yet unknown. In reading we lay our nets out, expectant of meaning, the remembrance of past things, a startling call in the distance—an anticipation whose object remains unknown. Equally, giving up on the paranoid attitude does not mean that there are no real lived reasons for paranoid thinking, for suspicion and anxious anticipation. Benjamin's own history of persecution, escape from Nazi Germany, and tragic suicide testify to that—not unlike the way in which Sedgwick herself reflects on reasons for paranoid reading against the historical framework of the 1980s AIDS crisis.⁴⁰ Benjamin's theory is not blind to history but reconfigures the relation to it.

In the introduction to *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*—the study containing her critique of "paranoid reading"—Sedgwick explains her shift away from the "topos of depth or hiddenness . . . that has been such a staple of critical work of the past four decades" as a turn away from the spatial descriptors "beneath and behind" (*TF* 8). Instead, her "reparative reading" finds its most salient preposition in "beside"—a preposition that breaks through linear logic, constituting in this fashion "a mode of *resistance*" to the specters of origin and telos,

as Emily Apter and Elaine Freedgood have emphasized.⁴¹ Sedgwick explains this move as a “Deleuzian interest in planar relations” (*TF* 8). Recalling Benjamin’s early fragments on perception we find an uncanny resonance, an “intimate nearness” even, between Sedgwick’s planar “beside” and Benjamin’s emphasis that “readable is only that which appears in a plane.” The logic of “beside” remains salient in Benjamin’s negotiations of different forms of reading beyond these early texts. To the flâneur, Notre-Dame-de-Lorette relates its history in an “intimate nearness”; Paris is right beside Marseille, and past events slide up right next to the present. The flâneur’s walk *over* the double-ground of the pavement that unleashes memories seems to speak more to the logic of “beneath.” And yet it is precisely the fact that the flâneur encounters this “beneath” feet-first, not with the distanced mind and intellect but in the intimate nearness of corporeal touch, that disturbs the depth-model of interpretation.

“Beside” is the preposition of closeness, not that of disclosure. It is also this logic of closeness that marks the various figures of corporeal relationality in the different scenes of reading we have encountered thus far—from the flâneur’s remembrance “by touch” to Benjamin’s own way of reading Proust at a certain speed, step-by-step, perceiving Proust’s image like something emanating from lace curtains under one’s hands. This corporeal dimension corresponds to what Sontag articulated as a need for an “erotics of art” instead of an interpretation that would look for hidden “content” (AI 14). Benjamin points us to these sensuous dimensions when he follows the breath-rhythm of Proust’s sentences. Maybe more importantly, however, he also alerts us to perceiving the mental activity of reading *like* a physical activity—reading like walking, touching, immersing oneself in the “aromata” of words.⁴²

Going Deep

A resistance to an attitude of mastery, a breakdown of the hierarchy inherent in depth-hermeneutics, a turn to the material, sensuous dimensions of both texts and reality—all these are elements that characterize both Benjamin’s idiosyncratic way of reading and surface reading today. Different as the critical approaches summarized under the term of “surface reading” might be, they also share as a common denominator a resistance to “symptomatic reading,” the roots of which “lie with Marx’s interest in ideology and commodity and Freud’s in the unconscious and dreams.”⁴³ According to Sontag, Marx’s doctrine “amount[s] to [an] elaborate system of hermeneutics,” an “aggressive and impious

theor[y] of interpretation”—against which Sontag formulates her own stance “against interpretation” (AI 7). Sedgwick too reminds us via Paul Ricoeur that Marx is the man of paranoia and suspicion for whom the “fundamental category of consciousness is the relation hidden-shown” (*TF* 125). Benjamin’s own relation to Marx is certainly a topic in its own right—one that cannot be covered in the context of this essay. But a brief turn to the problem of reification opens up another view onto the way in which Benjamin, with his “technique of closeness,” formulates an early alternative to Marxist ideology critique and the associated form of depth-hermeneutics.⁴⁴

As C. D. Blanton suggests, the *Arcades Project* as a whole can be understood as a “study in reification.”⁴⁵ The arcades are the symptom of a reified world in which the object is dissociated “from the referential source of its value.” To read them means taking up the task of accounting for this displacement by which “every object is inscribed with a meaning, but one that belongs and refers elsewhere . . . shrouding the world of objects with a cloak of significance to which it cannot fully correspond.”⁴⁶ Where Marx scrutinized the cultural sensibility of the nineteenth century for “ideological content . . . whose depth is unearthed in ideology critique,” Benjamin finds his own idiosyncratic way of responding to this world. As Tiedemann notes, Benjamin turned to “surfaces or exteriors”—the facades of the Parisian arcades, the surface of the city. He was interested in immediate presence; “the secret he was tracking in the [*Arcades Project*] is a secret that comes to appear.”⁴⁷ Or as Blanton puts it, for Benjamin the problem of reification requires settling into “suspensions of present or palpable meaning, searching instead for the slowly emergent patterns or constellations that it disgorges by apparent chance.”⁴⁸ Against this background the “technique of closeness” can also be seen as a method that responds to the reified reality of the modern world in a way that exceeds the model of commodity fetishism: it takes things to be potentially alive and animated, to have history, ready to step into our lives. Maybe we might say that at this point Benjamin’s Marxism intersects with his mystical, “weak” Messianic vein. What, in the early fragments and in his writing on Proust, appeared as a process of remembrance, which is tied to a form of encounter with material, now takes the shape of a reading that is also a way of responding to a reified reality. The concern with the experience of sudden cross-historical constellations intersects with the particular problem posed by processes of reification but is not displaced by it. Rather we can see here another fragment of Benjamin’s wider commitment to articulating ways of responding to the expressions of history in a theory of reading. Reading like the flâneur and following the logic of closeness is potentially to go against the logic

of “military orders” that confines history to a sequence of epochs. It is a perceptive attitude that, while in touch with the surface, is attuned to historical depth and can allow for the past to emerge.

In the discussions around surface reading today, the mnemonic dimension and concern for the depth of history seems to have fallen to the side—together with the turn away from Marx. Reading Benjamin in relation to contemporary critical hermeneutics shows a neglected potential of surface reading as a practice that responds to history and attends to its depth on its own terms. His “technique of closeness” and theory of reading at large open up new possibilities for understanding just how deep surface reading might go.

Walking for a Theory of Reading

I have tried to read with Benjamin, to think with and through him about how he conceives of reading, and I have placed him in dialogue with past and contemporary theories of reading. It remains to be asked, however, to what extent these moments of reading really do point to a *theory* of reading. In other words, does Benjamin develop a fully fledged theory of reading or simply provide instructions for a mode or technique of reading?

My introduction states that Benjamin urges us to question the ideal of a theory independent of the writing itself. In this approach, I follow readers of Benjamin such as Gerhard Richter or Max Pensky, who respectively suggest that there is no “semantic, extratextual truth-content” to Benjamin’s own rhetoric and that Benjamin grew, at least by the time of the *Arcades Project*, “increasingly unwilling to commit his project to a theoretical justification.”⁴⁹ For Benjamin, historical truth itself becomes “legible” or “recognizable” only at specific moments and resists “the imposition of a theoretical superstructure.”⁵⁰ This, then, is the difficulty in speaking of a theory of reading in the context of Benjamin’s work: a theory of reading is subject to the very same premises of legibility that it supposedly formulates and investigates. That is to say, the answer to the question of what it means to read and how we read too must resist a theoretical superstructure and rather give itself, render itself legible on its own terms. As Butler shows in a discussion of Benjamin’s relation to theory, Benjamin himself insisted that any theory always retains a moment of incoherence. When Theodor W. Adorno challenged him on exactly this incoherence of his theory, Benjamin pointed specifically to his discussion of the flâneur; he suggested that a “theory in the strictest sense . . . comes into its own” in a process that he likens to the

breaking of a “single ray of light into an artificially darkened chamber.”⁵¹ This explanation was not satisfying for Adorno, but it might eventually be closer to a contemporary notion of theory. Surface reading—if it is a theory in its own right—only gives itself as theory in the encounter between different methods of reading, different modes and techniques, and thus retains a certain incoherence.

With this notion of theory in mind, I aver that a theory of reading emerges between the fragments of Benjamin’s own writing—a theory that is also a practice, a working out of the way we read by way of the writing’s own rhetoric and figures, its gaps and interstices. The site where one can best observe Benjamin’s theory in practice might be the reading of his own texts: “Berlin Chronicle,” “Hashish in Marseille,” or the *Arcades Project* themselves often engender a form of surface reading, in which readers tend to follow figures or constellations, not necessarily looking for “hidden, repressed, deep [meaning] in need of detection and disclosure.”⁵² Over time, as we read and walk the *Arcades Project*, the notes, comments, and small fragments of information appear to accumulate and then condense into insight. Such is the case of the figure of the flâneur itself, whose different characteristics and theoretical valences are not understood in chasing after one single fragment but only after moving among the different voices and comments that bring this figure close to us. We follow it without searching or anticipating until the figure comes forth and enters our lives. As Benjamin’s English translators Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin describe, Benjamin gathered “masses of quotations” in the convolutes of the *Arcades Project*, working them into a “framework of montage,” in which citation and commentary might be “perceived as intersecting at a thousand different angles, setting up vibrations across the epochs of recent history, so as to effect ‘the cracking open of natural teleology.’”⁵³ Given that we can “regard this ostensible patchwork as, de facto, a determinate literary form,” this principle has “significant repercussions for the direction and tempo of its reading.”⁵⁴ We are back to the speed of reading at this point, the principle of “letting the mind participate in that measure of time in which similarities flash up fleetingly out of the stream of things,” as Benjamin writes in his “Doctrine of the Similar.”⁵⁵ The *Arcades Project* asks us to immerse ourselves in the text as we would in the atmosphere of a city, moving through the textual fragments as through particles that we perceive in a state of free-floating attention, and from which we suddenly hit upon the sweet spot of seeing something that only emerges from a constellation of various different fragments.

Trying to understand Benjamin’s theory of reading and its peculiar embodied-disembodied encounter with constellations, this essay en-

counters constellations of its own. There is Benjamin's connection to Proust and Sontag's investment in Benjamin, which shines through in Sontag's "Against Interpretation," which is then, in turn, picked up by Best and Marcus in their collection of essays titled "The Way We Read Now." Here is an encounter with similarities, vibrations between critical interventions, all drawn into intimate nearness, the specter of Marx in the background. Surface reading today asks us to unlearn the anxious paranoia of not knowing. It encourages us to surrender to the possibility of unanticipated encounters in reading a text. In that sense Benjamin paves a way for such an encounter: surface reading is a practice, which—surprisingly or not—follows the steps of Benjamin's flâneur.

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NOTES

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1 Walter Benjamin, "The Flâneur's Return," in Franz Hessel, *Walking in Berlin: A Flâneur in the Capital* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), xv.

2 Benjamin, "Berlin Childhood around 1900," trans. Howard Eiland, in *Selected Writings*, ed. Eiland, Michael W. Jennings, Gary Smith, and Marcus Paul Bullock, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996-2006), 3:344-413; Benjamin and Asje Laciš, "Naples," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz and Laciš, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 2007), 163-76; Benjamin, "Moscow," in *Reflections*, 97-130; and Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002) (hereafter cited as *AP*).

3 Benjamin, "The Flâneur's Return," xiv (emphasis mine).

4 Rolf Tiedemann, "Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the *Passagen-Werk*," (*AP* 931).

5 See Andreas Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2015), 141.

6 Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle," trans. Jephcott, in *Selected Writings* 2.2:598.

7 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2003) (hereafter cited as *TF*); Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 1-21; and Heather Love, "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 371-91.

8 Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 9-13.

9 Love, "Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," *Criticism* 52, no. 2 (2010): 236.

10 Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Delta, 1966), 6 (hereafter cited as *AI*). See also Marcus and Best, "Surface Reading," 10.

- 11 Famously, Benjamin questioned genealogical models of historical transmission in his "On the Concept of History." Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings* 4:389–400.
- 12 Judith Butler, "Values of Difficulty," in *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena*, ed. Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003), 213.
- 13 Carol Jacobs, *In the Language of Walter Benjamin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999), 20.
- 14 Eiland and McLaughlin, "Translators' Foreword," in *AP x*. German text in brackets from Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Tiedemann and others (1974–1989; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 5.1:524.
- 15 Two significant studies that engage with Benjamin in this direction are Sigrid Weigel, *Body- and Image-Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Gerhard Richter, *Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 2000).
- 16 Consider for instance Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Richter, *Thought-Images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007); and Alison Ross, *Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image* (London: Routledge, 2014). A different version of my article might link Benjamin's theory of reading in more detail to his notion of the dialectical image. If I refrain from going in this direction, it is in the hope that we might come to see other dimensions of Benjamin's thought more clearly. Readers will still see the potential connections throughout.
- 17 Benjamin, "Wahrnehmung und Leib," in *Gesammelte Schriften* 6:67. Translation mine.
- 18 Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003), 61. See also Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 2005), 8. This was also a time when Benjamin was engaging with Kabbalah and language through Scholem. The influence of the linguistic theory of the Kabbalah on his own theory of language—and, consequently, his theory of reading—is a question that another version of my essay could develop further.
- 19 Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 6:32. Translation mine.
- 20 Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," trans. Knut Tarnowski, *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979): 68, 66. For further reading on Benjamin's "Doctrine of the Similar," see Jacobs, *In the Language of Walter Benjamin* (especially chapter 6).
- 21 Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," 68.
- 22 Benjamin, "Protocols of Drug Experiments," trans. Jephcott and Eiland, in Benjamin, *On Hashish*, ed. Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 54.
- 23 Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 158.
- 24 Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 6, *Time Regained*, trans. Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 217f.
- 25 See for example Max Pensky, "Tactics of Remembrance: Proust, Surrealism, and the Origin of the *Passagenwerk*," in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, ed. Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 164–89; and Marc de Wilde, "Benjamin's Politics of Remembrance: A Reading of 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte,'" in *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Rolf J. Goebel (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), 177–94.
- 26 Michael Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009), 198.
- 27 Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 390.
- 28 Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, 158.

- 29 Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," in *Illuminations*, 212. German text in brackets from Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 2.1:321.
- 30 Benjamin, "Image of Proust," in *Illuminations*, 202, 213–14.
- 31 Benjamin, "Image of Proust," in *Illuminations*, 205.
- 32 Benjamin, "Image of Proust," in *Illuminations*, 214.
- 33 Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, 198.
- 34 Weigel, *Body- and Image-Space*, 19–20.
- 35 One could take this segment as a starting ground for an investigation into the relation between the figure of the collector and the figure of the flâneur. The collector too embodies a way of relating to and experiencing the world, which in many ways sheds light onto the larger question of a Benjaminian theory of embodied perception.
- 36 Benjamin's translators Eiland and McLaughlin rendered the German *Technik der Nähe* as "technique of nearness," while Weigel's study, translated by Georgina Paul, offers "technique of closeness" as translation. While I find Eiland's and McLaughlin's translation in general more fitting, I have settled on "closeness" in the hope that it renders visible the relation to "close reading." Weigel, *Body- and Image-Space*, 19.
- 37 The "technique of closeness" also resonates on another level with the film technique of the "dissolve," *Überblendung*. In his discussion of the relevance of this technique for Benjamin, Eiland describes it as the "form-element" of allegorical perception by virtue of which "antiquity appears in modernity and vice versa." Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin. A Critical Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2014), 618.
- 38 Love, "Close but Not Deep," 387.
- 39 Love, "Close but Not Deep," 381.
- 40 For a nuanced discussion of the relation between "paranoid" and "reparative reading" in Sedgwick, see Love, "Truth and Consequences."
- 41 Emily Apter and Elaine Freedgood, "Special Issue: The Way We Read Now. Afterword," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 143.
- 42 In her 1978 essay "The Last Intellectual," a review of Benjamin's *Reflections*, Sontag speaks to this alignment between mental and physical perception. Picking up on the passage from Benjamin's *Berlin Chronicle*, she relates the "way of losing oneself" at once to Benjamin's general interest in problems of complex orientations (she cites his repeated interest in labyrinths) but also to a suggestion on his part on how to gain access to "[what is] forbidden . . . through an act of the mind that is the same as a physical act." Sontag, "The Last Intellectual," *The New York Review of Books*, October 12, 1978.
- 43 "Symptomatic reading" here is best understood in the specific version of Fredric Jameson. Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 4; Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981).
- 44 Benjamin comes in contact with Marx—specifically his writing on commodity fetishism—by way of Georg Lukács at a stage when he was already working on the *Arcades Project*. Yet the notion of reification becomes important for the entire work. Tiedemann notes, "Benjamin largely owed his Marxist competency to the chapter on reification on Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*." Tiedemann, "Dialectics at a Standstill," 938.
- 45 C. D. Blanton, "Modernism and Reification: Lukács, Benjamin, Adorno," in *The Cambridge History of Modernism*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017), 809.
- 46 Blanton, "Modernism and Reification," 810, 809–10.
- 47 Tiedemann, "Dialectics at a Standstill," 938.
- 48 Blanton, "Modernism and Reification," 811.
- 49 Richter, *Thought-Images*, 10; and Max Pensky, "Method and Time: Walter Benjamin's Dialectical Images," in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 180. Both Richter and Pensky articulate this

thought specifically with regard to the *Denkbild* (thought-image) and the dialectical image, but in both cases it points to a more general characteristic of Benjamin's writing with regard to its relation to theory.

50 Pensky, "Method and Time," 180. This text is also insightful in its discussion of the relation between "method" and "theory" more generally.

51 Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Henri Lonitz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999), 290. On this tension between Adorno and Benjamin, see Butler, "Values of Difficulty," 212.

52 Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 1.

53 Eiland and McLaughlin, "Translators' Foreword," xi.

54 Eiland and McLaughlin, "Translators' Foreword," xi.

55 Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," 68.