Arcades as *Intérieur*: The Production of Distance in Sophie Calle
and Janet Cardiff

by

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A thesis presented to the Ontario College of Art & Design
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Masters of Fine Arts
in
Criticism & Curatorial Practice

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2010

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Abstract

The work of French artist Sophie Calle and the Canadian artist partnership Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller localize this art critical consideration. My lens is Walter Benjamin's writings on memory, trace, and narrative. Calle parlays her exercises in memorial site-reconstruction, and arbitrary assignments in tracking and detection through the deceptively descriptive media of photography and text. Her dubious construction of narrative, and the demands she makes on trust, result in a practice that requires both our romantic supplication and our skepticism. Cardiff and Miller similarly position their viewer/participants at the interstices of desire and doubt. Their work solicits memorial and sensorial vulnerability, such that we must give ourselves over in order to 'complete' the work. In the case of both Calle and Cardiff/Miller, histories are created in the *here and now*. Linking the distinctions Benjamin made between distance and trace and their intersection's possibility for aura, I explore the auratic function of artwork that stresses process, produces distance and trace, and brings absence to experience.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my indebtedness to the Ontario College of Art & Design for granting me the opportunity to be among its first MFA graduates. The Criticism & Curatorial Practice program has proven rigorous, insightful, and rich with opportunity for both practice and idea. Program Director Rosemary Donegan and her attending faculty established a dialogue with our cohort that has been advancing and expert. I would like to acknowledge Professors Vladimir Spicanovic and Andy Patton for inciting my interest in and commitment to art writing that is, as Andy would say, "adequate to its object."

Secondly, I would like to convey my great gratitude to Professor Dot Tuer, with whom I established my project and who motivated me to pursue its end. With unflagging passion and complete encouragement, she provided me with the incentive to speak to what I love.

I would finally like to express my gratitude to Professor Charles Reeve. His consummate advise, unerring criticism, and constancy have been essential to my success. He tempered my more aureate impulses, stabilized my tumult, and made a better writer of me. Thank you for taking me on, Charles.

Dedication

To my mother, who is always here and now with me, no matter how far away, and whose traces in me are everlasting.

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Introduction

> *The interior is not only the universe but also the <u>étui</u> of the private person. To live means to leave traces. [. . .] The detective story that follows these traces comes into being.*[1]
> - Walter Benjamin
>
> *I know of a greek labyrinth which is a single straight line.*[2]
> - Jorge Luis Borges

Walter Benjamin wrote of the arcades as "something between a street and an *intérieur*."[3] He was not just referring to the architectural interiority of the nineteenth-century glass-domed sidewalks, but to the experience of walking them, of dropping through to a covered phantasmagoria that mirrored the interior, the private *étui*. The arcades' profound effect of isolation in the walker occurred despite the reflective and multifarious quality of its commodities and crowds. As such, the manifold had its stage in the arcades, and yet it took the "gaze of the alienated man" to see its crowding.[4] With the passages serving, as their main commodity, *Andenken*[5] (which translates as souvenir, but also memory), the flaneur became a chronicler and collector of the masses. Detecting and archiving his living history, he traced "the new, the already-past, and the ever-same."[6] The arcades internalized the world, and formed the passages for our seeking. Its walker made his object this search.

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[1] Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century, [Exposé of 1939]," *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002) 20
[2] Jorge Louis Borges, *Labyrinths* (London: Penguin, 1970) 53
[3] Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2006) 68
[4] Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century, [Exposé of 1939]," 15
[5] Qtd. in Anne Friedberg, "The Passage from Arcade to Cinema," *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 49
[6] Ibid 51

Though the arcades are virtually obsolete today, the city goes on producing them in us. Walking, we can become displaced from our 'here and now', and yet found in our histories, the leafy interior of what Benjamin called our "forest reserve of remembering."[7] Artists Sophie Calle and Janet Cardiff light upon these passages like the accidental tourists of their lives, and from these they create sites of narrative. The traces of their stories - flitting between dream and experience, truth and fiction - wink deceptively through their media. We catch our reflection and put our ear to the glass. We drop through.

In the following text I perform an exercise in art criticism. I consider the work of contemporary artists Calle and Cardiff through the lens of Benjamin's writings on the arcades, memory, aura and trace. Walking through his passages – both those in his text and for his subject – I discover the passage-production of Calle and Cardiff's work. Their narrative is the result of trace, making us "detectives against our will"[8] in our trail after the *andenken* of their vanished protagonists. The process of seeking supplies the directive for both artists, who leave what goes 'found' to their viewers and participants; the incidental commodities of their invitations. With Benjamin as my model, my thesis – at least topographically – is an art critical exercise in lyrical interpretation and archival constellation. Benjamin's writings on the auratic quality of the original work of art; the modern city and its archives; personal narrative and its traces; memory, myth, and allegory inform my contemporary interpretation. I consider the features of his aura that are present in works that *are* reproducible, or have for their 'object' a very immaterial thing – myth, traced narrative, sensorial experience, memory – and discover a practice

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[7] Benjamin, "Picturing Proust," *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008) 96
[8] As qtd. in Friedberg, 50

that produces distance in the immediate, and trace in the intangible. Benjamin's traced *étui* of the interior and the labyrinthine line of Borges's detective stories provide the guiding paradigms for my project; they give form to the idea of a living history's traces, and the network they lay before their passage extends.

Benjamin's most cited essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," presents both a practical and elegiac evaluation of an art medium's revolutionizing implications.[9] At once romantic and rational (and in both senses, political), his classification of aura is at the center of his distinction between a mechanically proliferated (reproducible) art form and one capable of an original. Ultimately a consideration of a politically liberated and accessible art and its more ritualized predecessor, Benjamin's text has proven prescient since its publication. His sentiment has been complicating, however, and the text has long been misunderstood and misused. Popular interpretations position Benjamin's distinction of aura as nostalgic, and his estimation of reproducible media, ascetic. The reverse is closer to the truth. Benjamin anticipated the precariousness of an evolving and increasingly dark history, and sought opportunities for mass agency in the face of a growing tyranny. Reproducible media and its possibilities for actuating revolution were his offering.

The political appeal at the essay's center takes root in the potentially democratizing effect of an origin-less media, qualitatively shifting the object from a cultic pole to one of display. Benjamin applied his media-specific arguments to a comment on Fascism's aestheticized politics and the possibilities of mass media for democratizing means. His characterization of the original work of art, however, and its

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[9] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 36

implications for our reverential codes, is significant in isolation from his greater argument. I want to assert such an isolated consideration, and clarify that where Benjamin's definition of aura is of use to me, his application of it is not. I will apply his characterization of aura to what I consider to be both contradictory and emblematic examples of its presence in a process-centered contemporary art practice. As a result, I dwell on the tenets of these origin-less media, rather than push forward with their example as Benjamin does. In the moment of Benjamin's essay, a history was at once distinguished and cautioned against; for my purposes, a practice opened out.

The potential extensions and embodiments of aura are at work in Benjamin's very definition of the term. Striking at the transcendent quality inherent to an original work of art, Benjamin states that "Even with the most perfect reproduction, *one thing* stands out: the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in the place where it is at this moment."[10] Benjamin believed that without the here and now, a work falls "beyond the province of genuineness."[11] A long-standing fascination with "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," evinced in its recurring application in cultural criticism, is rooted in our desire to see the tenets of aura extended. Cultural theorist and art writer Boris Groys recently made a point of this in his essay, "The Topology of Contemporary Art." He writes, "Our contemporary condition cannot be reduced to being a 'loss of the aura' to the circulation of ritual beyond 'here and now'."[12] Instead, Groys observes an essential loophole in reproducible media's problem of placelessness: he

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[10] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 6
[11] Ibid
[12] Boris Groys, "The Topology of Contemporary Art," *Antinomies of Art and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) 76

asserts that the moment a work is installed, it establishes an original among its generations. With the difference between an original and a copy being one of topology, installation provides inscription. "Reproduction means dislocation, deterritorialization;"[13] the installation of a work locates it, providing a 'here and now' by fixing it in place. In conversation with Groys at the recent *Art +Religion* conference, hosted by the Musée d'art contemporain (Montreal, April 2010), I asked him if his argument implicated the presence of aura in reproducible media. He replied, "One hundred percent."

While Groys offered a solution to the problem of site in reproducible media, the issue of its lacking provenance remained. Provenance establishes the defining quality of aura, providing distance in the immediate and material object through its history. Benjamin asks, "What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be."[14] Robert P. Harrison condenses the essential and paradoxical quality of an artwork's perceivable distance in his short story on Benjamin, "Pietá:" "We never see how the past saw the world. What we see in the work that comes down to us from another age is the pathos of distance that separates us from the past – a distance revealed in the traces of its age and the tangible evidence of its having endured in the world."[15] For Benjamin, the distancing tenet of an original work of art arrives with its provenance. But is this distance possible in an unfixed or reproducible work of art? Can provenance be accumulated in a moment? These questions motivated my consideration of a contemporary art practice that falls at the interstices of Benjamin's qualifications of aura – between distance and presence, and

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[13] Groys 73
[14] Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," *Selected Writings II, Pt.2 1931-34* (Harvard University Press, 1999) 518
[15] Robert P. Harrison, "Pietá," *Mapping Benjamin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003) 316

reproducibility and originality.

Benjamin made two distinctions on which my considerations pivot. The first is the abovementioned original work of art's distancing faculty. The second is the essential contrast he made between 'trace' and 'aura'. He writes, "The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us."[16] I understand the experience of distance – and its material insignia, trace – to be Benjamin's underlying aesthetic faculty through which we might "rediscover a lost appreciation of myth," recover the significance of narrative frames (like allegory), and truly regard history.[17]

Where Benjamin's was a material dialectic, with the distance of aura rooted in an original work of art that had accrued provenance and bore its history in its very objecthood, I am engaged in exploring the production of distance in artwork that stresses process. As I demonstrate, the experience of distance can occur through storytelling, memorial experience, and the temporal frame that both require. Reproducible media, while not essential to these correspondences, does not hamper the uniqueness of their successful realization. In reinterpreting aura as process, and shifting the focus from the object to the subject, I relocate Benjamin's characterization of aura from absence to experience. The ambulatory and memorial work of Calle and Cardiff opens such a space for reinterpretation.

Cardiff and partner George Bures Miller are Canadian artists whose practice spins story. Their work takes the form of auditory walks that outfit the 'viewer' with a headset

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[16] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 447

[17] Joseph Mali, "The Reconciliation of Myth: Benjamin's Homage to Bachofen," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (January 1999) 165-87, 170

and taped narrative (*Her Long Black Hair,* 2005); museum-stationed *tableaux vivants* (*Opera for a Small Room,* 2005); and works that bridge both the museum and the street, such as the telescopic 'cinema' of *Westfälisches Landesmuseum* (1997). Calle is a French artist whose practice manifests in private or transient settings (on trains, in beds or the streets), her documentation plainly descriptive and journalistic, if inconclusive. Her process, like that of Cardiff's, at once marks and makes the work. The pieces of Calle's that I focus on – *The Bronx* (1980), *Les Fantomes* (1989-91), *Les Dormeurs* (1996) and *The Detachment/Die Entfernung: A Berlin Travel Guide* (1997) – present active archives. Whether personal or collective, histories are negotiated in Calle's practice. Similarly, Cardiff's audiowalks, such as *Her Long Black Hair*, which I discuss at length in chapter one, effect an archive in its palimpsestic narrative. Voices, whether historic or contemporary, insightful or interruptive, weave through Cardiff's directives and reflections. Our individual experience and sensorial reaction, then, responds not just to Cardiff, nor incident, but to a crowd of figures among whom we attempt to advance. The difference between the two artists' archival exercises, however, is that where Calle returns her 'dossiers' to the museum in order to piece together the stories – however unresolved – Cardiff's work ends with, and in, us. The museum provides an officiating 'ground zero' for her audiowalks, but when the viewer-participant returns, there is no epilogue offered. The space between lived event and its presentation feels emphasized. In the way that memories shape-shift over time, both Calle and Cardiff's narratives hang suspended between fantasy and recorded confession.

I turn to Benjamin's concern for 'living history' in distinguishing the narrative features of process in Calle and Cardiff. The ur-history of Benjamin's *Passagen-werk*

(*The Arcades Project*) centers on the "the trace of living history," especially that which "can be read from the surfaces of surviving objects."[18] As Susan Buck-Morss notes, this focus "introduces the significance of visual 'concreteness' in Benjamin's methodology of dialectical images."[19] Benjamin's concern for a living history was material in its dialectic, however, and as such it limited the possibility for immaterial effects. In particular, Benjamin neglected the potential in our "forest reserve of remembering" for an instantaneous production of distance.[20] The process-centered practices of Calle and Cardiff tap the memorial and receptive structures of their viewers and participants, opening a possibility for palimpsestic narrative, and creating depth through both separation and correspondence.

Working the seeking that connection requires, both artists make detectives of their viewers. Calle and Cardiff incite our interest through the screen or the speaker, with their chosen media (photography, text, audio and video) the distancing apparatuses that at once officiate and obfuscate their subject. These records, and the traces of maleficence that streak them, invite our scrutiny. For Benjamin, the tradition of the detective story is grounded in Edgar Allan Poe, with the flaneur its historical practitioner. From *One-Way Street* to *The Arcades Project* – and, most notably, in a short piece titled "Kriminalromane, auf Reisen" ("Crime Novels, on Travel") – Benjamin makes a claim for fictitious fear, distracting its readers and participants from the more "archaic fear of

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[18] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1991) 56
[19] Ibid
[20] Benjamin, "Picturing Proust," 96

the journey" through modern life at large.[21] Benjamin writes, "No matter what trace the

flaneur may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime."[22]

Lived experience limns our private interiors. Calle and Cardiff demonstrate a

preoccupation with these marked *étuis*, delivering their stories through photographic,

text-based, and recorded media that provide a parchment where the incidental can leave

its marks. Whether in the form of teasers or openings, fictions or confessions, storylines

inviting invention, or storylines baiting deception, detection is required. The fun in

Cardiff 's walks is in seeking the footprints and fragments, in picking up her dropped

threads. Calle's *Les Dormeurs* presents a poster work for the artist for similar reasons.

Journalistic and comprehensive in its material, *Les Dormeurs* tracks a subject that, while

present in form, is absent in essence. Her stalwart account of her absent subjects stresses

the gainless nature of the endeavor. Calle exercises control over the incidental; the marks

and leads she leaves are framed like clues. Cardiff perpetrates control, too, in the sense

that her audiowalks, soundscapes, and telescopic narratives are automated. But what

these pieces leave to chance is the *étui* that Benjamin details below – our personal lining

of sensory memory, intuitive intelligence, and remembered experience:

> The interior is not only the universe but also the *étui* of the private person. To live
> means to leave traces. In the interior these are emphasized. An abundance of
> covers and protectors, liners and cases is devised, on which the traces of objects
> of everyday use are imprinted. The traces of the occupant also leave their
> impression on the interior. The detective story that follows these traces comes into
> being.[23]

Through a constellation of theoretical, critical and lyrical perspectives, I consider

how the "unfinished separations" of Calle's documentation and Cardiff's

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[21] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 381
[22] Ibid 543
[23] Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century, [Exposé of 1939]," 171

correspondences inhabit the *space between*.[24] Benjamin's description of the arcades,

Borges's render of the labyrinth and Proust's soliciting of *memoire involontaires*

illustrate a few of the correspondences I draw between the work of my contemporary

artists and their living histories. Chapter one provides a study of Cardiff's audiowalk *Her*

Long Black Hair, and her museum installation (with partner Miller), *Opera for a Small*

Room. The two works lend themselves to a discussion of an active archive, with

Benjamin's writing on the arcades a framing device through which their memorial

palimpsests gain depth. The second chapter returns to Cardiff, her telescopic

Westfälisches Landesmuseum an important pairing with the constellation of Calle's *The*

Bronx, *Les Fantomes*, *Les Dormeurs* and *The Detachment/Die Entfernung: A Berlin*

Travel Guide. In this chapter, I propose the argument of my thesis, that the provenance

reproducible media lacks can be located in process. Since process implies a temporal

quotient, the distance that Benjamin stressed as a tenet of aura manifests in unfixed

media, and our recognition or experience of production interpolates us in its process.

The labyrinthine line we trace, and the detective story we both weave and

unravel, day to day – we only have metaphor available to us for the complexities of lived

experience, and the unlikelihood of narrative coherency. The seeking that correspondence

requires, and the process of turning event to story are the assignments with which we

wander the arcades of the interior. Calle and Cardiff plumb the depths of these arcades,

documenting their topography, and bringing shape to the process of pursuit. In the

following two chapters I consider these pursuits through the lens of Benjamin's *Arcades*,

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[24] Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 58

the 'world in miniature' wherein process produces history, and the traces of memory are

revealed.

Chapter 1

The Arcades' Interior in
Janet Cardiff's *Her Long Black Hair*

Early in Janet Cardiff's audiowalk *Her Long Black Hair* (2005), she directs us to consider the impossibility of walking in the present. "One foot moving into the future and the other into the past. Do you ever think about that? It's like our bodies are caught in the middle." I am walking around a pond near the south border of New York's Central Park when my footsteps dematerialize into a temporal pendulum. Cardiff seems to intuit this, asking me to keep my feet in synch with her recorded footsteps. "The hard part is staying in the present. Really being here." I have left the starting point at the Jose Martí statue too eagerly. I find myself steering through the park trying to anticipate the proper routes when she orders, after reflecting on the soft rain that is nowhere to be seen, "Get up. Walk with me." I race back to the start, tripping after her. I am already slipping into my own time as I begin to trace Cardiff's, her time never stable in itself. The distance between us grows exponentially as I stumble between direction and incident.

An hour-long journey that begins at Central Park South, *Her Long Black Hair* denatures a common walk into an "absorbing psychological and physical experience."[1] Winding through the park's nineteenth-century pathways, Cardiff retraces the footsteps of an enigmatic dark-haired woman. A weave of stream-of-consciousness observations, local history, and music (opera and gospel) form the narrative, with Cardiff's signature

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[1] "Janet Cardiff, *Her Long Black Hair*," Public Art Fund, Archived Project: 16 June –11 Sept. 2005, accessed 10 April 2010
http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/projects/05/cardiff/cardiff-05.html

interruptions and intrusions choreographed from everyday life. The walk uses binaural[2]

technology to achieve a precise three-dimensional sound modeled after the hearing ear,

"at once cinematic and non-linear."[3] Through this intimate technology, Cardiff recalls the

histories of eminent flaneurs, simultaneously streaking our experience with a detective

story whose subject has long been lost. I step through Cardiff's experience, losing myself

to find another. I eventually return to myself only to find me changed, the light of day

shifted, and the ground beneath my feet revealing manifold traces.

Janet Cardiff, *Her Long Black Hair,* 2005

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[2] Binaural sound is achieved through two separate microphones (transmitting through two separate channels) to produce a stereophonic effect; it gives the impression of the hearing ear.
[3] "Janet Cardiff, *Her Long Black Hair*," http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/projects/05/cardiff/cardiff-05.html

Central Park was designed in the mid-nineteenth century to simulate landscape painting.[4] Its rolling pathways and rocky hillocks produce a pastoral scene, despite the towers crowding its borders. At any given moment, a privileged vanishing point frames the view, though these reorganize themselves with each step forward. Cardiff both emphasizes and destabilizes these frames, creating a panorama of memory, history and landscape.[5] Through a series of historical gestures and the photographic protagonist we are made to consider at various turns, the panorama activates a phantasmagoria of walkers; the park becomes their – and our – arcade.

From the moment of their first appearance, the arcades tapped into the subjective experience, at once mirroring and distorting it. The *Illustrated Guide to Paris* from the early 1820s describes the emergence of the arcades as an invention of industrial luxury, wherein the "*passage* is the city, a world in miniature."[6] The arcades marked a paradigm shift for the urban centre, representing the synchronic moment of industry and individualism. Enjoying an alienation from himself and from others, the flaneur took up the arcades like a fun-house mirror – seeking reflection, but unable to identify his own subject. Benjamin first traced the subjective experience of the city in his 1935 essay "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in which he accounts for the development of the interior experience of the city through both the technologies and environments that stimulated it. Benjamin delineates a trajectory, from the panoramas that anticipated the

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[4] The park was designed by Calvert Vaux and Frederick L. Olmstead with the intent to produce sublime epiphanies in its walkers. See George Scheper, "The Reformist Vision of Frederick Law Olmsted and the Poetics of Park Design," *The New England Quarterly* (62.3, 1989): 369-402, 370

[5] A panorama being "the city open[ing] out, becoming landscape," wrote Benjamin. Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century [Exposé of 1935]," *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999) 6

[6] Qtd. by Benjamin, Ibid, 6

arcades, to the arcades that yielded the cinematic experience[7] – with each form further framing the reflexive and distracted experience of the urban environment. None produces a flitting between the interior and exterior experience quite as the arcades do, however. "The arcades are something between a street and an *intérieur*," Benjamin writes.[8] Through a consideration of the various historic forms that frame and evoke the urban dweller's interior experience, Cardiff's audiowalks take on a historic quality, though one that uniquely evades a temporal establishment of its own.

Noting that the city would do this "later, in subtler fashion, for the flaneurs," Benjamin wrote of the panorama's significance for the production of Paris's nineteenth-century arcades.[9] "One sought tirelessly, through technical devices, to make panoramas the scenes of a perfect imitation of nature."[10] Panoramas were life-size tableaux of natural environments whose representational form quelled the urban denizen's anxiety and distraction, offering a moment of stillness, reprieve, and often nostalgia. They produced frame. Benjamin recognized the succession that these still spectacles anticipated, corresponding them with cinematic form.[11] The panoramas[12] of the early nineteenth-

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[7] The cinematic quality Benjamin observed in the arcades is succinctly elucidated by Anne Friedberg in her chapter, "The Passage from Arcade to Cinema:" "Benjamin took the 'passages' as a succinct instantiation of the fragmentary nature of modernity – its hodgepodge accumulations, its uncanny juxtapositions, its 'theater of purchases' – and, above all, its curious temporality. The passage (and here it is important to retain the word *passage* – not arcade) was an architectural monument to *time* and its passing." From Friedberg's *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 47-94, 48-9.

[8] Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2006) 68

[9] Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century, [Exposé of 1935]," 6

[10] Ibid 5

[11] Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century, [Exposé of 1935]," 5; see also Michael W. Jennings, "Production, Reproduction, and Reception," *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2008) 16

[12] In their material form, panoramas were large circular tableaux painted in *trompe l'oeil*, originally designed to be viewed from the center of a rotunda. In 1799, the American engineer Robert Fulton introduced them in France. The Diorama (opened by Louis Daguerre and Charles Bouton in 1822 in Paris) was a subsequent form, with cloth transparencies bearing painted pictures that, by 1831, were being presented with various lighting effects. It was this installation that burned down in 1839, and, as Benjamin

century (and their subsequent manifestation in the Diorama) led to the arcades, introduced in 1822. The interior experience of the city quickly moved from the nostalgia and revery of panoramas to the phantasmagoria and distraction of the arcades. In each development from there on, "the gaze of the allegorist," as it fell on the city, was "the gaze of the alienated man."[13] Detachment and reflection, fragment and refraction: the tenets of the allegorical frame would become central motifs for Benjamin's understanding of the modern denizen.

Before panoramas disappeared in the 1820s (tellingly at the moment of the arcades' emergence), their significance was rooted in the city dweller's "attempt to bring the countryside into town."[14] This significance extended beyond a nostalgic amalgam, however. Panoramas and panoramic literature shared a foregrounding of anecdotal form against a common background. Benjamin describes panoramic literature, for instance, as evincing the earliest model of the flaneurs "botanizing on the asphalt."[15] Against a universal backdrop, the panoramic stage foregrounded the experiential and the personal; much like the arcades, the life-world of a simulated phantasmagoria beckoned new experiences. Benjamin organized these various forms of expression and frame around the essential qualities of the Baroque. Grounding much of his investigation in Charles Baudelaire, the Paris arcades, and the Baroque play of mourning, he compressed various historical sites to establish a continuity that was constellatory in nature.[16]

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notes, directly led to Daguerre's invention of the photograph. See Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, *notes*, 218n11

[13] Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century, [Exposé of 1939]," *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999) 15

[14] Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century [Exposé of 1935]," 6

[15] Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, 68

[16] Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, 135

The Baroque qualities of temporal instability, dialectical imagery, and reflexivity provided an essential structure that evinced a new historical model for Benjamin – one opposed to the traditional trajectory.[17] His theories proved prescient. Cultural criticism has demonstrated a longstanding affair with the Baroque style and sensibility. Various arguments for the Baroque's continued presence (past its 'home' in the Counter-Reformation of seventeenth century Italy) speak to the Baroque aesthetic itself, and its expansive character. Contemporary art historian Mary Henninger-Voss argues that its unfixed position crosses genre, style and sensibility, with its audience participating "in a labyrinthine world whose possibilities are only half-charted, and where the technical and the 'spiritual' assume a similar aspect."[18] Historically unconventional citations of the Baroque first cropped up in modern criticism, with its proponents – from Jean Rousset and Wylie Sypher to the more contemporary examples of Gilles Delueze and Mieke Bal – encouraged by the example of Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928).[19] This, Benjamin's longest completed text, argued for a paradigm shift in the interpretation of history that would recognize two things: The eschatological character of the Baroque frame, in which the evolution of event is accretive rather than temporal;[20] and allegory's centrality to this atemporal structure, and its ongoing relevance in reflexive motifs. I will return to the allegorical frame and its contemporary applications in my second chapter, but wish to introduce here the project of narrative-through-palimpsest, a spatial structure through which history's significance "comes together in a flash."[21]

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[17] Jennings, "Introduction," *The Writer of Modern Life*, 12
[18] Mary Henninger-Voss, "Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment," *Technology and Culture* (47.3, 2006) 657-658, 657
[19] Christopher Braider, *Baroque Self-Invention and Historical Truth* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004) 5
[20] Benjamin based this consideration in the Counter-Reformation era German play of mourning, the *Trauerspiel*. See Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London; New York: Verso Press, 1963)
[21] Benjamin, as qtd. by Jennings, "Introduction," *The Writer of Modern Life*, 12

Cardiff and her partner George Bures Miller are often written about in terms of

their works' Baroque sensibility.[22] Daniel Birnbaum, in his essay contribution to *The*

Paradise Institute, explains the association as linked to the Baroque style's stability

"constantly being called into question."[23] While the Baroque is generally understood by

art historians as aesthetic (one of excess), an intellectual and philosophical rending has

long attempted to involute the "'pleats' and 'folds' that form the dominant motif of

Baroque ornament" into something more expansive: character.[24] The Baroque tenets of

specularity, reflexivity, self-involution and destruction[25] invite a historical malleability

fitting to its later incarnations. Benjamin acknowledged the Baroque "doctrine" as one

that "generally conceives history as created event."[26] Appropriately, Cardiff's audiowalks

conjure historic anecdote such that we walk in step with Baudelaire or Harry Thomas[27] as

truly as with Cardiff and her contemporary protagonist. Similarly, Cardiff and Miller's

museum installation pieces, such as *Opera for a Small Room* (2005), and *Westfälisches*

Landesmuseum (as I demonstrate in chapter two) both establish and uproot the archive.

Temporal constellations flicker through their media, with the 'here and now'

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[22] Daniel Birnbaum, "The Paradise Institute," *The Paradise Institute: Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller* (Winnipeg: Plug In, 2001) 5. See also Marjory Jacobson, "Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller," *Sensorium* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006)

[23] Birnbaum 5

[24] Braider 5

[25] Braider condenses these aspects well, writing, "There is the well-documented *specularity* of baroque culture, a self-regarding temper whose most explicit expression is the era's obsession with mirrors as both a source of intriguing optical effects and an inexhaustible reservoir of analogies and examples. The mirror motif is related to the widespread taste for *mises en abyme*, elaborate framing devices (interpolated tales, pictures of pictures, plays within plays) that enable a work to incorporate its own image in the body of what it depicts. And it further coordinates with the major themes of dream and illusion, the era's compulsive interest in ghosts, twins and doubles, and the tireless manufacture of ironic reversals, strident antitheses and uncanny inversions dramatizing the deeply entrenched dualisms of baroque style." 7-8

[26] Benjamin, "The Antinomies of Allegorical Exegesis," *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2008) 175

[27] Cardiff provides excerpts from the slave testimony of Harry Thomas, who in 1850 escaped war and made it to Canada to on foot.

simultaneously questioned and asserted. Cardiff locates this temporal *trompe l'oeil* in an

established lineage:

> The rhetoric around illusionism hasn't really changed since the renaissance. People were amazed at a linear perspective and then everybody got used to that and then there was the hyper reality of photography, and then stereo photograph, film, and virtual reality. Every generation discovers and understands a way of looking in a different, progressive way but we're really talking about the same questions.[28]

Cardiff understands her precedents well, and plays out their relationships (to one another,

and to her work) in a constellatory manner, as Benjamin did in so much of his writing.

Both Benjamin and Cardiff bring historical figures to meet contemporary characters,

these pairings like so many arranged marriages wherein new correspondences become

explicit. As Jennings observed of Benjamin's historical approach:

> The resolutely historical nature of Benjamin's project is driven thus not by any antiquarian interest in the cultural forms of past epochs, but by the conviction that any meaningful apprehension of the present day is radically contingent upon our ability to read the constellations that arise from elements of a past that is synchronous with our own time and its representative cultural forms.[29]

However large his scope, Benjamin's focus consistently returned to the

individual. The ways in which industry, modernism, consumerism or war effected the

private denizen, the audience, the artist: Benjamin continued to bring the monumental

back to the singular. He discussed the arcades and the life-world of the panorama's

windowless rotunda in terms of how these manifested in the flaneur. For Benjamin, the

exterior could not operate independently of its inverse.

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[28] Cardiff (and Miller) in conversation with Brigitte Kölle, "I Wanted to Get Inside the Painting," *The Paradise Institute*, 9

[29] Jennings, "Production, Reproduction, and Reception," 17

The interior is assigned its arcades in Cardiff's walks. The *étui*, Benjamin's

paradigm for the casing in which we leave our traces, is made exterior through evocations

of memory, history and provocations of the sensorium that connect us to our immediate

surroundings. Whether the self doubles or the "dummy" empties, the desired effect is "to

bring in, over and over again, that other thing."[30] Indeed the Central Park walk produces

an overlay of various landscapes matched by a memorial palimpsest of figures – from

both Cardiff's personal history ("There's a dog. I miss my dog. I had a dream about her

last night that woke me up"), and our shared history (at turns she remembers Baudelaire,

Thomas, a nameless Iraqi mourner and Søren Kierkegaard). Cardiff seeks refuge in a

crowd of her making. As Benjamin writes, "The crowd [is a] veil through which the

familiar city beckons to the flaneurs as phantasmagoria – now a landscape, now a

room."[31] The directing figure amidst Cardiff's phalanstery, however, is one predicated on

both chance and choice. She is the one, ultimately, who clears the paths of all intruders,

ironically stressing our experience as solitary and incommunicable through her own. The

temporal paradox of Cardiff's work veers around her alone.

Remaining uniquely silent throughout the multiloquent narrative, the woman with

the long black hair directs the walk. As Cardiff describes it, she discovered our nameless

protagonist in a flea market photo bin. Locating the woman (seen in three images that

Cardiff directs us to hold up at various moments) in Central Park, Cardiff structured the

walk around the places where the photos were taken. (This cannot have been easy, as the

sites amount to particular bends in tree roots, and rock profiles.) With her chance

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[30] Benjamin wrote of Proust: "He was insatiable when it came to emptying the dummy, the self, at a stroke in order to bring in, over and over again, that other thing." From "Picturing Proust," *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008) 97
[31] Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, 40

imperative in hand, Cardiff follows the woman, and we follow Cardiff, all of us remarking upon the absence of *her* trace. "Now we're walking over where she stood. One time across another. Her shadow is walking towards us." My knees chill as I step through these storied absences, myself layering another in passing.

Works such as *Her Long Black Hair* exacerbate our awareness of the pluralism of lived experience, and its paralleling with memory, nostalgia, and *reverie*. In an interview with Brigitte Kölle, Cardiff acknowledges this pluralistic and memorial experience as being the object of the walks, saying, "We're trying to connect right away to the remembered experiences that your body knows."[32] In this same interview, Miller notes the indirect way that *reverie* through digital media can make the present experience more immediate, more 'lived': "I like the idea that we are building a simulated experience in the attempt to make people feel more connected to real life . . ."[33] This aspect of presence-through-return is exemplified in the Central Park walk, wherein we follow our nameless protagonist only to find ourselves where she was, our presence the stand-in for her absence.

Partway into the walk Cardiff asks me to hold up a photograph. The woman with the long black hair is pulling a strand away from her cheek, half-smiling. Cardiff comments on how the woman looks unprepared for the shot, the photographer catching her a moment before she was ready. She goes on, "What happened after the camera clicked? Maybe she laughed. Maybe you went over and kissed her. Maybe he put his fingers through her long black hair, whispered in her ear: *I shall plunge my head adoring*

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[32] Cardiff, "I Wanted to Get Inside the Painting," 13
[33] Ibid 15

drunkenness into this black ocean where the other is imprisoned."[34] "That's Baudelaire,"

she says. The protypical flaneur (and as such, walker), Baudelaire enters as a key figure

for Cardiff, as he was for Benjamin. She does not stay on him for long, though, flitting

between the historic and the immediate and the contingencies that bind the two. In one

brief moment we have shifted from a hypothetical moment involving an assumed

photographer and his subject, to an interpolation ("you went over"). Then, just as quickly,

Baudelaire is rushed to our side, speaking through a male voice, "*where the other is*

imprisoned." Cardiff does not linger in her constructed romance for long; she pops out

and flatly reminds us: "That's Baudelaire." As quickly as this series of episodic

condensations began, I am brought back to where I stand.

A significant aspect of the Baroque character, as identified by Benjamin, was its

"aim to invest the most profane things with an elevated significance."[35] Baroque theatre

inculcated allegory in even the most banal of props and individual words with "[A]

remarkable, but obscure, power."[36] But, as Michael W. Jennings and Brigid Doherty

write in their introduction to Benjamin's essay on the subject, "Because the relationship

between meaning and sign was wholly subjective – the product of the allegorist's

imagination, rather than any natural or inherent significance – the meaning of these

allegorical objects was wholly arbitrary."[37] Singular components of this decimated

language become what Benjamin terms *schrift*, a text that "strives to become image," or a

script-image (*schriftbild*) that is left an "amorphous fragment."[38] As such, the narrative or

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[34] Cardiff quotes section XIII, "La Chevelure," from Baudelaire's "Les Fleurs du Mal." See *Selected Poems* (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 1995) 20
[35] Jennings, "Introduction," *The Writer of Modern Life*, 20
[36] Ibid
[37] Ibid
[38] Benjamin, "The Antinomies of Allegorical Exegesis," 176

sentimental 'completion' of the allegorical object is only fulfilled by our reading, our

reverie. "Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else.

With this possibility a destructive but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is

characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance."[39] At a point of

confusion in Cardiff's Central Park walk, where a carousel in front of me is a tunnel in

Cardiff's path, and I begin to worry that I am no longer with her, she says, "It is the

accidental and insignificant things in life which are significant. Kierkegaard wrote that.

He was a walker." I concede some anxiety to this thought, and try to steer myself free of

direction.

Cardiff's walks stress a Blanquian effect of eternal return,[40] with "the number of

our doubles infinite in time and space."[41] My doubling, and experience of pluralistic

perambulation causes me some consternation as I catch myself attributing the smell of

lilacs to Cardiff's sensory provocations. But this cannot be! I intervene to remember what

observations are my own, what sensory effects can only be produced in my time, and not

another's. In the moment of this struggle for singularity, there is an effect of isolation in

these walks, as the cool press of a recording device reminds me. I am fighting to be

singular, and yet I have only ever been alone.

The conception of the soul as a '*monda*' – an individual unit that "contains the

entire universe as an infinitely folded space" – effects an esoteric relevancy with this

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[39] Jennings, "Introduction," *The Writer of Modern Life*, 18

[40] Eternal return (also known as "eternal recurrence") is the concept that the universe has been recurring, and will continue to recur, in a self-similar form an infinite number of times. See Benjamin on the concept as posited by Louis Auguste Blanqui and Friedrich Nietzsche in "Boredom Eternal Return," *The Arcades Project*, 109-21

[41] Qtd. by Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century, [Exposé of 1939]," 25-26, from Louis Auguste Blanqui, *Instructions pour une Prise d'Armes: L'Eternité par les asters-Hypothèse astronomique* (Paris: Société Encyclopédique Française, 1972) 167-69. Benjamin first came upon this text by Blanqui at the end of 1937.

work, which depends on the tensions between a polyvalent experience and a narrowly narrative one.[42] As Cardiff destabilizes the Central Park walk with questions of temporality, the folds turn in on themselves, producing the *monda* – "the autonomy of the inside, an inside without an outside."[43]

Nineteenth-century Parisian shopping arcade

Ultimately, a captive-holding narrative juxtaposed against the streetscapes and park interiors results in a paradox: we never get outside. Jorge Luis Borges observes in his short story "Death and the Compass," "I know of one Greek labyrinth which is a

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[42] Birnbaum 5

[43] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 28

single straight line."[44] The labyrinthine quality of memory – but also of the urban

experience, as Benjamin observed – is one attributed to the flaneurs' experience of the

arcades. "The labyrinth is the habitat of the dawdler. The path followed by someone

reluctant to reach his goal."[45] In the way that labyrinths double back before revealing

their end, Cardiff's audiowalks fold and twist before we are returned to ourselves, altered.

Daniel Birnbaum writes in his introduction to *The Paradise Institute*, "Time is the

river that sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger that destroys me, but I am the

tiger…"[46] As he demonstrates, Cardiff's ultimate challenge to her audience is to keep a

sense of self-determination while experiencing her works' intensively polyvalent senses

of time and narrative. The threat of losing ourselves – whether *in* ourselves or to her – is

a simulated madness. As such, in work of this nature, with determination, 'dreamwork'

and condensed histories at its center, certain elements of psychoanalysis come into play.

Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* provides the lexicon for Cardiff's

themes of memorial fragment and narrative. Significantly quoting Hamlet ("That

undiscovered country from whose bourne / No traveler returns"), Freud recognized the

danger in following a dream remnant to a narrative conclusion.[47] "Dreamwork" is

positioned as the result of dream displacement and dream condensation.[48] The first

carries the dream fragments away from their disorganized origin, the other presses them

into narrative. These narratives, however – the result of our parrying and weaving only

that which is remembered – should be regarded with skepticism. Freud remained aporetic

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[44] Borges, "Death of a Compass," *Everything and Nothing* (USA: New Directions Publishing, 1962) 65
[45] Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, 146
[46] Birnbaum 7
[47] Qtd. by Sigmund Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 235. From *Hamlet*, III 1.8, 1-2
[48] Ibid

of producing narrative from dream determination, distinguishing "dream-thought" from dreams, with the former only possible after time and consideration. "This makes it utterly clear that if an element is determined many times over, its entry into the dream-content is bound to be made much easier. For this mediating factor to be formed, our attention is displaced from what is actually meant to something closely associated with it."[49]

Such distancing as a means to logic finds relevance in Benjamin's discussion of the urban experience. In his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin discriminates between "long experience (*Erfahrung)*" and "isolated experience (*Erlebnis).*"[50] Jennings condenses this distinction in his introduction to Benjamin's *The Writer of Modern Life*. He presents long experience as a coherent body of knowledge, which, like spoken narrative, carries from generation to generation, and isolated experience as one "bound to the shocks."[51] While Benjamin was discussing the experiences spurred by "the individual strolling amid the urban masses,"[52] Freud's dreamworld and the flaneurs' phantasmagoria share common ground in that, upon absorption and distance, their fragments condense to form sequence. Jacques Lacan, writing on Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, observed, "Our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follows."[53] Similarly, isolated experience, "far from being retainable or transmissible, is in fact parried by consciousness," writes Jennings.[54] The verity of

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[49] Ibid 226
[50] Jennings, "Introduction," *The Writer of Modern Life*, 20
[51] Ibid
[52] Ibid
[53] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981) 75
[54] Jennings, "Introduction," *The Writer of Modern Life*, 20

dreams, then, like the experience of the arcades, lies in the moment of its occurrence. With distance, with *seeing*, its truth is at a remove.

Benjamin made the connection between the arcade's enclosing structure and the unseeing quality of the dream in *The Arcade Projects*, noting, "Arcades are houses or passages having no outside – like the dream.''[55] His refrain that the arcades are "something between a street and an *intérieur*" correlates walking the arcades with the interiority of a dream. Mirroring the experience of Benjamin's arcade, Faust, one of Freud's frequent literary allusions, remarks upon the scuttling quality of dreams: "One thrust of this foot, and a thousand threads / Invisibly shift, and hither and tither / The shuttles dart – just once he treads / And a thousand strands all twine together."[56] As though a direct demonstration of this evocation, Cardiff's walk simulates (and stimulates) the fracturing and condensing aspect of dream-thought. Here, a remembered dog, a dreamed anxiety; there, the binding prose of Baudelaire, the directing presence of an elusive protagonist. She winds us through the labyrinths of incident and memory, but their accident is only true in our reception. As such, her 'long experience' provokes our 'short experience'. Walking the work, we are "bound to the shocks," locked in the foreground of Cardiff's panorama.

Responding to the self-forgetting and disorienting anxiety produced in the industrialized and capitalizing city, Benjamin discerned one way out. Where the phantasmagoria distracted – "now a landscape, now a room" – such that "all traces of individual existence are in fact effaced,"[57] the detective story offered an apparent

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[55] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 406
[56] Qtd. in *Interpretation of Dreams*, 216. From the dialogue between Mephisto and the student in the scene *'Faust's Study (II)'* of *Faust, Part One.*
[57] Jennings, "Introduction," *The Writer of Modern Life*, 13

solution. Benjamin positions the detective genre's emergence in the mid-nineteenth century as somewhere between providing an excuse for the flaneurs to shadow and stare, and giving them an incentive to move through the city.[58] (In either case, it excused the period's popular – if casual – practice of physiognomy.[59]) Benjamin's determination was rooted in his observation that the city's walkers required an escape from the city's phantasmagoria; it was the flaneurs' reaction to a deep-seated unease with the "threatening aspects of urban life."[60] Jennings, in his introduction to Benjamin's *The Writer of Modern Life*, explains the effect:

> If, in the dreamlike space of the urban phantasmagoria, the denizens of the city were nonetheless confronted with a series of shocks and an attendant sense of unease, the detective story, with its reliance on ratiocination, provided an apparent solution, one that 'allowed the intellect to break through this emotion-laden atmosphere'.[61]

As with the detective in the flaneurs, Cardiff's walk also demands we become a detective. The consummate labyrinth-weaver, Borges portentously warned of the detective's trespass through the maze: "Along that line so many philosophers have lost themselves that a mere detective might well do so, too."[62] For all of Cardiff's philosophical gestures, her eminent character is the detective, a seeking figure fated to meet his end in obfuscation. In *Her Long Black Hair*, Cardiff makes detectives of us if only to emphasize the vanity and fruitlessness of her project. The woman we search for came and went; she was never lost, she never needed us. As her photographer evinces,

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[58] See Tom Gunning, "The Exterior as *Intérieur*: Benjamin's Optical Detective," *boundary 2* (30.1 Spring, 2003) 105-129
[59] The art of determining one's character from his or her outward appearance or countenance.
[60] Ibid 112
[61] Qtd. in Jennings, "Introduction," *The Writer of Modern Life*, 14
[62] Borges, "Garden of Forking Paths," *Everything and Nothing* (USA: New Directions Publishing, 1962) 141

she had company; despite Cardiff's attempts to form a crowd – from history, from dreams – we are not so lucky as the woman we seek.

Not long into the walk, I lost Cardiff. I knew it had happened when she directed me to "keep going straight," and I stopped short; straight was not an option. I pressed pause on the recorder and tried to find my way back to the last place I had been with her. Where had our paths forked? How had I strayed? Where was she now? Memorial exercises of the kind that Cardiff constructs are only successful when, as Benjamin wrote of Proust's memorial project, "The story is so riveting that one believes one is no longer the listener but the actual person day-dreaming."[63] But rather than day-dreaming, I was panicking. The former balance between my time and my narrators' had decidedly tipped in my favor; but I did not want to be alone yet, nothing had been concluded. And while I was not lost in the park (which is to say, not lost to myself), I was lost to Cardiff.

A similar sense of abandonment permeates *Opera for a Small Room*, a "contemporary make-believe" erected like a fort in the museum.[64] The piece appears as a boarded-up box, perforated with glass windows and peepholes and surrounded by twenty-four antique loudspeakers. Miller's voiceover is spliced with arias, pop tunes, punk scraps, cult film drop-ins, "and the melancholic ambience of unrequited love."[65] There are nearly two thousand records stacked around the room, as well as eight record players, which turn on and off in time with the soundtrack. The sound of someone moving and

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[63] Max Unold qtd. by Benjamin, "Picturing Proust," 96
[64] Klaus Bußmann et al (eds), *Contemporary Sculpture: Projects in Münster 1997* (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1997) 58
[65] Ibid

Cardiff and Miller, *Opera for a Small Room*, 2005

sorting albums plays while a cardboard head rotates electromechanically. Klaus

Bubmann writes of the artists, "In the virtual realities of Cardiff and Miller, the ultimate

imaginary where scripts are deformed with fragmented tales filtered through a flood of

information, plots may never conclude."[66] The viewer, encouraged by the soundtrack and

the crude, rotating monument to a figure, becomes a protagonist at the scene's centre.

The artists give us the pieces, but we provide the conclusions, the fantasy. Miller stresses

this quality of development and abandonment: "What is interesting to me is that if you go

to a theatre play, the set is quite often better than the actual play. So we started from that

point: we're going to build a set, we're going to animate with light, sound – and we're

going to forget about the play."[67] The set, while situated in the museum and mechanically

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[66] Ibid

[67] Thomas Trummer (ed.), *Voice and Void* (Vienna: The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 2007) 100

operated – in both ways, fixed – invokes our narrative desire. Cardiff and Miller's work

always requires action.

Benjamin, in his consideration of the modern city's potential for isolated

experience, wrote of the space where "building and action" meet. Aware of the

multifarious potential and significance that a single place carried, he wrote:

> Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In
> everything is preserved the potential space of play [*Spierlraum*] that would make
> it possible to become a site [*Schauplatz*] of new, unforeseen constellations. The
> definitive, the characteristic are avoided. No situation appears just as it is,
> intended as such forever; no form asserts its own 'just so, and not otherwise'.[68]

New unforeseen constellations abound in Cardiff and Miller's projects. We

demonstrate our participation less so than we experience it. Ron Burnett writes on our

relationship to what he terms "image-scapes:" "The gaps among creativity, viewing, and

interpretation are not as broad as might appear to be the case. There is no moment of

interaction that is not also a moment of creativity, and this is perhaps the most important

link."[69] The brilliance of Cardiff and Miller's work is that they underline the moment that

we step over, or begin to supplant the narrative. Though such transitions are encouraged,

they are nonetheless like raised seams. The spinning cardboard head in *Opera* would

seem to be making a joke of this, pointing out our transference and expectation as we

invest ourselves in the work. Similarly in the audiowalks, phrases like, "Who's there?

What's that behind you?" are not uncommon – we are meant to whip around only to find

ourselves, our thin and eager desire like a wake of smoke. Cardiff:

> In my walks you often have the situation where two people are separated by
> media. This leads to a sort of dislocation through time and space. Also, it gets

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[68] Benjamin, "Naples," *Selected Writings 1 1913-26* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996) 416
[69] Ron Burnett, *How Images Think* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004) 82

echoed in this person you're listening to, who is part of you, but separate from you, so there is this continual cyclical repetition and layering.[70]

The emphasized distance in Cardiff and Miller's media is one of import for Benjamin's distinction of 'aura', if conversely strained through a media in opposition to Benjamin's other defining tenets. Benjamin distinguished the defining quality of aura as one of produced distance. "What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be."[71] Benjamin positioned the provenance of an original work of art as its distancing apparatus. To recognize an object's history, for Benjamin, was to observe the distance it has traveled to arrive at this *here*, this *now*, the archive ending with us. Such effects, however, are not limited to the immovable object. We carry a personal history with us, which can have the effect of aura wherever we find ourselves. Like collective memory, and a city's storied topography and engineering, we are an archive of palimpsestic traces. We keep making room for another text, but the parchment of memory does not lose its citations.

In attempting to understand the depths of Marcel Proust's exhaustive text *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Benjamin wrote, "The laws of remembering affected the very scale of the work."[72] So too with Cardiff, who can plumb a city's depths, and ours, in the short time it takes to walk with her. The measure of the work, its length and depth, depend on our reserves of memory and our construction of new correspondences. The *memoir involontaires* that Proust strove to document are, as Benjamin observed, the

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[70] Gabrielle Cram et al., *Other Than Yourself (*Köln: Walther König; New York: Distribution, 2008) 72
[71] Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," *Selected Writings II, Pt.2 1931-34* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 518
[72] Benjamin, "Picturing Proust," 94

"rejuvenating force [. . .] where things past are reflected in the freshly dew-drenched 'now'."[73] How long the walk takes to complete may not vary much between its participants, but the extent of its effects depends entirely on the 'laws of remembering', its results varying and difficult to communicate. The work enters the interior, and, if successful in its scope, remains there alone.

Lost to Cardiff for some time, I removed my shoes and found a rock. I sat down and resumed listening to her walk. She spoke:

> I think about the squatters that lived here during the depression in the 1930s. Over two thousand homeless people moved into the park. Now many live in underground tunnels all over the city. There's a whole city beneath us. Deep in the many layers; in some areas over ten stories deep. It's like in our minds. Deep layers we only see in our dreams. *Amongst your heavy mane.* [. . .] *For are you not the oasis where I dream. The gourd where in great troughs I gulp the wine of memory.*

I thought of Benjamin, for whom the Paris arcades were to become the "key for the underworld of *this* century," and into which he predicted Paris would sink.[74] But it did not; the arcades simply came apart.

Benjamin wrote: "The phantasmagorias of the interior – which, for the private man, represents the universe – bring together the far and away and the long ago."[75] The arcades, once capable of powerfully evoking the interior, now remain there alone. And while a few of their ruins stand amidst Paris's new development, they merely maintain the husk of a city's memory. In *Her Long Black Hair*, a city's memory is alluded to as the *intérieur* lights up like so many gas-lit passages. Cardiff brings together the 'far and away and the long ago', and we walk through, trying not to lose our way.

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[73] Ibid 105-6
[74] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 83
[75] Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century, [Exposé of 1935]," 9

Chapter 2

Process as Provenance: The production of distance in Calle and Cardiff

Before Sophie Calle acknowledged her practice as such, she archived. As Yve-Alain Bois wrote of her earliest piece, *Les Dormeurs*, her subjects "lent themselves to Sophie Calle's archival impulse."[1] She charted their traces and risen utterances, making notes every hour, taking photographs and standing guard for the switch. Twenty-eight people rotated through her bed. Some grew bored, some were distrustful, some were there for the wrong reasons. Most slept. In cataloguing *Les Dormeurs* (1979) through both her journalistic media and the spoken myth that Calle's works perpetuate, the French artist mapped distance, tracked vanishing points. It was an archive of absence through presence. And while even the incoherency of sleeping speech provides documentation, Calle's records assert that the archive is only a history's risen utterances, its traces. *Les Dormeurs*, Calle's first exhibited work, evinced what would become the artist's signature tropes: cloaked narrative threads, interrogated intimacies, and secrets displayed on public platforms. Whether following a sleeper through the night, or a stranger through the streets, Calle seems to fixate on the vanishing point.[2]

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[1] Yve-Alain Bois, "Character Study: Sophie Calle," *Artforum* (April 2000) 126–30, 127

[2] This is true to the extent that, "when a news item described the disappearance of a woman, whom, it would seem, once worked at the Pompidou Centre, and whose papers included declarations to the effect that she wanted to live Sophie Calle's life, the artist had no option but to associate this tragic tale with her exhibition in the form of a new work (*Une jeune femme disparaît / A Woman Vanishes*), which also includes missing-person notices displayed throughout the building." Alfred Pacquement, Preface to *M'As-tu vue* (Paris: Centre Pompidou de Paris, c2003) 15

Sophie Calle, *Les Dormeurs*, 1979

Both allusion and memory are about the process of seeking. The first seeks

correspondence, the second seeks return; neither quite grasps the thing they follow. In his

assessment of Calle's work, Jean Baudrillard brings this comparison together: "Following

someone is equivalent to the secret in the space of a city, as allusion is equivalent to the

secret in speech, or the *déjà-vécu* is equivalent to the secret in time."[3] But where

Baudrillard observes *Les Dormeurs* to be an exercise in acquisition ("Their dreams, their

boredom, their eventual uneasiness, their sexual fantasies belong to Calle"[4]), I consider it

an acknowledgment of provenance without ledger. When consciousness flickers out,

Calle fills the absence with ellipses. Her event horizon emits no light. She pursues her

sleepers like she tracks her stranger in *Suite vénetienne*, documents the missing in *Les

fantomes*, and cites memorial ruin in *The Detachment/Die Entfernung: A Berlin Travel

Guide*: inevitably concluding in her apartness.

Calle's choice of medium best demonstrates this separation. Photography, the

proof and preservation of disappearance, is central to her practice. Working with the

"technical support" that, as Rosalind Krauss observes, "is the investigative journalist's

documentary research,"[5] she stresses the elusive quality of her subjects with a means that

typically defies absence. Her signature work, *Suite vénitienne* (1980), in which Calle

recounts following a stranger to Venice, demonstrates the artist's titillation with her

subject's absence. She comments, "While I am in Venice, I am fully obsessed with his

hotel room, for that's a place where I can't see him."[6] Over-exposed and unfocused, the

[3] Jean Baudrillard, "Please Follow Me," *Sophie Calle: The Reader* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009) 24
[4] Ibid 22
[5] Rosalind Krauss, "Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition," *Sophie Calle: The Reader*, 130
[6] In interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, "Portrait: Sophie Calle," *Sophie Calle: A Survey* (Santa Monica, CA: Fred Hoffman Gallery, 1989) 136

photographs from her reconnaissance in Venice are frequently peopled by subjects other than the one she sought. A tipped hat brim veils identity; a couple in profile moves out of frame; a sheet of negatives show the course of waiting, each picture a beat in the prolongation of absence.

Calle, *Suite vénetienne*, 1980

Roland Barthes elucidated the essential quality of disappearance in photography, paradoxically positioning it in the materiality of its subject. In *Camera Lucida* he writes, "In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the

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Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see."[7] Wanting an alluding,
even transcending figure for photography's subject, we instead continue to be returned to
the 'body we see'. Photography presents its subject anecdotally, relegating it to the past
while keeping it in an eternal present. To witness its subject is to recognize its moment;
in recognizing this, the image becomes a receipt for presence. Barthes, before coming
upon a childhood photograph of his mother that, without looking like the woman he had
known, showed her essence, described his frustration with the medium as stemming from
its inability to allude to a time beyond itself. "It is the absolute Particular, the sovereign
Contingency, matte and somehow stupid [. . .]. It is not the death that one reads there, but
rather the vanishing."[8] Responding to Barthes's concern for the medium, Baudrillard
recognized a parallel in Calle's *Dormeurs.* The photograph and the sleeper both lay bare
their bodies; but these bodies do not belie a greater presence. "It is not by chance that *The
Big Sleep* [sic] gathers together sleep – in itself a vanishing of consciousness –
photography, and a succession of people who sleep and cross paths in the apartment: at
once appearing then disappearing, one into another," he writes.[9] *Les Dormeurs* are so
many figures, here and not here. Their capture in a medium meant for such 'present'
absences is only too appropriate.

Walter Benjamin crystallized the essential nature of aura – the '*here and now*' of
an object – in its appearance of distance. "What is aura, actually? A strange weave of
space and time: the unique appearance of distance, no matter how close the object may

[7] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 5
[8] Ibid
[9] Baudrillard 25

be."[10] For Benjamin, provenance was the distancing apparatus of the art object. And yet, the inferred history of a fixed artwork made it all the more immediately *here* for our arrival, our meeting. However, if provenance is the archive of an object's history – something accumulated over the generations, even geography, of its ownership – our reception of its history happens in only a moment. Benjamin made this connection between the power of an original work of art and its history, writing, "The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it."[11] But as Borges, the consummate archivist, could see, "Everything happens to a man precisely, precisely *now*."[12] Provenance can happen in a moment. When a fixed object becomes unfixed – erased, stolen, decimated – the history of the piece transfers to memory, becomes narrative. For Calle's *The Detachment/Die Entfernung: A Berlin Travel Guide* (1997), a distanced history is an active site of reconstruction, though one never convincingly restored.

Calle 'undid' monuments and memorials by documenting the empty sites where the former German Democratic Republic emblems stood before their removal, their erasure. As she plainly explains, "I asked passers-by and residents to describe the objects that once filled these empty spaces. I photographed the absence and replaced the missing monuments with their memories."[13] Through the exercise, sites of ruin become sets for reconstitution. As allusion and memory can only provide approximations, what we get in

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[10] Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," *Selected Writings II Pt.2 1931-34* (Harvard University Press, 1999) 518
[11] Benjamin, *Selected Writings III 1935-38* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996) 103
[12] Borges, "Garden of Forking Tongues," *Everything and Nothing* (USA: New Directions Publishing, 1962) 40
[13] Calle qtd. in "Undoing Memory," Matthew Griffin, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* (22.2, Berlin 2000) 168-170, 169

place of reconstituted memorials is a series of correspondences. Matthew Griffin's review

"Undoing Memory" observes how *The Detachment* effects a truth about the nature of

memory in postwar Germany:

and
> Calle's book broaches concerns about memorials on two levels: how does
> Germany remember events it would rather forget, and how does it build a new
> just state on the memory of its crimes? Sophie Calle's provocative answer to
> these questions makes up her book's allure: only the unfinished memorial can
> guarantee that these questions will continue to be asked.[14]

Open histories are emphasized in the work's installation, with the series of bound texts

framed so that a few pages from each book drift open. The page you read depends on the

current in the room, the volume and speed of the bodies moving through it. In this way,

elements of chance remain in even Calle's most historical works. People moving through

space make history, write the archive.

The presence-through-return aspect of *The Detachment* deserves consideration in

light of Bois's criticism that Calle "has no access to metonymy."[15] Where event is often

narrative in Calle's work, such that a temporal structure is built directly into its

delineation (and this was Bois's estimation of Calle's commitment to the literal, that she

was forever reducing her trace to trivia: "I boarded the Trans-Siberian in Moscow, on my

way to Vladivostok. It was October 29, 1984, 2:20 p.m."), *The Detachment* eschews a

plotting structure for a non-narrative one, and site becomes significant only in its

metonymical function. Fragments build up, producing a time that is vertical (spatial), not

linear (temporal). Benjamin termed this distinction *Trauerspiel* in his investigation of the

Baroque framing device. He regarded the dynamism of allegory temporally

unquantifiable, but a motivation that nevertheless carries the "fluidity of time:"

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[14] Griffin 170
[15] Bois, "The Paper Tigress," *M'As-tu vue*, 29-30

> We can be perfectly satisfied with the explanation that takes the one [the symbol] as a sign for ideas, which is self-contained, concentrated, and which steadfastly remains itself, while recognizing the other [allegory] as a successively progressing, dramatically mobile, dynamic representation of ideas which has acquired the very fluidity of time.[16]

By contrast, Craig Owens's "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" (1980) positions allegory as stationary, asserting that while it can project "structure as sequence" (spatial or temporal), the result is "not dynamic, but static, ritualistic, repetitive."[17] The two essayists are describing a similar structure despite their contrary descriptive models: allegory, like the palimpsest, builds meaning up. This vertical accretion of significance opposes the sequential, and thus the temporal; however it carries the 'fluidity of time' in the nature of its causational traces. One thing responds to another, and is affected by the next.

Benjamin associated the allegorical with the ruin, as "Allegory is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete."[18] For its metonymical function and narrative invitation, Calle carries an affinity for the ruin. Where a "progressive distancing from origin"[19] marked the ruin's sentiment for Benjamin, Calle approaches the ruinous site for its potential. The variety and unreliability of the 'recreating' memories she receives from her historical witnesses means a palimpsestic site is formed in place of a delineable one. *The Detachment*'s memorial site happens *in* memory, its physical site only one of metonymical proxy and correspondence.

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[16] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London; New York: Verso Press, 1963)165
[17] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* (v.12, 1980) 67-86, 72
[18] Owens, writing on Benjamin, 71
[19] Owens 70

Calle, *The Detachment/Die Entfernung: A Berlin Travel Guide*, 1997

Correspondence, however, does not distinguish between coming and going. In

The Writing of the Disaster, Maurice Blanchot signals an important difference between

connection and separation, and its relation to the fragmentary: "Fragments are written as

unfinished separations. Their incompletion, their insufficiency, the disappointment at

work in them, is their aimless drift."[20] 'Unfinished separations' are strung through *The Detachment*, their completion a possibility in time if only memory and myth did not persist. The dialectic of memory and site stalls such separations, our present forever negotiating its contingency on the past.

Benjamin's consideration of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* cited its earliest application in Baroque plays of mourning, but pressed for its continued relevance in modern historiography. He positioned the model as appropriate for an irrevocably broken history.[21] A structure of reflection (and, as such, distance), allegory pronounces its subjects as historically dialectical, impermanent, and the result of an arbitrary assignment of meaning. "Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. With this possibility a destructive but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance."[22] In its brokenness, allegory provided for Benjamin the most responsible form for a "history that is a permanent catastrophe."[23] Its "disharmony between the image and the object" beckons its audience to observe the distance between the 'notes'.[24] As with its central tenets of ruin and fragment, allegory's discord demands reflection and supplemental correspondence, but only so long as its quotidian aspects of destruction and arbitrariness do not dissuade one from making the effort.

The destructive and the arbitrary seem to motivate Calle's projects. As Bois observes, "She traces for herself a line of conduct that she follows to the dot, no matter

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[20] Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 58

[21] Michael W. Jennings and Brigid Doherty, "Script, Image, Script-Image," *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2008) 167

[22] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 233, 175

[23] Jennings, "Introduction," *The Writer of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2006) 18

[24] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 175

how dangerous it might be."[25] Her ludic pacts with herself have incited anger in strangers, broken friendships and romance, and put Calle at risk, but she follows the rules of her game once they are set. The destructive character, as Benjamin characterizes it, is one who "sees nothing permanent. But for this very reason he sees ways everywhere."[26] Calle – like the fetish object in Benjamin's arcades, and the prostitute he compared them to – is "seller and sold in one."**[27]** Her destruction, however, only sets in upon making a choice, and her choices do not appear destructive in themselves. "In what ways are what we remember, memorialize, organize and archive predicated on chance operations?" asks archivist Renée Green.[28] Calle seems to predicate her entire catalogue on this very question, setting it for her challenge.

The Baroque dualisms of "truth and falsehood, light and darkness, reason and passion" set up its historic successor, the Rococo, for a preoccupation with game playing. Centuries later, Calle collapses the dualisms of the Baroque and the game-playing of the Rococo into one, establishing her practice in a period known for neither. She worked in opposition to the 1980s popular anathema to acknowledged authorship, presenting work that was unflaggingly "first-person."[29] Her subjects demonstrate a biographical ardor – with Calle at turns falling in love with strangers and recounting heartbreak – but her counter-intuitive use of journalistic media and the writing's cool tone of recitation seem to distance these sentiments. It is unclear if we are being encouraged to bridge this distance and participate in its creative potential, or distrust her personal involvement.

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[25] Bois, "Paper Tigress," 34
[26] Benjamin, "The Destructive Character," *Selected Writings II, Pt.2 1931-34* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 541
[27] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002) 11
[28] Renée Green, "Survival: Ruminations on Archival Lacunae," *Interarchive. Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field* (Luneberd: Kunstraum der Universitat, 2002) 147
[29] Pacquement, "Preface," *M'As tu vue*, 15

With *Les Dormeurs*, for instance, Calle continues to assert her detachment from the

intimacy of her undertaking. She begins each entry with "I don't know him," going on to

describe the superficial features of her encounter with the sleeper, their activity, and their

departure. Significantly – almost comically – the project ends with a suicide (the ultimate

detachment). She catalogues this with the entry for her final sleepers, a couple. She

writes:

> He says he came because he likes adventures, ones where you don't risk your
> skin. [. . .] He changes position. She is at the end of the bed, in the dark, she is
> calm. He snores. [. . .] I wake them with breakfast. We look for the goldfish I
> bought on April 1 in honour of my guests and which was supposed to accompany
> them throughout their sleep. During the night it leaped out of the bowl,
> committing suicide before the last sleepers left.

Calle rarely tells her intimate tales in full; between missed encounters and diaristic

confessions, elements of the story get left out, and the gap between the subject and its

presentation feels emphasized. At the interstices of intent, the production of distance gets

strained not just between Calle and her subjects, but between the viewers and the work.

Missed encounters, forged intimacies, and melancholic voyages become pursuits at a

remove, and we struggle to reconcile the subject with its treatment.

Early in her career, a work titled *The Bronx* (1980), comprising photographs and

text, exemplified more than any other of Calle's works the invitation she gives to chance,

risk, and the secrecy that manifests between. Inspired by an invitation to show in a

Bronx-neighborhood gallery, the piece involved Calle asking the area residents to take

her to the places they would most remember if they left. She produced nine prints with

accompanying text panels that lined the walls in a studied presentation. A portrait of a

young man is accompanied by the following text: "At 5:30 he takes me back to the

nearest subway station. He says: 'can you do me a favor.' I help him out." Like so much

of Calle's work, the gaps between her exchanges and their records remind us that we were not there, and that we are not fully invited in. Her detachment may not be involved in the projects' production, but she ensures ours in its reception.

The evening before the opening for *The Bronx*, someone broke into the gallery and covered the walls with graffiti. The vandal scrawled over Calle's work, and, as she puts it, did so in "a careful way I must say." When Robert Storr asks about this in an interview, she replies, "It was better after than before."[30] But where Calle acquiesced to chance in the work's presentation, she did not fully put herself at risk in its making. The text that accompanies a portrait of a woman in a barren Bronx parking lot demonstrates this: "She asks me if I'd like to warm up a few minutes with her in the waiting room of the nearby hospital. I decide not to go. We shake hands." This is one of several hard-to-spot moments of resistance that Calle asserts in her catalogue of projects. She may be following her rules to the end, but not without discretion.

For Calle, text is a tool for asserting her difference from her subject, and establishing distance. "Text is a way of establishing the contact without it becoming intimate," she says.[31] She established the writing component early, in *Les Dormeurs* and *The Bronx*, and has maintained it in the decades since. Her projects have struggled with bringing the private into the public sphere, with publicizing the personal. She has relied on the found written notebooks of strangers in order to fabricate whole existences; published a serial in a newspaper, garnering a nation's attention for a summer of exploitive investigation and fantasy. She has recorded the banal, topographical features of an extraordinary three-month sojourn that involved devastating heartbreak.

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[30] Robert Storr, in interview with Calle, *Talking Art 1* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993) 31
[31] Adrian Searle, *Talking to Strangers*, 30

Calle, *The Bronx*, 1980

In a phrase, her texts have long been about the space between the protagonist and its record, and documentation's inability to fully capture its subject. Her practice, however, does not reside in the criticism of this, so much as in the creative potential it affords. What can you do with the space between, and how can you bring limitation around to invention? In using media that both perform journalistically, and, for her subjects, ineffectively, Calle seems to relegate her documentation to laying trace. And with themes like secret, memory, travel and ruin, trace is all one should hope for.

Calle's production of trace through technological media parallels Janet Cardiff's practice, and returns us to the interstices of trace and aura. Benjamin makes an essential contrast between 'trace' and 'aura' in *The Arcades Project*, writing, "The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The

aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace,

we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us."[32] Cardiff's

Westfälisches Landesmuseum (1997), exhibited in Münster, places its viewers at the

intersection of aura and trace. The work directs a telescope onto the streets from the

museum windows. Cardiff's narrative, while actually fed into the screen of the viewer's

lens, appears to be manifesting in the city below. The museum is little more than a

collaborator in the deception, an official harbour for the instrument of fictionalized truths

tracing the streets. *Westfälisches'* lens interpolates the narrative subject in the city, laying

down a ghostly trace that stresses the paradox of closeness and distance. The telescope, a

long zooming lens, at once projects sight and brings the far away close.

Westfälisches evokes another important feature of Benjamin's *Arcades*, the

window mirror. A characteristic furnishing of the nineteenth-century apartment, the

window mirror projected the street into the interior of the room. Theodor Adorno

distinguished the paradox of its effect, with the bourgeois apartment both aggrandized

and annulled by the projected image: "By this means, the living room dominates the

reflected row at the same time that it is delimited by it."[33] Benjamin, however, signaled

its significance to the flaneurs, writing, "The way mirrors bring the open expanse, the

streets, into the café – this, too, belongs to the interweaving of spaces, to the spectacle by

which the flaneurs is ineluctably drawn."[34] While *Westfälisches'* telescopic narrative does

not bring the street into the museum as such, the lens connects site, and implicates the

[32] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 447
[33] Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) 45
[34] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 537

voyeur in a panoptical (and periscopic) empiricism. We are powerless over the activity

we witness, but then, it does not exist without us.

The ineffectual and yet necessary aspect of *Westfälisches'* participant asserts a

sense of foreboding. Borges accentuates this portentous quality in his short story "The

Garden of Forking Tongues:" "Time forks perpetually toward innumerable futures. In

one of them I am your enemy."[35] The potential for manifold futures and the stress this

places on present choice is both a real and artificial challenge that Cardiff and Calle issue.

In the practice of each, narrative presentation catches light with the shimmer of

malfeasance. With Calle, the figure of surreptitious misdeed is inferred sometimes only

through the suggestion of playful deceit – but sometimes by way of much more

foreboding aesthetic decisions and narrative implications.

Calle's *Les Fantomes* (1989-91), a tour of the missing or loaned works in a

French museum by the custodial and docent staff, feature singularly haunting paintings,

though they are works that do not give form to their hazard. A piece that is largely about

absence (*fantome* is the museological term for missing or loaned works in France), it

comprises the paintings *House by the Railroad* (1925) by Edward Hopper; *The Enigma of

the Day* (1914) by Giorgio de Chirico; and Georges Seurat's *Evening, Honfleur* (1886).

All three works harbor uncanny vacancies, a criminal stillness at work in their

streetscapes. Calle's chosen 'ghosts' are both fitting to her piece, and in keeping with her

larger ethos, the missing storylines and the menace of protagonists just out of frame

providing Calle's true *fantomes*. As one of her museum staff remembers of De Chirico's

The Enigma of a Day:

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[35] Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths," *Everything and Nothing* (USA: New Directions Publishing, 1962) 142

You have a feeling that you are not in reality, you are on a film set, and something is wrong. There's a terrific suspense that something is going to happen, something is going to appear in that picture and everything will eventually make sense, but nothing does. I can't remember if there is a train. There is almost always a train.

Positioned where the work used to hang, the script of each memory patches together variously faded and bold text, some of the words seemingly retreating into the wall. The quotations are separated by small thumbnail drawings of the work as remembered, and the borders are scrawled in ghostly-light pastel, with loose arrows gesturing out, the very figure of allusion. This is less a record of the missing works than of the space between an object and its trace. Memory made manifest, only ever by proxy, produces something other than the thing it seeks to capture. At best, it describes its distance.

Calle brings us into the *étui* of the private person. She creates a narrative lattice, with the holes as much the pattern as the thread. Her exhibitions become the site of discovery or mourning, a place to recognize the missing. *Les fantomes*, a veritable memory palace, emphasizes the provenance of the original work of art. But the histories reside with the viewer, stressing a work's provenance as contingent on its reception. In this way, trace and aura again find themselves at an intersection. "The appearance of a nearness" in trace, "however far removed the thing that left it behind may be," is inscribed in memory, for Calle's museum staff. By the same token, aura's "appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth" comes with our witness of the project. The museum staff "gain[s] possession of the thing;" we viewers watch as it "takes possession of us."   Architecture writer Giuliana Bruno characterizes the building of certain 'psycho-spaces' as the "fashioning" of archival space.[36] Discussing museum culture, Bruno directs her readers through a series of museum walks, and

[36] Guiliana Bruno, *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007) 3

demonstrates a renewed emphasis in artistic practice on the culture of recollection. She

similarly points to the

Calle, *Les fantomes*, 1989-91

historic precedents of these psycho-spatial experiences, revealing a project that has been

underway since the Renaissance.[37] Bruno regards Benjamin to have advanced the

discussion on the greater implications of media "marriages" in his essay on the art of

mechanical reproducibility.[38] In this work, Benjamin bases the meeting of illusory

depiction and the psycho-spatial in the phantasmagoria of nineteenth-century panoramas

and the memory theaters of the Renaissance.[39] As these stages worked to offer respite

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[37] Jacques Lacan sought the first meeting of architecture and painting where, as he noted, architecture that was "organized around a void" allowed for perspectival painting as further contribution to this, with its laws of perspective always directing one's attention "out of the room," to the fictionalized horizon line. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959 – 1960* (New York: Norton, 1992) 135-6
[38] Bruno, *Public Intimacy*, 3
[39] Ibid

from the urban environment or emulate it, Benjamin stressed the relationship between the

city's subject and its projection onto his surrounding environment. The "porosity" of the

city's architecture is a form for a more general porosity in the "conduct of life," he

claims. "No situation appears just as it is, intended as such forever; no form asserts its

own 'just so, and not otherwise.'"[40]

The invitation to new meaning comes in the broken form, the unfinished

separation, the ruin and its trace. All it takes is a perceived distance in the here and now,

or a sense of immediacy in the far away and the long ago, for a work to come rushing

forward and invite our correspondence. As Benjamin writes, "The interior is not only the

universe but also the *étui* of the private person. To live means to leave traces. In the

interior these are emphasized. [. . .] The detective story that follows these traces comes

into being."[41]

Calle and Cardiff produce provenance in their process. Between fragment and

fiction, memory and trace, the artists direct our gaze beyond the 'body we see', invoking

a history in the reception of the ephemeral artwork, and in so doing, producing

correspondences that last beyond the limits of their media. We hunt an elusive

protagonist. We pick at dropped threads, weave narrative to cover the holes. Calle

demonstrates the distance in an archive, as Cardiff focuses on its production. Both

exercise a dialectic in the *étui*.

The labyrinthine line that forms history and its archive, and the narrative that

informs it, emphasize the fact that we only have the processes of seeking available to us.

The complexities of lived experience and the unlikelihood of narrative coherency require

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[40] Benjamin, "Naples," 416
[41] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 171

correspondences. Calle and Cardiff play with the matter of storytelling and process, and bring invention to the business of bearing witness. Calle has folded her personal biographies and fictions onto one stage, and Cardiff has asked us to bring ours to hers. Whether in the museum or on the streets, roped in or let out, their narratives trace the distance a good yarn requires.

Conclusion

My relationship to Benjamin began when I recognized in his project a profound measure

of homesickness. It is a 'hurt condition' intrinsic to my experience of every place – even

home – and one difficult to convey; I found counsel in Benjamin. The homesickness

sentiment threads its way through the fragmented *Arcades*, a project that, while

galvanizing change, only did so because of a despondency with its present. Benjamin

recurringly brings voices to bear on its subject; most profoundly, to my mind, accounting

for the experience in a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche: "This seeking for *my* home . . .

was *my* affliction . . . Where is – *my* home? I ask and seek and have sought for it; I have

not found it."[1] Further on, Benjamin introduces an aspect of homesickness that I consider

to be central to his work on the arcades, in a passage from Kierkegaard: "The art would

be to be able to feel homesick, even though one is at home. Expertness in the use of

illusion is required for this." Significantly, Benjamin writes beneath this citation, "This is

the formula for the interior."[2] The arcades' phantasmagoria of commodity and crowd

created a sense of isolation in the flaneur. Jarred by the shocks and fission of his

environment, the urban denizen was dislocated from himself. The interior, then, was

roaming, and its walker, without home.

Beyond the myriad references Benjamin brings to the condition of homesickness,

his larger preoccupation with the theme is evinced in his treatment of his major subjects:

Paris, Proust and Baudelaire – and the recurring reference to Paul Klee's *Angelus*

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[1] Qtd. by Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002) 20
[2] Ibid 218

Novus (1920). This coterie of seeking figures parlays Benjamin's concern for a living history into the larger project of pursuing home. Homesickness, the most melancholic and immediate of nostalgia, brings us into our "forest reserve of remembering," while making us painfully aware of our *here and now*, and its separateness (in time and site) from the thing we miss. Its character is one of perceiving distance in the immediate, in recognizing that we are not where we wish to be. Homesickness is temporal instability, memorial ache; the sense that we inhabit a haunted station. For Benjamin, that station was his place in history, and the city he called home.

A short text of Benjamin's, "Picturing Proust," identifies the essential ethos of Proust's eight-volume tome of remembering, *A la recherche du temps perdu*. In the novel, Proust painfully achieves a moratorium on what he terms "the incurable imperfection in the very essence of the present."[3] Relational memory provided the vehicle in which Proust could move through the annals of his personal history. He dealt in triggers, and the dreamworlds of lived and utopic experience they conjure, attempting, however fruitlessly, to usher himself into the remembered experience.[4] Benjamin asks, "What was he looking for so frantically? What lay behind all this tireless effort?"[5] He wonders if "all life, all works, all deeds that count" must undergo a similar unanswering development.[6] Paired with these observations, however, which read as both corrective and admiring, Benjamin qualifies that when Proust performed his "feeblest" hours - his most sensitive, broken and slow - "we are a hair's breadth from being able to term that

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[3] Qtd. by Benjamin, "Picturing Proust," *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008) 95
[4] Ibid
[5] Ibid 94
[6] Ibid

existence everyday."[7] We come close, he argues, and Proust makes his experience relevant to our own; but that hair's breadth remains. The distance separating Proust and his reader from the thing he so tirelessly sought shifted the subject, for Benjamin, from that 'other thing' to the very process of seeking. Benjamin writes:

> Proust was insatiable when it came to emptying the dummy, the self, at a stroke in order to bring in, over and over again, that other thing. The image that fed his inquisitiveness – nay, his homesickness. He lay in bed ravaged by homesickness, homesickness for a world distorted in a state of similarity. To wit, never in isolation, dramatically and in a visionary manner, but heralded and often with backing, bearing a fragile, precious reality: the image.[8]

The image that bore Benjamin's fragile reality, Klee's watercolour *Angelus Novus*, represents the essential 'homelessness' of his historical moment. As Benjamin's project demonstrates that he understood - certainly presciently but also portentously - the direction in which his lived history was headed, Klee's painting (which Benjamin purchased in 1921) provided a monument to the writer's interpretation: it became his 'Angel of History'. Staring fixedly at the storming fusillade of history's ruin rushing up to meet the present, the angel mirrored what Benjamin perceived to be his moment's paralysis in the winds of distraction and promise. Helpless to change the course of events, the angel could only bear witness to "the storm [that] we call progress."[9] Correlating with the angel's predicament, a poem fragment from Baudelaire appears in Benjamin's text on the poet: "Je contemple d'en haut le globe en sa rondeur, / Et je n'y cherche plus l'abri d'une cahute." ("I contemplate, from on high, the globe in its roundness, / And no longer

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[7] Ibid 95
[8] Ibid 97
[9] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 257-58

look there for the shelter of a hut.")[10] Like the angel, Baudelaire positioned himself at a remove that gave him vantage; but his distance (that of the allegorist, the "alienated man") produced "no hymn to the homeland," as Benjamin observed.[11] Rather, he termed it displacement.

What Baudelaire, Proust and Klee's angel provoke in Benjamin, Cardiff and Calle produce in me. Tapping that province of internalized recounting, verdant and unlit, they map the placelessness of pursuit, the homelessness of memory. Their exhibitions and expeditions become the sites of discovery or mourning: a place to recognize the missing. A sketch from Cardiff and Miller's catalogue of unrealized works, *The House of Books has no Windows*, pictures a bird with a human face – not unlike the *Angelus Novus* – flying away from a house on a tower. Beneath the image, a line of text is scrolled, "Searching for a house to call your own;" beside, "should it be even smaller?"[12] Many of Cardiff and Miller's works take the viewer away from their starting point – without return. Between the more literal example of Cardiff's audiowalks terminating in the streets, and the hermetic example of their museum-situated pieces, which require a sensory and memorial departure, the artists relegate their viewers to vagrancy.

In the example of Calle, vagrancy becomes pilgrimage, with the artist trailing after the unknowable (the sleeper, the stranger, the ruin), perpetually seeking arrival and connection. Her expeditions, motivated by personal affection, curiosity or heartbreak, often end in her failure to capture what she seeks. In an interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Calle describes the motivation behind a work of hers in which she produces the image of a man's life through the contents of his address book. She says, "I wanted to

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[10] Qtd. by Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2006) 202
[11] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 10
[12] Cardiff and Miller, *The House of Books has no Windows* (London, UK: Modern Art Oxford, 2008) 13

describe the absent man."[13] This motivation seems to perpetuate her catalogue, with her subject so often vanished, secreted or ruined. She roots an otherwise elusive project in the 'descriptive' media of photography and text, however, providing an anchor for the absent, a citation for the missing. Such receipts litter her trail, but all without purchase.

T.S. Eliot, in his *Four Quartets*, writes, "Home is where one starts from."[14] As with any start, the implication is that we end somewhere else. James Agee beautifully illustrates this distance in his novel, *A Death in the Family*: "How far we all come. How far we all come away from ourselves. So far, so much between, you can never go home again. You can go home, it's good to go home, but you never really get all the way home again in your life."[15] The bird who sets out from the tower, in Cardiff's sketch, seeking home, is Benjamin's Angel of History, is Calle moving through the streets in search of a nameless man. Pursuing that which cannot be caught or regained, these are the figures of seeking. They do not return to their starting point. But, like Proust and his madeleine, they sometimes strike upon passages that rush them to back to within a hair's breadth from the place where they began. The arcades of the interior are these passages; their traces, the stories we pursue.

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[13] Hans-Ulrich Obrist, "Portrait: Sophie Calle," *Sophie Calle: A Survey* (Santa Monica, CA: Fred Hoffman Gallery, 1989) 136
[14] T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1943) 17
[15] James Agee, *A Death in the Family* (New York: Avon Books, 1938) 93-4

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