"The Time of a Passage":
On Photography, Temporality, and Mourning in Kracauer, Benjamin, and Derrida

"*Als das Kind Kind war,*
hatte es von nichts eine Meinung,
hatte keine Gewohnheit,
saß oft im Schneidersitz,
lief aus dem Stand,
hatte einen Wirbel im Haar
und machte kein Gesicht beim fotografieren"
– Peter Handke

Eduardo Cadava's *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* begins with a flashy claim: "In his 'Theses on the Concept of History,' assembled while fleeing from Nazi Germany, shortly before his suicide in 1940, Benjamin conceives of history in the language of photography, as though he wished to offer us a series of snapshots of his latest reflections on history."[1] The conception of photography underpinning this assertion, however, is much closer to that elaborated by Jacques Derrida in his remembrance "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," published in 1981, than it is to the one found in the 1927 essay "On Photography" by Benjamin's friend and contemporary Siegfried Kracauer – a text cited by Benjamin in 1931, in his own "A Short History of Photography." And yet, although the photograph of "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" differs meaningfully from the photograph of "On Photography," it bears more than a passing resemblance to the figure of the *Passage* explored by Kracauer in an essay written not long after, 1931's "Farewell to the Linden Arcade." This apparent confusion, however, soon develops into a constellation, for by placing these five texts – Kracauer's "Farewell" and "On Photography," Benjamin's "Theses" and "Short History of Photography," and Derrida's "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" – into conversation, one can come to view Benjamin's "Theses" as a passage running between Kracauer's *Passage* and Derrida's photograph, as the

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1   Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3.

reconceptualization of time that Benjamin performs makes it possible to re-situate what Kracauer

identifies as the *Passage*'s "power to bear witness to transience"[2] *inside* what Derrida calls "the

almost no time of a (camera's) click."[3]

Cadava's identification of Benjamin's thinking of history in the "Theses" as

fundamentally photographic rests on an understanding of the photograph as an image that bears

mourning in its very structure. He writes: "The image already announces our absence. We need

only know that we are mortal – the photograph tells us we will die, one day we will no longer be

here, or rather, we will only be here the way we have been here, *as* images. It announces the

death of the photographed. This is why what survives in a photograph is also the survival of the

dead – what departs, desists, and withdraws."[4] Thus, he explains:

> Photography is a mode of bereavement. It speaks to us of mortification. Even though it still remains to be thought, the essential relation between death and language flashes up before us in the photographic image. 'What we know we will soon no longer have before us,' Benjamin writes, 'this is what becomes an image' (CB 87 / GS 1:590). Like an angel of history whose wings register the traces of this disappearance, the image bears witness to an experience that cannot come to light. This experience is the shock of experience, of experience and bereavement. This bereavement acknowledges what takes place in any photograph – the return of the departed. Although what the photograph photographs is no longer present or living, its having-been-there now forms part of the referential structure of our relationship to the photograph. Nevertheless, this return of what was once there takes the form of a haunting.[5]

In a footnote to these lines, Cadava points the reader to Jacques Derrida's "The Deaths of Roland

Barthes," to which this understanding of photography – and, with it, Cadava's identification of

Benjamin's thinking of history as photographic – is powerfully indebted. In order to make visible

the passage of the understanding of the photograph from Kracauer's writings through Benjamin's

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2   Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 342.
3   Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 34.
4   Cadava, *Words of Light*, 8.
5   *Ibid.* 11.

and into Derrida's, however, it is necessary to lake a closer look at the account of the photograph given by Derrida in "The Deaths of Roland Barthes."

As Gerhard Richter explains in *Afterness*, "Derrida's engagement with photography works to open the medium to its own alterity, to the ways in which photography exposes the non-self-identity and internal self-differentiation that, for him, ultimately condition any act of aesthetic experience and its ethico-political futurity."[6] In "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" – Derrida's first public performance of the work of mourning, following the death of a friend – Derrida does so by locating the work of mourning firmly *within* the photograph of Roland Barthes – a photograph which is not itself a photograph, but rather the last image of Barthes; that is to say, the subject of his final book, *Camera Lucida*. (Re)appropriating terminology from – and grappling with the claims of – *Camera Lucida*, Derrida offers an image of photography that differs meaningfully from the one proposed by Barthes in that volume, but that nonetheless forms a constellation with the thinking of his departed friend in such a way that it enabled him to think (and speak to) his friend's departure.

Derrida accomplishes this by relentlessly interrogating Barthes's concept of the "*punctum*"[7] or "'poignant'" point that i(nte)rrupts the "*studium,*" or that which is "'studied,'" in the photograph. First, he posits the *punctum* as "a point of singularity that punctures the surface of the reproduction – and even the production – of analogies, likenesses, and codes," the site at which "the absolute singularity of the other addresses itself to me, the Referent that, in its very image, I can no longer suspend, even though its 'presence' forever escapes me, having already

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6   Gerhard Richter, *Afterness*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 122.
7   Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, 38.

receded into the past."[8] From here, however, Derrida collapses the opposition between *studium*

and *punctum:*

> For above all, and in the first place, this apparent opposition *(studium/punctum)* does not forbid but, on the contrary, facilitates a certain *composition* between the two concepts … They compose together, the one *with* the other, and we will later realize in this a *metonymic* operation; the 'subtle beyond' of the *punctum,* the uncoded beyond, composes with the 'always coded' of the *studium* (*CL*, 59, 51). It belongs to it without belonging to it and is unlocatable within in; it is never inscribed in the homogeneous objectivity of the framed space but instead inhabits or, rather, haunts it: 'it is an addition [*supplément*]: it is what I add to the photograph and *what is none the less already* there' (*CL*, 55). We are prey to the ghostly power of the supplement; it is this unlocatable site that gives rise to the *specter*…[9]

Derrida thus relocates the *punctum* of the photograph from the image of its referent to the

structure of its referentiality:

> Though it is not there (present, living, real), its having-been-there presently a part of the referential or intentional structure of my relationship to the photogram, the return of the referent indeed takes the form of a haunting. This is a 'return of the dead,' … Already a sort of hallucinating metonymy: it is something else, a piece come from the other (from the referent) that finds itself in me, before me, but also in me like a piece of me…[10]

From here, Derrida suggests that the punctual structure of the photograph's referentiality not only

participates in metonymy, but instead motivates it: "I said that the *punctum* allows itself to be

drawn into metonymy. Actually, it induces it, and this is its force, or rather than its force (since it

exercises no actual constraint and exists completely in reserve), its *dynamis*, in other words, its

power, potentiality, virtuality, and even its dissimulation, its latency."[11] Finally, this chain of

metonymies (re)turns to the meta-metonymy, time – "for," as Derrida asks "is not Time the

ultimate resource for the substitution of one absolute instant by another, for the replacement of

the irreplaceable, the replacement of this unique referent by another that is yet another instant,

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8   *Ibid.* 39.
9   *Ibid.* 41.
10 *Ibid.* 54.
11 *Ibid.* 57.

completely other and yet still the same? Is not time the punctual form and force of all metonymy

– its instant recourse?"[12]

At this point, however, Derrida's image of the photograph turns away somewhat from the

specificity of its referent:

> Time: the metonymy of the instantaneous, the possibility of the narrative magnetized by its own
> limit. The instantaneous in photography, the snapshot, would itself be but the most striking
> metonymy within the modern technological age of an older instantaneity. Older, even though it is
> never foreign to the possibility of *technē* in general. Remaining as attentive as possible to all the
> differences, one must be able to speak of a *punctum* in all signs (and repetition and iterability
> already structures it), in any discourse, whether literary or not. As long as we do not hold to some
> naive and 'realist' referentialism, it is the relation to some unique and irreplaceable referent that
> interests us and animates our most sound and studied readings: *what took place only once, while
> dividing itself already*...The photographic apparatus reminds us of this irreducible referential by
> means of a very powerful telescoping.[13]

By shifting the focus of Barthes's analysis from the relationship between the photograph and its

referent to our relationship with the photograph's referentiality, Derrida makes clear that, as

Richter argues, "what photography teaches us about the referential is that the particular relation

without relation that it captures is itself related to other relations without relation. That is to say,

the relation without relation that photography relates is itself something of a photograph … [of] a

whole host of relations without relation"[14] – or, as Derrida writes: "Ghosts: the concept of the

other in the same, the *punctum* in the *studium*, the completely other, dead, living in me. This

concept of the photograph *photographs* every conceptual opposition; it captures a relationship of

haunting that is perhaps constitutive of every 'logic.'"[15] The essence of the mourning work

performed by the Derridean photograph, then, is not in essence photographic – or is, only insofar

as photography's essence is, like all essences, to be essentially other than itself. Indeed, it is by

performing this very relation of multiple layers of supplementarity and non-self-identity that the

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12 *Ibid.* 60
13 *Ibid.* 61
14 Richter, *Afterness,* 124.
15 Derrida, *The Work of Mourning,* 41-42.

photograph traces the structure of incomplete internalization that makes raises the specter of a ghost, and it is this tracing that makes the photograph an intimation of mortality and an image of the work of mourning.

Derrida's understanding of photography and its relation to the work of mourning differs meaningfully from that found in Siegfried Kracauer's 1927 essay "On Photograpy." There, Kracauer's offers a critique of the photograph that turns on a contrast that he draws between photographs and "memory images."[16] At the center of this distinction rests Kracauer's claim that memory preserves images on the basis of their being meaningful to the person who remembers them, while photography mechanically reproduces the external "aspect"[17] of a moment but cannot capture or convey its inner meaning:

> An individual retains memories because they are personally significant. Thus, they are organized according to a principle which is essentially different from the organizing principle of photography. Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum; memory images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance. Since what is significant is not reducible to either merely spatial or merely temporal terms, memory images are at odds with photographic representation.[18]

Thus, for Kracauer, "the meaning of memory images is linked to their truth content."[19] This, in turn, places the memory image and the photograph in different relationships to time:

> The last memory image outlasts time because it is unforgettable; the photograph, which neither refers to nor encompasses such a memory image, must essentially be associated with the moment in time at which it came into existence … If photography is a *function of the flow of time*, then its substantive meaning will change depending upon whether it belongs to the domain of the present or to some phase of the past.[20]

Consequently, "[i]n inverse proportion to photographs, memory images enlarge themselves into monograms of remembered life. The photograph is the sediment which has settled from the

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16 Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 50.
17 *Ibid.* 56.
18 *Ibid.* 50.
19 *Ibid.* 51.
20 *Ibid.* 53-54.

monogram, and from year to year its semiotic value decreases. The truth content of the original is left behind in its history; the photograph captures only the residue that history has discharged."[21] Because Kracauer understands the photograph to only record the "surface coherence"[22] of the moments it captures, he contends that the significance of the images it produces withers as they are carried away by time, separated more and more from the moments of their creation.

On this basis, Gertrude Koch identifies the photograph as a *memento mori* for Kracauer, writing that: "In the course of time, the legibility of the photograph, the recognition of its likeness, dwindles. When viewing the photography, we therefore discern the passage of unrecoverable time and 'shudder.' ... Although the photo reproduces 'reality,' the latter emerges in the photo only as the spatial fixation of a past moment, in other words, as dead matter."[23] In this regard, Kracauer's photograph has a similar effect to Derrida's, but the mechanism through which this reminder operates for Kracauer is premised on a metaphysics of presence alien to Derrida's thinking; as time widens the gulf between the photograph and the moment of its origin, the photograph's testimony, initially an index of what was present before it, progressively reconfigures itself into evidence that that once-present something has passed away. Crucially, time here operates *externally* to the photograph, distancing it from the scene it traces.

In contrast to the way that the photograph is thus carried by the "*flow of time*" away from its referent, Kracauer suggests that the memory image is brought closer to its referent by that same flow. For memory, the passage of time causes the inessential features to fall away, leaving as a "last image" only a condensed "monogram" of meaning that constitutes the departed's

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21 *Ibid.* 55.
22 *Ibid.* 52.
23 Gertrude Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 98-99.

"actual *history.*"[24] Graeme Gilloch identifies this "last image" as the site of mourning within

Kracauer's thinking:

> The 'last image' is a final rendezvous, a vestigial moment of correspondence, between the remembering subject and the remembered. Such images are 'biographical': a depiction of life, not merely a fragment of that life but the truth of a whole existence. There is a connection here I think between this concept of the 'last image' and Kracauer's earlier reflections on friendship. The persistence of the image of the other in memory is part of an enduring silent conversation, the mark of genuine friendship. The 'last image' is a lasting image, perhaps the afterlife of friendship.[25]

While the photograph may function for Kracauer as a reminder that all things must pass, he thus

nonetheless views it as poorly equipped to perform the work of mourning; for Kracauer,

mourning is the work of *mnēmē*, which is threatened by photographic *hypomnēsis.*[26] "In a

photograph, a person's history is buried as if under a layer of snow,"[27] he writes; later in the

essay, he claims that "the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory. The assault of this

mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of

crucial traits...In the illustrated magazines, people see the very world that the illustrated

magazines prevent them from perceiving."[28] Kracauer's photograph, being all surface, cannot

remember; it displaces memory, and thus interferes with mourning.

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24 Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 50.

25 Graeme Gilloch, *Siegfried Kracauer* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 38.

26 With its sharp distinction between photography and memory, along with his claim that "the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory" (*Mass Ornament* 58), Kracauer's critique of photography recalls the critique of writing made in Plato's *Phaedrus* (and deconstructed by Derrida in "Plato's Pharmacy"), which turns on the notion that writing "dulls the memory, and if it is of any assistance at all, it is not for the *mnēmē* but for *hypomnēsis*...It is a debilitating poison for memory, but a remedy or tonic for its external signs … [and thus] belongs to the order and exteriority of the symptom" (*Dissemination,* 110). To the extent that Kracauer's claims follow this logic, they are likewise susceptible to Derrida's exposition of the fact that "[t]he 'outside' does not begin at the point where what we now call the psychic and the physical meet, but at the point where the *mnēmē*, instead of being present to itself in its life as a movement of truth, is supplanted by the archive, evicted by a sign of re-memoration or of com-memoration. The space of writing, space *as* writing, is opened up in the violent movement of this surrogation, in the difference between *mnēmē* and *hypomnēsis*. The outside is always already *within* the work of memory...A limitless memory would in any even not be memory but infinite self-presence. Memory always therefore already needs signs in order to recall the non-present, with which it is necessarily in relation. The movement of dialectics bears witness to this. Memory is thus contaminated by its first substitute: *hypomnēsis*..." (*Dissemenation* 109).

27 Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 50.

28 *Ibid*. 58.

Thus, Kracauer observes that

> *historicist thinking* … emerged at about the same time as modern photographic technology. On the whole, advocates of such historicist thinking believe they can explain any phenomenon purely in terms of its genesis. That is, they believe in any case that they can grasp historical reality by reconstructing the course of events in their temporal succession without any gaps. Photography presents a spatial continuum; historicism seeks to provide the temporal continuum. According to historicism, the complete mirroring of an intratemporal sequence simultaneously contains the meaning of all that occurred within that time … Historicism is concerned with the photography of time. [29]

From these lines, it becomes clear that a lack of acknowledgement by Kracauer of the ways that the photograph participates in the logic of supplementarity lies at the heart of the difference between his account of the photograph and Derrida's; where Derrida sees the photograph at once picturing and performing the play of presence and absence, selfhood and alterity that structures every instant and instance in life, Kracauer views the photograph as a depthless image that threatens to stand in for the a substantive encounter. If Kracauer's account of the photograph thus differs from Derrida's on the basis of its thinking of supplementarity, however, the extensive engagement with the logic of supplementarity performed by Kracauer in 1931's "Farewell to the Linden Arcade" allows that essay's figure of the *Passage* to bridge the gap between the Derridean photograph and Kracauer's own.

"Farewell to the Linden Arcade" begins with the announcement of a death: "The *Lindenpassage* (Linden Arcade) has ceased to exist."[30] "That is," Kracauer hurries to clarify, "it remains a means of passage [*Passage*] between Friedrichstraße and Linden Avenue in terms of its form, but it is no longer an arcade [*Passage*]." This differentiation between *Passage*-as-form and *Passage*-as-content is immediately unsettled, however, by the difficulty one encounters in attempting to think the content of a passage – which is, after all, a form that is constituted by an inner lack, a central vacuity. Nonetheless, Kracauer is adamant that he has come to speak on the

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29 *Ibid*. 49-50.
30 *Ibid*. 337.

occasion of the passing of a *Passage*, albeit one which in the next sentence has flickered back to life through multiple layers of memory: "When I recently strolled through it once again, as I so often did during my student years before the war, the work of destruction was already almost complete." Following an inventory of the features of the remembered arcade that remained faintly detectable during this final visit, which he describes as "all the faded bombast that now no passerby will ever again be able to appreciate," Kracauer concludes his first paragraph (and its whirlwind of temporalities) with the declaration that "All this is now sinking into a mass grave of cool marble" – an image of the *Passage* suspended in the moment of its interring, perpetually posed in the process of passing away.

Insofar as the *Passage* had a content outside its form, according to Kracauer, it was as the home of all that was heterogeneous to its surroundings, the site of internal difference within the society that it traversed:

> What united the objects in the Linden Arcade and gave them all the same function was their withdrawal from the bourgeois façade …Wherever possible, they were executed, and if they could not be completely destroyed than they were driven out and banished to the inner Siberia of the arcade. Here, however, they took revenge on the bourgeois idealism that oppressed them by playing off their own defiled existence against the arrogated existence of the bourgeoisie. Degraded as they were, they were able to congregate in the half-light of the passageway and to organize an effective protest against the façade culture outside.[31]

As such, the *Passage* became the place where the movement underneath the surface of culture could come to rest within it, where "transient objects" – and transience itself – "attained a kind of right of residence."[32] Through this process of internalization of its other, "disavowing a form of existence to which it still belonged, the Linden Arcade gained the power to bear witness to transience … in this arcade, we ourselves encountered ourselves as deceased."[33]Gerhard Richter

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31 *Ibid.* 341.
32 *Ibid.* 338.
33 *Ibid.* 342.

thus reads the *Passage* as a prime example of Kracauer's concept of "extraterritoriality: the condition of existing in a territory beyond territory, belonging to a territory while at the same time being 'extra' or superfluous to it, being outside or other to one's own or to another's territory."[34] Richter places this concept into conversation with Derrida's "monolingualism of the other," noting that "...Derrida's experience of the monolingual, and all that it implies, hardly can be understood without the 'spectrality of the phenomenon,' which is to say, 'the phantom, the double, or the ghost.' Phantoms and ghosts – it is these homeless images that both Kracauer and Derrida leave behind for us to learn to read."[35] And indeed, Kracauer's description of the *Passage* functions almost identically to Derrida's reading of the *punctum*, as both mark the point at which supplementarity passes through the apparently-present, opening up an internal movement of passage within presence itself.

While Richter convincingly extends his reading of the *Passage* as a mournfully extraterritorial figure to Kracauer's photograph, on the basis of "the inability of photography to coincide with itself, its particular way of never being able fully to capture what it attempts to present,"[36] there is value to be had in emphasizing the ways that the photograph of "On Photography" remains heterogeneous to the Linden Arcade. Such a distinction is justified by Kracauer's own explicit contrasting of the "souvenirs" filling a store in the arcade with the items on sale in "the photograph store":

> These memory aids that can be fondled, these authentic copies of locally resident originals, are part of the very body of Berlin and doubtless are more qualified to convey to their buyers the energies of the city they have devoured than the photographs which the photograph store invites one to have personally made. The photos claim to bring the world home; the World Panorama, in contrast, provides the illusion of places one longs for, and distances the familiar ones all the more."[37]

34 Gerhard Richter, *Thought-Images* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 112.
35 *Ibid*. 143.
36 *Ibid*. 133.
37 Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament* 340.

The language of this comparison reinforces the idea that a distinction exists in the relation borne by *Passage* and photograph to that which lies outside them; this notion is compounded as Kracauer closes his essay by asking: "What would be the point of an arcade [*Passage*] in a society that is itself only a passageway?"[38] shortly after noting that the *Passage*'s "World Panorama has been superseded by a cinema." These juxtapositions suggest that, insofar as "[t]he time of the arcades has run out,"[39] it has yielded to the time of the photograph. If, as Richter claims, "the image reveals the ways in which an assumed presence already was a fiction at the time when it was believed to be present. We even could say that rather than simple re-presenting its subject, the image retroactively makes visible the absence that already lay at the core of the event it set out to record,"[40] in Kracauer's account this is precisely the function of the *Passage* running beneath the streets of Berlin, which testifies to "[t]he disintegration of all illusory permanence."[41] By contrast, to Kracauer the photograph offers an image of a world "[s]eemingly ripped from the clutch of death, [that] in reality … has succumbed to it,"[42] thus on both sides overlaying and obscuring the presence of the present from view.

One might even say that the significant difference between Derrida's photograph and Kracauer's is a function of the existence of a distinction in Kracauer's thought between the photograph and the *Passage* – of the fact that, for Kracauer, the world of photograph lies outside the *Passage*, and the *Passage* outside the photograph. If one does so, the role played by Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in mediating between Kracauer's photograph

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38 *Ibid.* 342.
39 *Ibid.* 338.
40 Richter, *Thought-Images,* 108.
41 Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament,* 341.
42 *Ibid. 59.*

and Derrida's becomes visible, as the rethinking of time that Benjamin's essay performs opens

up a Kracauerian *Passage within* the apparently-present instant of the photograph.

For Benjamin, the work of history *is* the work of mourning – but order for this work to be

performed, it is first necessary to reconceptualize historical time. He writes :"The concept of the

historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a

homogeneous, empty time. A critique of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of

the concept of progress itself... History is the subject of a structure whose site is not

homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]."[43] In order to

understand this complex claim, it is helpful to begin with the figure of the "angel of history"

described by Benjamin in Thesis IX:

> His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single
> catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel
> would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is
> blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no
> longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned,
> while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[44]

This image of the angel of history would appear to align it with a camera as conceived by

Kracauer; the angel bears witness to events, but cannot intervene in them, as simple progressive

time carries it away helplessly from the scenes to which it bears witness. The angel's

helplessness is a function of "its progression through a homogeneous, empty time," which carries

it past images of suffering while at the same time preventing it from redeeming the suffering that

it sees. Thus, in order for the present to recognize that "[t]he past carries with it a temporal index

by which it is referred to the present," and exercise its resultant "*weak* Messianic power, a power

to which the past has a claim,"[45] the "homogeneous, empty time" that prohibits the exercise of

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43 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Pantheon, 1968), 261.
44 *Ibid.* 257-258.
45 *Ibid*. 254.

this power by progressively distancing the angel of history from the suffering before it must be reconfigured.

For Benjamin, this reconfiguration of time is accomplished through a reconfiguration of the relationship between the image and the instant, and such that the historian understands the present moment within which he is writing as being constituted by the passage of the past through it. "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up once at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again,"[46] he writes, and claims that "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger." Crucially, what "flits by," in Benjamin's account, is not the fleeting present, but an image of the past which is "recognized by the present as one of its own concerns"; in other words, an image of the past as passing through the present itself. In the moment of this recognition, the straightforward, linear progression of time is brought to a halt; it is to this reconfiguration of temporality that Benjamin refers when he writes that "[a] historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history."[47]

As Benjamin explains in his *Arcades Project* [*Passagen-Werk*]: "It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation … while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-

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46 *Ibid.* 255.
47 *Ibid.* 262.

has-been to the now is dialectical: it is not progression but image...”[48] This passage closely

echoes Benjamin's claim in Thesis XVII that

> Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure, he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history … The nourishing fruit of the historically understood contains time as a precious but tasteless seed.[49]

In other words, the "standstill" described by Benjamin is not meant to present the present as an

absolute instant, divorced from its past and future, but rather as a present understood as *always*

already imbricated with times other than itself, a present from which time does not carry away

the image of the past in its simple flow, but which is rather constituted as present by the

perpetual passage/*Passage* through it of the past which it bears within itself as supplement.

In "'Now': Walter Benjamin on Historical Time," Werner Hamacher offers a dazzling

(and dizzying) reading of Thesis XVII:

> Only in its *Einstand* – in the *instant* – is time the 'preserved' and 'sublated' happening of a time that protects against the empty formalism of a mere form of perception and against the absolutism of a substantial eternity. It is always again new and in different ways the time that stands in, in each *instant*, in each present, in each Now: a *nunc stans* that indicates within the historical objects their true history and only thus relates history to *objects*: not oppositionals of the idea of positioning or propositional subjects, but *instants*, *Einstände* of history. For these objects are not 'in' time as if in a container merely coloured externally: rather, time is in their 'inside' and they are the fruits and carriers of its seed. When Benjamin talks with the unusual word 'standing in' (*einstehen*), then that means that time 'stands' 'in' *for* time – for the time of what-has-been as well as for any time: defends it, preserves it, represents it and fixates it as time in its movement. Without the 'insisting' of time, which is another sense of its *einstehen*, there would not be the course of time. Without instant there would be no moment. Time stands in (*steht ein*) because its discrete moments stand together in a unity and because time stands into the inside, into the nucleus of time in the historical course, and sets it free. The *Einstand* of time is mere time.[50]

Eduardo Cadava connects this insight to the photograph image in *Words of* Light, arguing that

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48 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 462.

49 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 263.

50 Werner Hamacher, "'Now': Walter Benjamin on Historical Time," in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: A&C Black, 2005), 55.

> the radical temporality of the photographic structure coincides with what Benjamin elsewhere calls 'the caesura in the movement of thought' … A force of arrest, the image translates an aspect of time into something like a certain *space*, and does so without stopping time, or without preventing time from being time. Within the photograph, time presents itself to us as this 'spacing.' … Looking both backward and forward, this figure marks a division within the present … the photographic event interrupts the present; it occurs *between* the present and itself, between the movement of time and itself … Related to both the future and the past, the photograph constitutes the present by means of this relation to what it is not. If a space must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, this space must at the same time divide the present. In constituting itself, in dividing itself, this interval is what Benjamin calls '*space-crossed time*' – time-becoming-space and space-becoming-time.[51]

Between these two dense passages, the mediation that Benjamin's essay performs between Kracauer's *Passage* and Derrida's photograph becomes clear: "Theses on the Philosophy of History" re-imagines the *instant* as heterogeneous to itself, as an image of time constructed by its standing in frozen dialectical tension with some other instant/image of time also so constituted, thereby containing the *Passage* of time and supplementarity within itself as *punctum*, the meta-metonymy of temporality as *dynamis*. If for Kracauer, "photography is a *function of the flow of time*," for Benjamin, historical time is a function of the structure of photography. Through this lens, the image of the "automaton" actually controlled by a "hunchback" sitting underneath a table in Thesis I takes on a new depth, as the "system of mirrors [that] created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides"[52] becomes transparently a figure for the photographic apparatus that misleadingly suggests that the instant has nothing inside it; that it is full of air, rather than *Passage*.

Interestingly, Benjamin was already subtly situating a *Passage* inside of the time of the photograph in his earlier "Short History of Photography." Cadava notes that in that essay, Benjamin speaks of a "'decline of photography'...[that surprisingly] does not coincide, as one might expect, with a decline in the technical efficiency of the camera or in its capacity to register

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51 Cadava, *Words of Light,* 63.
52 Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 253.

what is photographed. Rather it corresponds to the technical refinement of the camera's

performance … [as it] seems to make possible a coincidence between the moment of the act of

recording and the moment of the referent."[53] Benjamin himself, however, gives a slightly

different account:

> The earlier plates were far less sensitive to light and this necessitated long exposures in the open. This in turn made it desirable to place the subject in as secluded a spot as possible where nothing could disturb concentration. 'The synthesis of expression brought about by the length of time that a model has to stand still,' says Orlik of the early photography, 'is the main reason why these pictures, apart from their simplicity, resemble well-drawn or painted portraits and have a more penetrating and lasting effect on the spectator than more recent photography.' The procedure itself taught to models to live inside rather than outside the moment.[54]

Here, already, one finds a sense that the "moment" of photography is in fact punctuated by a

Passage, structured around a space of time internal to it. The same sense sense can be found in

the contrast between Kracauer's claim that "*historicist thinking* … emerged at about the same

time as modern photographic technology" and Benjamin's observation, paraphrased by Derrida,

that "the invention of photography and the advent of psychoanalysis concur [*conviennent*]"[55] – a

contrast that suggests an internality to the photograph that goes far beyond the "surface

cohesion" decried by Kracauer in "On Photography."

In the final chapter of *Inheriting Walter Benjamin*, Gerhard Richter meditates on multiple

meanings of the phrase "photography goes with time."[56] After following the passage of the image

of the image from Kracauer, through Benjamin, to Derrida, and the passage of the image of the

Passage from Kracauer (in)to Derrida; the passage of the image in time, and the passage of time

into the image, one cannot help but agree.

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53 Cadava, *Words of Light*, 13-14.
54 Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography." *Screen* 13.1 (1972): 8-17.
55 Jacques Derrida, *Right of Inspection*, trans. David Wills (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998), 25th page of Derrida's unpaginated contribution; see also Derrida, *The Work of Mourning,* 38-39.
56 Gerhard Richter, *Inheriting Walter Benjamin* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 123.

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