

BENJAMIN, PROUST, AND THE REJUVENATING POWERS OF MEMORY

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IN HIS 1929 essay 'The Image of Proust', Walter Benjamin argues that what is radical about the conception of involuntary memory which emerges from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* is the experience of rejuvenation with which it is associated. Benjamin argues that Proust's novel is marked by a 'constant attempt to charge an entire lifetime with the utmost awareness' – a consciousness which springs from the 'shock of rejuvenation' that one experiences when 'the past is reflected in the dewy fresh instant'.¹ In this essay I argue that what is significant, for Benjamin, about the impressions evoked by involuntary memory is not only the particular experience of time which they enable, but more significantly, the rejuvenation of the capacity for imagination with which this experience is associated. Drawing on Benjamin's analysis of the radicality of the child's capacity for imagination, I argue that it is in the involuntary recollection of childhood (revealed both in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, and Benjamin's own childhood reminiscences) that Benjamin locates the possibility for rejuvenation, and with it a sense of promise for a different kind of future.

I.

One of the earliest references to Proust in Benjamin's correspondence appears in a letter to his friend Gershom Scholem dated July 21 1925, in which he informs Scholem of his recent decision to undertake the 'enormous task' of translating *Sodom and Gomorrah* (the 'main novel' of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*).² While Benjamin's translation of *Sodom and Gomorrah* was never published, two other volumes

which he translated in collaboration with Franz Hessel were published as *Im Schatten der jungen Mädchen* and *Die Herzogin von Guermantes* in 1927 and 1930 respectively.¹ Throughout this period, Benjamin's fascination with Proust's writings is clearly evident in his correspondence with friends and associates. In the above mentioned letter to Scholem, Benjamin's acknowledgment of the close affinity between Proust's 'philosophical perspective' and his own prompts him to describe their relationship as one of 'kindred souls'. 'I am eager to see', Benjamin writes, 'whether this feeling will be maintained now that I will be intimately involved with his work'.² In a letter to Rainer Maria Rilke written four months later, the continuation of these feelings is confirmed:

The deeper I delve into the text [*Sodom and Gomorrah*], the more grateful I am for the circumstances that caused it to be entrusted to me! What I have gained from having been so deeply involved with this great masterpiece will in time become very tangible for me.³

However, despite Benjamin's own claims about the philosophical affinities between his own ideas and those of Proust, there has been much speculation about the extent to which Benjamin and Proust are in fact 'kindred souls'. This speculation has, in part, been fuelled by Theodor Adorno's account of a conversation he had with Benjamin about the Proust translations. In 'On Proust' Adorno writes that Benjamin once told him 'that he did not want to read one word more of Proust than he had to translate, because otherwise he would fall into an addictive dependency that would impede him in his own production'.⁴ In 'Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin', Peter Szondi claims that this remark can be read not as a confirmation of Benjamin's felt affinity to Proust, but rather as a sign of trepidation about his concentrated engagement with a work 'only apparently similar to his own'. Benjamin's letter to Scholem, written in September 1926, in which he describes the 'symptoms of intestinal poisoning' induced by his 'unproductive involvement with a writer who so splendidly pursues goals that are similar to [his] own, at least former, goals'-would certainly appear to confirm Szondi's claim.⁵

Szondi argues that Proust's and Benjamin's shared concern to capture 'lost time' (as manifested in *In Search of Lost Time* and *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* respectively) obscures 'the fact that the intentions of the two works are not only not related but are in fact totally opposed'.⁶ Szondi claims that Proust's search for, and experi-

ence of lost time (through the conjunction of the past and the present triggered by involuntary memory) is primarily motivated by a desire to 'escape from the sway of time itself'.¹⁰ He argues that this desire (the goal of which is to evade the future, and with it death) stands in stark contrast to the promise of the future that Benjamin seeks in the past evoked by involuntary memory.

Szondi's claim can, in part, be confirmed by the comments of Proust's narrator, Marcel, in the final volume of the book. In a discussion of the effects evoked by the taste of the madeleine (which was the catalyst for his first sojourn into the realm of involuntary memory) Marcel argues that the 'joy' induced by these 'impressions' hinges on their extra-temporality:

A minute freed from the order of time has re-created in us ... the man freed from the order of time. And one can understand that this man should have confidence in his joy, even if the simple taste of a madeleine does not seem logically to contain within it the reasons for this joy, one can understand that the word 'death' should have no meaning for him: situated outside time, why should he fear the future?¹¹

As Szondi and others have pointed out, this desire to escape the future by submerging oneself in a timeless, idealised past does not sit comfortably with the powers of involuntary memory envisioned by Benjamin.¹² While Benjamin is not openly critical of Proust in this regard, in 'The Image of Proust' he does point out that there are 'rudiments of an enduring idealism' in Proust's writings, but adds that 'it would be a mistake to make these the basis of an interpretation'.¹³ For while the concerns which underpin Benjamin's interest in involuntary memory do differ from those of Proust in certain regards, there are, nonetheless, a number of important similarities between each of their analyses of the 'rejuvenating' effects precipitated by an experience of 'convoluted time'. While Proust's trepidation about the future is quelled by his encounters with the past, to claim this as the primary motivation behind his search for lost time is to radically undermine the significantly more complex, nuanced conception of the powers of involuntary memory that emerges from the six volumes of *In Search of Lost Time*.

In order to get a fuller sense of the important influence that Proust's writings had on the development of Benjamin's conception of the significance of involuntary memory, an analysis of the distinc-

tion which Proust draws between voluntary and involuntary memory is required. In *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel argues that the 'desiccated' and 'insubstantial' images evoked by voluntary memory (otherwise referred to as 'the memory of the intellect') do not preserve anything of the 'reality' of the past. Located beyond the grasp of the intellect, he argues that the true past 'lies hidden' within 'some material object' or 'in the sensation which that material object will give us' – the location of which can only be discovered by chance.¹⁴ This is because the reality of the past consists of impressions (of colours, scents, feelings and sounds) which have been separated by the intellect from the events or moments with which they were associated, because – as Marcel points out – 'it could make nothing of them for its own rational purposes'.¹⁵ Although excluded from the realm in which they could be voluntarily recalled, he argues that these impressions nonetheless remain 'immured as within a thousand sealed vessels', each of which is filled with scents, colours, and temperatures which, when discovered, provide us with 'the sensation of extraordinarily diverse atmospheres'.¹⁶ For Marcel, the 'essential character' of these ephemeral encounters (which, like 'a propitious breeze', blow in from the past¹⁷) is that they cannot be recalled at will, and this – he claims – is the 'mark of their authenticity'.¹⁸

As Benjamin argues in his 1939 essay 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', a comparison can be drawn between Proust's ideas and those elaborated by Sigmund Freud in his 1921 essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'¹⁹ (which Benjamin describes, in *The Arcades Project*, as 'probably the best commentary' that exists on Proust's writings²⁰). In a similar vein to Proust's analysis of the desiccating function of the intellect, Freud argues that consciousness plays an important role in parrying stimuli from the realm in which they could leave behind an imprint in memory. 'The basic formula of this hypothesis', Benjamin writes,

is that 'becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system'. Rather, memory fragments are 'often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness'. Put in Proustian terms, this means that only what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject as an experience [*Erlebnis*], can become a component of the *memoire involontaire*.²¹

For Benjamin, the 'special achievement' of the intellect can be found

in its 'function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents'.³⁷ This process not only turns the incident into 'a moment that has been lived (*Erlebnis*)', but in doing so, 'sterilize[s] it ... for poetic experience' (*dichterische Erfahrung*).³⁸ 'Experiences', Benjamin writes, 'are lived similarities'. 'What is decisive here is not the causal connections established over the course of time' (which characterise the kind of experience designated by the term *Erlebnis*),³⁹ but rather 'the capacity for endless interpolations into what has been'.⁴⁰ While 'a lived event is finite – at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience [*des Erlebens*]; a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before it or after it'.⁴¹

Like Benjamin, Marcel argues that the images of the past which can be voluntarily recalled have been made 'arid by the intellect' through and by which they have been filtered and systematised.⁴² While the 'snapshots taken by [his] memory' do not reveal anything of the substance of his trip to Venice, for example, an experience of a very different kind is communicated to him after the event via a chance encounter, in Paris, with an uneven path like the one he had encountered in the baptistery at St.Mark's.⁴³ For Marcel, what is important about this encounter is not so much the uncanny recurrence of the sensation of bumpy paving stones underfoot, but rather the extent to which this recurrence serves as a trigger for the mood and emotions associated with that time. Marcel's discovery of an old book, for example, not only reignites within him the memory of reading it as a child, but serves as a catalyst for an encounter with 'the brilliant sunshine that prevailed while he was reading it', and the desires and dreams 'that were then shaping themselves in his mind'.⁴⁴ This emphasis on the evocation of feeling and mood (rather than a purely imagistic encounter with the past) plays an important role in Benjamin's analysis of *In Search of Lost Time*. In his observations on Proust collected in the 'Proust-Papier', he writes:

[W]hat Proust discovered, is that once he had broken open the secret compartment of 'mood', what lay inside ... could be appropriated: this disorderly heap of things, which we ourselves, having faithfully crammed into the unconscious, had forgotten, and which now overwhelms the person who stands before it, like the man at the sight of a drawer which is stuffed to the brim with useless, forgotten toys. It is this playfulness [*Verspieltheit*] of true life, of which only memory speaks to us, that one must seek in

Proust, and make the central point of reflection.³¹

This sense of 'playfulness' (which is also central to Benjamin's analysis of the radicality of childhood perception and cognition) is – in his analysis of Proust – entwined with the relationship he draws between the involuntary recollection of one's childhood and an experience of 'rejuvenation [*Verjüngung*]'.³² Anticipating Benjamin's fascination with the child's capacity for imagination, and his/her refusal to accept the form of something as it exists³³, Marcel argues in *In Search of Lost Time* that the rejuvenating power of the impressions evoked by involuntary memory lies in their capacity to evoke a sense of 'fresh emotion' and 'spiritual renewal'³⁴ which could serve as a 'starting point' or 'foundation stone' for the construction of a different kind of existence.³⁵

II.

The significance Benjamin places upon the relationship between involuntary memory and an experience of rejuvenation is also manifested in his childhood reminiscences. In both 'A Berlin Chronicle' and *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*, the past as recalled via involuntary memory emerges as a preserve of hope for a different kind of future. According to Scholem, Benjamin started work on 'A Berlin Chronicle' in Berlin in January 1932, and in the following months continued to work on it while living in Ibiza.³⁶ As Benjamin explains in a letter written to Scholem in April of that year, his stay on the island was prompted 'first and foremost' by his very poor economic situation, and the 'strain of inconceivable proportions' engendered by the difficulties associated with making ends meet in Berlin.³⁷ Benjamin completed 'A Berlin Chronicle' in Ibiza, and in July travelled to France, where he planned to take his own life in a Hotel in Nice.³⁸ In a letter to Scholem (written on July 26) Benjamin describes the 'profound fatigue' that had overcome him as a result of the political events in Germany which were 'preparing the way for Hitler's assumption of power'³⁹ – the impending consequences of which Benjamin was contemplating 'with a grimness verging on hopelessness'.⁴⁰ However, despite the mood of despair which pervades his letters of this period, Benjamin did not take his life, but travelled instead to Italy and then, in November, to Berlin, where he worked – amidst 'the inaugural celebrations' with which the Nazis heralded the beginning of a 'new ... era'⁴¹ – on a series of 'sketches'

concerning memories of [his] early life' entitled *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*.⁴²

The conditions under which Benjamin wrote this book are not insignificant. As Anna Stüssi argues in *Erinnerung an die Zukunft*, the fragmentary images of Benjamin's childhood which constitute *Berliner Kindheit* correspond with those memories 'which flash ... up at a moment of danger' that Benjamin describes in the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (which he wrote in exile in Paris, prior to his death in 1940).⁴³ For our concerns here, however, another – more productive – comparison can be drawn between the images which constitute *Berliner Kindheit*, and Benjamin's analysis of involuntary memory (which was undertaken around the time of his planned suicide) in his short, but nonetheless significant study 'Aus einer kleinen Rede über Proust, an meinem vierzigsten Geburtstag gehalten' ['From a short speech on Proust, delivered on my fortieth birthday'] on July 15, 1932 :

On the knowledge of the *mémoire involontaire*: not only do its images come when they are not summoned, but they appear rather as images that we have never seen before we remember them. This is most obvious in those images, in which – as in some dreams – we can see ourselves. We stand before ourselves, as we probably stood once somewhere in a primal past [*Urvorgangenheit*] but as we have never stood before our gaze. And precisely the most important images – those which are developed in the darkroom of the lived moment – are the ones we get to see. One could say that our deepest moments ... come with a little image, a photo of ourselves. And that 'entire life' that we often hear about, which passes before the dying, or those people who are hovering in danger of dying, is composed precisely out of these little images.⁴⁴

In 'A Berlin Chronicle' and *Berliner Kindheit* it is these 'little images' that Benjamin seeks to capture and represent, and which distinguish his reminiscences from the chronological, narrative based content of autobiographies developed primarily from the memory of the intellect. In 'A Berlin Chronicle', he writes:

Reminiscences, even extensive ones, do not always amount to an autobiography. And these quite certainly do not, even for the Berlin years that I am exclusively concerned with here. For autobiography has to do with time, with sequence

and what makes up the continuous flow of life. Here, I am talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities.⁴¹

In both 'A Berlin Chronicle' and *Berliner Kindheit* the temporal spaces opened up by involuntary memory are associated with rooms, objects, places, streets, sounds, and colours which surrounded Benjamin as a child, and later as a young man, growing up in Berlin. The images in *Berliner Kindheit* (which Hermann Hesse described as having been 'sketched out with the most careful hand and lightly hued as if with watercolours'⁴²) bear titles such as 'Der Nähkasten' ['The Sewing Box'], 'Wintermorgen' ['Winter Morning'], 'Verstecke' ['Hiding Places'], 'Loggien' ['Loggias'], 'Das Karussell' ['The Merry-go-round'], 'Ein Weihnachtsengel' ['A Christmas Angel'], and 'Farben' ['Colours'], while the memories that he describes in 'A Berlin Chronicle' revolve around places such as the zoo, New Lake, The Viktoria Café, and other meeting places of the Youth Movement with which Benjamin was associated. As Benjamin writes in the preface to *Berliner Kindheit*, this emphasis on Berlin was due partly to his realisation while abroad in 1932 that in the near future he could be forced to take permanent leave of the city in which he was born, and partly because – for someone living in exile – the images which awaken homesickness most strongly are those of childhood.⁴³

In 'The Image of Proust', Benjamin argues that Proust's writings, too, are infused with an almost debilitating sense of homesickness. For Benjamin, however, Proust's homesickness is not the catalyst for a desire to escape into the realm of childhood and away from time itself, but is the product of his longing for a 'world distorted in the state of resemblance'.⁴⁴ Benjamin argues that the world which involuntary memory opens up to Proust is not a world of 'boundless time' but rather a 'universe of convolution',⁴⁵ and it is through this experience of 'convoluted time' (which is achieved through the interweaving of memory with the present) that Benjamin locates the possibility for rejuvenation, and with it a sense of promise for a different kind of future. As John McCole has argued, this 'entwinement of memory' stands in stark contrast to 'the perpetual present of immediate, living experience [*Erlebnis*]'. It consists 'neither in recalling discrete moments whose entire significance was given in the instant of their occurrence nor in freeing them from time', but rather in 'the ability to interpolate endlessly in what has been'.⁴⁶

While it is clear that the emphasis which Benjamin places on certain aspects of Proust's search for lost time is driven by his own conception

of the powers of involuntary memory, he is not uncritical of Proust. On the contrary, one of the key criticisms that he levels at Proust's writings revolves around the two fundamentally different forms taken by the desire for happiness fuelling Proust's homesickness. One of these forms, Benjamin argues, is associated with an experience of memory which revolves around 'the unheard-of, the unprecedented, the height of bliss', while the other is characterised by 'eternal repetition, the eternal restoration of the original, the first happiness'.¹ While the latter – in its evocation of a self-enclosed, timeless space – is a recognition of the emphasis Proust places on the past as a refuge from the future, the former – in its reference to that which is 'unprecedented' – evokes an experience of time much closer to that which Benjamin privileges in his reading of Proust's 'impassioned cult of similarity'.²

For both Benjamin and Proust, the experiences provoked by these encounters are associated not with those incidents or events which one would ordinarily deem 'memorable', but rather with the fleeting experience of mood that Benjamin associates with 'the night, a lost twittering of birds, or a breath drawn at the sill of an open window'.³ It is the moody, atmospheric quality of these encounters (which are themselves prompted by everyday impressions such as the flavour of a certain blend of coffee or the colour of a book) which draws Benjamin – despite his reservations – to the writings of Proust. Marcel writes:

The sight, for instance, of the binding of a book once read may weave into the characters of its title the moonlight of a distant summer night. The taste of our breakfast coffee brings with it that vague hope of fine weather which so often long ago - as with the day still intact and full before us, we were drinking it out of a bowl of white porcelain, creamy and fluted and itself looking almost like vitrified milk - suddenly smiled upon us in the pale uncertainty of the dawn.⁴

For 'an hour', he continues, 'is not merely an hour, it is a vase full of scents and sounds and projects and climates', and real experience is borne of a 'connexion between these immediate sensations and the memories which envelop us simultaneously with them'.⁵

It is also out of such moments that both 'A Berlin Chronicle' and *Berliner Kindheit* are constituted. The promise of the 'scents and sounds and projects and climates' evoked by Benjamin's images of the loggias, the zoo, and ice-skating on New Lake do not lie, however, in

the objects and spaces, occasions and conversations with which they are associated, nor in their capacity to provide some kind of outline for the future. Rather – as per Proust's impression of the flavour of an early morning coffee when the day was 'still intact and full before [him]' – their significance lies in their evocation of a time when the future was still open, and the past not yet completed.⁶⁰ For Benjamin, this experience of time contains within it its own revolutionary possibility, because it opens up a space in the forward march of history within which the remembering subject is able to imagine the possibility of a different kind of future.⁶¹

In *In Search of Lost Time*, Proust also draws a connection between the experience of 'breathing the atmosphere' of childhood and the rejuvenation of one's capacity for imagination. In *Time Regained*, for example, Marcel refers to the 'celestial nourishment' with which involuntary memory provides him, commenting later that his encounters with impressions such as the sight of the sea, and the smell of

a room provoked by the texture of a starched napkin play an important role in 'caress[ing his] imagination'.⁶²

While the relationship that Benjamin draws between the experience of childhood and the capacity for imagination plays an important role in his analysis of childhood perception and cognition in *One-Way Street*, and in his essays on mimesis, and proletarian children's theatre⁶³, in the context of *this* essay, the heightened capacity for imagination that Benjamin attributes to children helps to shed light upon the nature of the promise for the future that he locates in the spaces opened up by his childhood reminiscences. For as Benjamin suggests in the preface to the book, the images which constitute *Berliner Kindheit* are not specific to his own particular childhood.⁶⁴ Rather, as attested to by his delight upon hearing that Scholem had recognised his own childhood in the book, what is significant for Benjamin is the degree to which *Berliner Kindheit* captures not only something of the urban childhood of the middle classes, but something of the experience of childhood more generally.⁶⁵

In his writings on Proust, Benjamin is critical of what he describes as the private, self-absorbed focus of Proust's conception of the powers of involuntary memory. In 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', for example, he argues that Proust 'nonchalantly and constantly strives to tell the reader: Redemption is my private show'.⁶⁶ Benjamin, however, argues in his later writings that 'where there is experience in the strict sense of the word', aspects of one's 'individual past' are

entwined with those of the 'collective'.⁶¹ In his notes on Proust written after the publication of 'The Image of Proust' in 1929, this emphasis on the collective features heavily. In his notes for *The Arcades Project*, for example, Benjamin argues that in order for a desire for social change to become manifest, the experiences provoked by Proust's childhood recollections would have to be experienced at the level of the collective. For Benjamin, the promise of the impressions evoked by involuntary memory lies not only in the particular content of the memories which are recollected, but in the extent to which the capacity for imagination that he associates with children's play is reignited along with those memories.

III.

In his analysis of Benjamin's essay on proletarian children's theatre, Gerhard Fischer draws a highly productive comparison between Benjamin's analysis of the significance of the child's imagination and Freud's discussion of children's play in his 1907 lecture 'Creative Writers and Daydreams'.⁶² In this short piece, Freud argues that the child's 'intense occupation' with play (an activity which he or she takes very seriously) can be likened to the practices of the creative writer insofar as both seek to 'create... a world of [their] own, or, rather, rearrange ... the things of [their] world in a new way which pleases [them]'.⁶³ He argues that the creative practices of both the child and the writer are fuelled by a desire for the fulfilment of 'unsatisfied wishes'.⁶⁴ 'A happy person', Freud writes, 'never phantasies, only an unsatisfied one ... and every single phantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correction of [an] unsatisfying reality'.⁶⁵

This conception of creative writing (as a practice which is driven by both a dissatisfaction with the prevailing conditions, and an active desire to transform one's reality into something different) certainly provides us with an insight into the writings of Proust, which are – as Adorno has pointed out – infused by a 'fidelity to childhood' borne out of Proust's implacable desire for happiness.⁶⁶ Proust, Adorno writes,

looks at even adult life with such alien and wondering eyes that under his immersed gaze the present is virtually transformed into prehistory, into childhood. This has an aspect that is not at all esoteric but rather democratic. For every somewhat sheltered child whose responsiveness has not been driven out of him in his earliest years has at his disposal infinite possibilities of experience.⁶⁷

Contrary, however, to Benjamin's claims about the private, self-absorbed focus of Proust's analysis of the experiences evoked by involuntary memory, it is clear from both Proust's letters and the narrator's comments in *Time Regained* that Proust conceived of the task of the novel somewhat differently. In a letter to Camille Vetard (written in 1922), Proust claims that the task of the book is 'to reveal to the conscious mind unconscious phenomena which, wholly forgotten, sometimes lie very far back in the past'⁷⁰; the significance of which is framed, in *Time Regained*, in terms of a collective, rather than an individual recollection of the past. In a passage towards the end of the novel, Marcel argues that 'it would be inaccurate ... to say that I thought of those who would read [the book] as 'my' readers. For it seemed to me that they would not be 'my' readers but the readers of their own selves ... It would be my book, but with its help I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves'.⁷¹ 'The writer's work', he claims, 'is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offers to the reader to enable him to discern what ... he would perhaps never have perceived in himself'.⁷²

In his article 'On Proust', Adorno expresses a similar sentiment. In a passage which reveals an important affinity between the childhood reminiscences of Benjamin and Proust (which was not explicitly recognised by Benjamin himself), Adorno argues that the reader of Proust 'feels addressed by [his descriptions] as if by inherited memories'.⁷³ It is from 'under the mask of autobiography' that he is able to give away 'the secrets of every person while at the same time reporting on something extremely specialized'.⁷⁴ In the recollections of his childhood collected in 'A Berlin Chronicle' and *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*, Benjamin has sought to achieve something very similar. Confronted by a future eclipsed by the horrors of Fascism, the value of his childhood reminiscences lies not in the extent to which they open up a space within which Benjamin can escape into the past, and away from the terror of the present. On the contrary, what I have tried to show in this essay, is that what is significant for Benjamin about the impressions evoked by involuntary memory, is not only the extent to which they can rejuvenate the capacity for imagination hidden within the crevices of one's childhood, but more significantly the extent to which the child's capacity for imagination can be harnessed in the service of the creation of a different kind of future.

Notes

- 1 Walter Benjamin, 'The Image of Proust', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992), pp. 206-7.
- 2 *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 277-8. Hereafter referred to as *Correspondence*.
- 3 Momme Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin A Biography*, ed. Martina Dervis, trans. Malcolm R. Green and Ingrida Ligers (London and New York: Verso, 1997), pp. 166-8.
- 4 *Correspondence*, p. 278.
- 5 *Correspondence*, p. 285.
- 6 Adorno, 'On Proust', in *Notes to Literature*, Volume 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 313.
- 7 Peter Szondi, 'Hope in the Past', *Critical Inquiry*, 4: 3 (Spring, 1978), p. 496.
- 8 *Correspondence*, p. 305.
- 9 Szondi, p. 496.
- 10 Szondi, p. 497.
- 11 Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* (6 Volumes), trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London: Vintage, 1996), Volume 6, p. 222. (Only the volume and page number will be given hereafter.)
- 12 Proust, Vol. 6, p. 225.
- 13 See also John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 261.
- 14 Benjamin, 'The Image of Proust', p. 206.
- 15 Proust, Vol. 1, p. 51. See also Proust's analysis of the differences between voluntary and involuntary memory in his letter to Antoine Bibesco of 1912, *Letters of Marcel Proust*, ed. and trans. Nina Curtiss (New York: Random House, 1949), pp. 226-7.
- 16 Proust, Vol. 6, p. 221.
- 17 Proust, Vol. 6, p. 221.
- 18 Proust, Vol. 1, p. 186.
- 19 Proust, Vol. 6, p. 232.
- 20 Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *On Metapsychology, The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, The Penguin Freud Library, Volume 11, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1991).
- 21 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 547.
- 22 Benjamin, 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London and New York: Verso, 1997), p. 114.
- 23 Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 117.
- 24 Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, pp. 116-7. 'The *memoire volontaire*', Benjamin writes in

- The Arcades Project*, 'is a registry providing the object [or incident] with a classificatory number behind which it disappears. "So now we've been there." ("I've had an experience")', p. 211. In a letter to Adorno (written in May 1940) Benjamin 'trace[s] the roots of [his] "theory of experience" to a childhood memory'. 'My parents', he writes, 'naturally took walks with us wherever we spent our summers. There were either two or three of us children. The one I have in mind is my brother. After we had visited one of the obligatory tourist attractions around Freudenstadt, Wengen, or Schreiberhau, my brother used to say, "Now we can say that we've been there." This statement made an unforgettable impression on me', *Correspondence*, p. 629.
- 25 'Experience', in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, ed. Michael Jennings et al, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 553, and 'Zur Erfahrung', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. VI-1, pp. 88-9.
 - 26 Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle', in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 603.
 - 27 'The Image of Proust', p. 198. I have modified the English translation of '*ein erlebtes Ereignis*' as 'an experienced event' to 'a lived event' because the translation of '*erlebtes*' as 'experienced' is confusing in this context. See 'Zum Bilde Prousts', in *Gesammelte Schriften* (7 Volumes), ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), Vol. II-1, p. 312
 - 28 Proust, Vol. 6, p. 224.
 - 29 Proust, Vol. 6, p. 218.
 - 30 Proust, Vol. 6, pp. 241-2.
 - 31 *Gesammelte Schriften*, II-3, p. 1057. My translation.
 - 32 In his *Notizen über Proust und Baudelaire*, Benjamin makes a number of references to the rejuvenating powers of memory. See, for example, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II-3, p. 1063. See also 'The Image of Proust', pp. 206-207
 - 33 See, for example, Benjamin's 'Sammlung von Frankfurter Kinderreimen', *Gesammelte Schriften*, IV-2, p. 792.
 - 34 See, for example: Proust, Vol. 1, p. 187, and Vol. 6, p. 237.
 - 35 Proust, Vol. 5, p. 294
 - 36 Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin. The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Harry Zohn (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), p. 181.
 - 37 *Correspondence*, pp. 389-92.
 - 38 For a detailed account of Benjamin's preparations for death during this period, see Scholem, *Walter Benjamin. The Story of a Friendship*, pp. 185-9.
 - 39 'Chronology', in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings*, Volume 2, p. 844. The situation is described by the editors of Benjamin's *Selected Writings* as follows: 'On July 20, 1932, Franz von Papen, who had been German chancellor for only a month, suspended the democratically elected Prussian government, naming himself "Imperial Commissar for Prussia" and preparing the way for Hitler's assumption of power. Benjamin was all too aware of the immediate and possibly future results of Germany's political demise. By the end of July he had already, as a Jew, received

- a letter from the building-safety authorities ordering him to abandon his apartment because of alleged code violations, his radio work had also been brought to a halt by the dismissal of the left-leaning directors of the Berlin and Frankfurt stations', p. 844.
- 40 *Correspondence*, pp. 395-6.
- 41 Broderson, p. 202.
- 42 Letter to Adorno (written on September 3, 1932) in *Adorno and Benjamin: The Complete Correspondence*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 16. In the same letter, Benjamin notes that included amongst the 'small library' that he has brought with him to Ibiza are four volumes of Proust which he 'frequently peruse[s]'.
 43 Anna Stüssi, *Erinnerung an die Zukunft: Walter Benjamins "Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert"* (Göttingen: Palaestra, 1977), p. 83, and Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, p. 247. For a detailed account of the final months of Benjamin's life in 1940, see Bernd Witte, *Walter Benjamin: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. James Rolleston (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), pp. 199-205.
- 44 *Gesammelte Schriften*, II-3, p. 1064. My translation.
- 45 'A Berlin Chronicle', *Walter Benjamin-Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 612. In a letter to Scholem written in September 1932, Benjamin writes of *Berliner Kindheit* '[Y]ou will have guessed that they are not narratives in the form of a chronicle, but rather portray individual expeditions into the depths of memory', *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, 1932 - 1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem, trans. Gary Smith and Andre Lefevere, (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), p. 19.
- 46 Hermann Hesse, 'Welche Bücher begleiten Sie', *Die Weltwoche*, 20, (July 1951). Quoted in Broderson, pp. 211 - 2.
- 47 *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* (Fassung letzter Hand). *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII-1, p. 385.
- 48 'The Image of Proust', p. 200.
- 49 'The Image of Proust', p. 206. Benjamin's analysis is supported by Proust's comments in a letter written to Princess Marthe Bibesco in 1912: 'A sensation', Proust writes, 'however disinterested it may be, a perfume, a ray of light ... are still too much in my power to make me happy. It is when they bring back to my mind some other sensation, when I savor them between the present and the past (and not in the past - impossible to explain this here), that they make me happy', *Letters of Marcel Proust*, p. 213.
- 50 McCole, p. 262. McCole is quoting Benjamin's 'A Berlin Chronicle', p. 603.
- 51 'The Image of Proust', p. 200.
- 52 'The Image of Proust', p. 200.
- 53 'The Image of Proust', p. 199.
- 54 Proust, Vol. 6, p. 245. I have slightly modified the punctuation of the translation in order to render it more clear.
- 55 Proust, Vol. 6, pp. 245-6.

- 56 See Szondi, p. 499
- 57 'In reality', Benjamin writes in his notes for the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', there is not one moment, which does not carry with it its own revolutionary chance - a totally new solution in the face of a totally new task'. See *Gesammelte Schriften*, I-3, p. 1231.
- 58 See Proust, Vol. 6, pp. 224 and 229 respectively
- 59 See 'One-Way Street' in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass., and London, Harvard University Press, 1996), and 'Doctrine of the Similar', 'On the Mimetic Faculty', and 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre' in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings*, Vol. 2.
- 60 '[I]n these experiments [*Versuchen*]', Benjamin writes, 'the biographical characteristics, which are apparent in the continuity rather than in the depth of experience, ... recede'. See *Berliner Kindheit*, p. 385.
- 61 See *Berliner Kindheit*, p. 385. In a letter to Scholem (written in January 1933) Benjamin writes '[Y]ou could hardly have said anything more encouraging than that in fact now and again certain passages seemed to bear on your own childhood', *Correspondence*, p. 400. In a letter to Benjamin (written in April 1934) Adorno comments that Erich Reiss also 'felt he could recognize his own childhood in [Benjamin's] "Childhood"' in *Berliner Kindheit*. See *Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. The Complete Correspondence*, p. 37.
- 62 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 145.
- 63 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 113.
- 64 Gerhard Fischer, 'Benjamin's Utopia of Education as *Theatrum Mundi et Vitae*: On the Programme of a Proletarian Children's Theatre', in Gerhard Fischer (ed.), *With the Sharpened Axe of Reason: Approaches to Walter Benjamin* (Oxford and Washington DC: Berg, 1996), and Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Daydreaming', in *Art and Literature*, The Penguin Freud Library, Volume 14, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1990).
- 65 Freud, 'Creative Writers and Daydreaming', p. 134.
- 66 Freud, 'Creative Writers and Daydreaming', p. 133.
- 67 Freud, 'Creative Writers and Daydreaming', p. 134.
- 68 Adorno, 'On Proust', p. 316.
- 69 Adorno, 'On Proust', p. 315.
- 70 *Letters of Marcel Proust*, p. 405
- 71 Proust, Vol. 6, pp. 431-2.
- 72 Proust, Vol. 6, p. 273
- 73 Adorno, 'On Proust', p. 315
- 74 Adorno, 'On Proust', p. 313.