Forgetting Eckbert, Forgetting Proust: Why Benjamin Abandoned Proust for Eckbert to Defend "Baudelaire"

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FORGETTING ECKBERT, FORGETTING PROUST:

Why Benjamin Abandoned Proust for Eckbert to Defend “Baudelaire”

by J. Brandon Pelcher

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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This thesis entitled:
Forgetting Eckbert, Forgetting Proust:
Why Benjamin Abandoned Proust for Eckbert to Defend “Baudelaire”
written by J. Brandon Pelcher
has been approved for the Graduate Program of Comparative Literature

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the for meet acceptable presentation standards
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
In replying to Theodor Adorno’s criticism regarding the lack of a theory of forgetting as reification in “Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire,” Walter Benjamin states that Marcel Proust’s mémoire involontaire is unable to answer such criticism. Rather, Benjamin will look to Ludwig Tieck’s Der blonde Eckbert. Proust theorizes an always already forgotten sensation, externalized in a now overdetermined physical object. In Eckbert, memories are internalized and therefore, according to Sigmund Freud and Theodor Reik, never truly forgotten, but rather divided through stimuli defense into two underdetermined halves of the former whole: name and excitation. This internal separation forces any forgetting in Eckbert to be the forgetting of the connection, which had previously held together the memory. Therefore, Benjamin’s reversal from Proust as theoretician of forgetting to Eckbert as locus classicus of forgetting mirrors Adorno’s conflation of the true forgetting of Proustian externalization with the non-presence of reification.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin
BW – Breifwechsel
CC – The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940

Walter Benjamin
AP – The Arcades Project
C – The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin
GS I-VII – Gesammelte Schriften
PW – Das Passagen-Werk, GS V
SW I-IV – Selected Works

Marcel Proust
BSB – By Way of Sainte-Beuve
Corr. I-XXI – Correspondance
CSB – Contre Sainte-Beuve
JS – Jean Santeuil
RTP I-IV – À la Recherche du temps perdu
SL I-IV – Selected Letters
SLT I-VI – In Search of Lost Time
TR – Textes retrouvés

Sigmund Freud
CPW – Complete Psychological Works
GW – Gesammelte Werken
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1939, Walter Benjamin sent a copy of his “Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire” to Max Horkheimer for publication in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*.¹ Theodor Adorno, who was to write the accompanying English and French abstracts for the German piece, wrote to Benjamin concerning the essay, stating that it was “als das Vollkommenste zu bezeichnen, was Sie seit dem Barockbuch und dem Kraus publiziert haben” and “die erste reife Frucht vom Totenbaum der Passagen” (*BW* 415; 416).² However, Adorno was not so full of praise as to offer no criticism whatsoever. He viewed Benjamin’s application of Freud’s theory of stimuli defense and memory to Baudelaire and Proust as lacking the depth and subtlety that such an intricate application would require. According to Adorno, Benjamin’s haste in this application had caused a dialectical element to drop out of the theory, “und zwar das des Vergessens” (*ibid*).³ Adorno continues: “Wäre es aber nicht die Aufgabe, den ganzen Gegensatz von Erlebnis und Erfahrung an eine dialektische Theorie des Vergessens anzuschließen” (*ibid*)?⁴ Adorno ties this criticism to reification and extends it to Benjamin’s chapter on the aura. While it is the only criticism that Adorno gives, he states: “Was ich etwa kritisch zum Baudelaire zu sagen hätte, fällt überhaupt nicht ins Gewicht” (*ibid*).⁵ The

¹ For brevity, I will hereafter abbreviate “Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire” as simply “Baudelaire.”
² the most perfect thing you have done since the book on Baroque drama and the work on Kraus; the first ripe fruit to fall from the totem pole of the Arcades (*CC* 319; 320).
³ and that is the element of forgetting itself (*ibid*).
⁴ Is it not the case that the real task here is to bring the entire opposition between sensory experience and experience proper into relation with a dialectical theory of forgetting? (321)
⁵ Any criticisms that I have to make about the Baudelaire are largely insignificant (320).
criticism that the dialectical element of forgetting is missing, an element at the heart of what Adorno considered one of the essay’s key tasks, is hardly insignificant. In his response, Benjamin appears to agree. He states unequivocally that the relationship between aura and forgetting is extremely significant. However, Benjamin begs that Adorno consider “es bitte nicht als ein Ausweichen, wenn ich heute über diese Feststellung nicht hinausgehe” (425). Benjamin recognizes that this criticism from Adorno will have to be answered, possibly in the work to follow “Baudelaire,” Benjamin states: “Das erste wird dann sein, dass ich auf den locus classicus der Theorie des Vergessens zurückgehe, den für mich, wie Sie wohl wissen, der »Blonde Eckbert« darstellt” (ibid).

Der blonde Eckbert was written by Ludwig Tieck in 1796 and published in his collection Volksmärchen. It is highly valued for its ambiguity, not only in its bizarre placement between fairytale, novella, tragedy of fate [Schicksalstragödie], and novel, but also in its unique narration, considered “ein eigentliches Meisterwerk des Dichters” (Fries 1180). This ambiguity begins with Bertha, Eckbert’s wife, sharing the fantastical story of her upbringing with her husband’s good and only friend Walther, whom Eckbert had vouched for as noble enough to hear it. This tale inside the tale tells of Bertha’s flight from home and her ensuing loneliness as sole companion to an old woman and her two pets, a loving dog and a songbird that laid gem-bearing eggs. Eventually Bertha abandoned the old woman and her dog, taking with her the wealth-producing bird, which she strangled upon her return to her hometown. At the end of her fantastical tale, Walther

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6 This was also a criticism that Adorno had with Benjamin’s essay on Kafka (see CC 71).
7 do not regard it as evasion if I do not pursue the question further here (326).
8 In that case, my first task will be to go back and consult the locus classicus of the theory of forgetting, which is represented for me, as you well know, by ‘Der Blonde Eckbert’ (327).
casually mentions the name of the abandoned dog, a name that Bertha had been unable to recall since she left the old woman. Bertha is driven to her deathbed by the shock of this casual naming. To clear his head, Eckbert heads out to hunt alone, eventually coming across and killing Walther. His wife and only friend both dead, Eckbert languishes in complete solitude, until he befriends Hugo, a knight Eckbert had introduced himself to at a party in an attempt to overcome his loneliness. Realizing that Hugo is in fact Walther, Eckbert is driven to madness, fleeing his home until he comes across an old woman, the companion of Bertha’s youth. She reveals to Eckbert that she had posed as Walther and Hugo and states that Bertha was Eckbert’s sister, a revelation whose trauma sends Eckbert to his death.

There is only one reference to Tieck’s *Der blonde Eckbert* in Benjamin’s writings published in his lifetime. In his essay “Franz Kafka,” Benjamin writes: “Im tiefssinnigen »Blonden Eckbert« Tiecks steht der vergessene Name eines Hündchens – Strohmian – als Chiffre einer rätselhaften Schuld” (*GS II.2* 430). This is also one of Benjamin’s few references to *Eckbert* that is not in some way connected to, and subsequently overtaken by, Marcel Proust and his *mémoire involontaire*. In his “Zum Bilde Prousts,” Benjamin strongly ties Proust’s *mémoire involontaire* to a theory of forgetting. The theory of

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9 That is not to say that Benjamin did not leave traces of his interaction with *Eckbert*. Ernst Bloch’s “Bilder des Déjà Vu” in his *Literarische Aufsätze* (Werkausgabe Bd. 9) relates their discussion of *Eckbert* on Capri in 1924. Benjamin planned to write an essay on *Eckbert*, which he mentioned in a letter to Gerhard Scholem in 1925 (see *Briehe 381*). In the early sketches of his *Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin reminds himself to add notes on *Eckbert* (*PW* <O,50>).

10 In Tieck’s profound story *Der blonde Eckbert* [Fair Eckbert], the forgotten name of a little dog, Strohmi, stands for a mysterious guilt (*SW II.2*, 810).

11 Both Benjamin’s discussion on Capri and his planned essay on *Eckbert* coincide historically with his initial steps as translator of Proust’s *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*. Benjamin’s attention to this translation likely shifted his focus from *Eckbert*. The proposed notes on *Eckbert* in *Das Passagen-Werk* were likely to augment the discussion of the effects of forgetting on Proust. However, *Eckbert* was not included when the citation was updated in subsequent collections (*PW* [K2a,3]). For a succinct discussion of Proust’s effect on Benjamin, see Robert Kahn’s “Image de soi, image de l’autre” and “Erich Auerbach and Walter Benjamin lecteurs du Temps retrouvé.”
forgetting had been paramount to Benjamin for some time and recurred throughout his works, most notably in his essay on Proust, whose ideas play a key role in “Baudelaire.” It is worth pointing out that Adorno stated that the dialectical element of forgetting had “dropped out” rather than having never appeared at all. His concern about the apparent lack of a theory of forgetting in Benjamin’s “Baudelaire” becomes all the more acute after seeing Benjamin’s interest in it throughout “Zum Bilde Prousts.” Therefore, Benjamin’s response to the criticism is surprising, not only for the introduction of Eckbert as his locus classicus of forgetting, but also for his dismissal of Proust, who up to this point had played that role. Benjamin suggests that Proust’s mémoire involontaire has little place in a discussion of a theory of forgetting. “Ich glaube, man braucht, um dem Vergessen das Seine zuzubilligen, den Begriff der mémoire involontaire nicht in Frage zu stellen” (BW 425). The increasingly frenetic situation of Benjamin’s attempted escape from Europe ended this line of conversation. However, the oddity of such a response must have raised many questions in Adorno.

What had changed between the theory of forgetting detailed in Benjamin’s “Zum Bilde Prousts” and the numerous other references to forgetting in mémoire involontaire throughout his work, and that which he now thought was the locus classicus of a theory of forgetting in Eckbert in this response to Adorno? After reading the respective theories of Proust and Eckbert, and how Benjamin may have utilized them, can we find a particularly singular strength in Eckbert, lacking in Proust, which would uniquely answer Adorno’s criticism? In short, why did Benjamin pick an early-Romantic fairy-tale, of which he rarely spoke, as his response to Adorno rather than his well known, well

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12 I do not think that, to give a true account of forgetting, one needs to call into question the notion of mémoire involontaire (SW IV 413).
respected, and well formulated theory of Proust, with which he had spent much of his professional life translating and refining?
CHAPTER II

PROUST

Mémoire Volontaire

Before determining Benjamin’s reading of forgetting in Proust, and why it may have changed over the course of time, an accurate account of Proust’s mémoire involontaire, the theoretical element of both his À la recherche du temps perdu and many of his early notes and works with which we are most interested, is necessary. Proust himself considered his work as “dominé par la distinction entre la mémoire involontaire et la mémoire volontaire” (TR 289). One of the first instances of mémoire involontaire in Proust’s work can be found in the preface to Contre Sainte-Beuve. The prominent placement of mémoire involontaire in the preface to what would eventually become the framework of À la recherche du temps perdu, reinforces the centrality of mémoire involontaire to Proust and the monomaniacal amount of work that Proust afforded its refinement. After a few sentences explaining the overarching tenets of mémoire involontaire, Proust begins to describe the episode that would become the famous scene of the madeleine in Du côté de chez Swann, which has become almost synonymous with Proust. As such, it is the perfect place to contrast it with that other Proustian memory, mémoire volontaire.

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13 For a discussion of Proust’s evolution of the various elements of his theory that we will be dealing with, see Céline Surprenant’s “Theory, Composition and Notes in Le Temps retrouvé” and Raichard Switzer’s “The Madeleine and the Biscotte.”
14 dominated by the distinction between involuntary memory and voluntary memory (Hodson 84).
The first sentence of Sainte-Beuve reads: “Chaque jour j’attache moins de prix à l’intelligence” (CSB 211).\textsuperscript{15} This is also one of the first instantiations of Proust’s thoughts of what he calls mémoire volontaire. Voluntary memory is the memory that we use every day, that is to say, the memory that we actively recall with our thoughts, to remember where we left the keys, etc. In general, voluntary memory is what is meant when one says “Venice was beautiful” or “Da wären wir nun gewesen” (PW [H5,1]).\textsuperscript{16} Proust began to notice that this voluntary memory was regularly used as the raw material of art. In other words, the act of memory used to recall which direction one turns the screwdriver to tighten rather than loosen was the same memory being used by artists, and the same memory valued by Sainte-Beuve. Proust believed that the mundane memory of our every day lives was an insufficient tool offering insufficient memories for the creation of a work of art. In Sainte-Beuve, Proust lays the framework from its first sentence for an argument against this voluntary memory. Proust continues: “Ce que l’intelligence nous rend sous le nom du passé n’est pas lui” (CSB 211).\textsuperscript{17} He saw in voluntary memory an inherent lack of depth and dimension in the recalled image. If the flawed, flat and uninteresting material of voluntary memory is used, we can expect any work of art reliant on it to be equally disappointing, for if the artist can not re-live the experience, how could he re-present it? This seeming impasse, in which Proust finds daily memory insufficient for the production of great art, is a driving force throughout much of La recherche.

\textsuperscript{15} Every day I put less stock in intellect (BSB 17, translation modified).
\textsuperscript{16} So now we’ve been there (AP [H5,1]). Benjamin compares this statement with Proust’s mémoire volontaire, which sparks his desire to enumerate a theory of experience, which would later become his “Baudelaire.” Benjamin also describes this statement, often made by his brother after family trips, in his response to Adorno’s criticisms on “Baudelaire” (see CC 326).
\textsuperscript{17} What intellect restores to us under the name of the past, is not the past (BSB 17).
highlights the inability of the narrator, whom I will call Marcel for short, to break free of mémoire volontaire in his attempt to find literary inspiration.

The introduction to the final climactic scene of Le Temps retrouvé gives a stirring example of Marcel’s despair at the unbreakable causation between voluntary memory and his literary failings. On a train back to Paris, stopped in the middle of a large field, Marcel notices a range of trees just next to the train. Sure that he will never break free of the restriction of voluntary memory that has rendered his attempted descriptions of Venise, Balbec, and Combray flaccid, Marcel resigns himself to never finding the inspiration to describe these trees in literature. He is at the point of growing disgusted with literature itself. Mirroring his despair invoked by his inability to describe the scene of trees in front of a halted train, Marcel ruminates on his difficulties in remembering the manifold elements his childhood hometown, Combray. But, this particular cold evening, Marcel’s mother had offered him a warming cup of tea and small madeleine, which he accepted against his usual habit. With a bite of tea infused cookie, Proust in Sainte-Beuve and Marcel in La recherche begin their respective books by turning away from the voluntary memory of the intellect to an involuntary memory, over which neither Proust nor Marcel hold any sway. At the exact moment that Marcel tastes the madeleine dipped in tea, Marcel is overwhelmed by a “plaisir délicieux” in complete opposition to “la morne journée et la perspective d’un triste lendemain” or the despair of trying to remember Combray, he had “cessé de [se] sentir médiocre, contingent, mortel” (RTP I 44). However, the delicious pleasure is fleeting and requires concentration and continued attempts to pin it down, all without success, giving up disheartened. Finally

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18 delicious pleasure; gloomy day and the prospect of another sad day to follow; ceased to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal (45).
and suddenly, the memory and with it the overwhelming sense of joy and happiness return. It is “tout Combray et ses environs, tout cela qui prend forme et solidité, est sorti, ville et jardins, de ma tasse de thé” (47). The details and depth, the literary inspiration necessary to describe Combray, the very things that had escaped mémoire volontaire come pouring out from his chance encounter with a madeleine dipped in tea. While Marcel’s encounter with the madeleine is certainly the most famous, for our purposes and more importantly for the author Proust, it is only one of a set.

The now aged Marcel, having given up on becoming a man of letters, sees no reason to not live the life of a socialite. He therefore accepts the fateful invitation for a night at the Guermantes. Exiting his car in their courtyard, Marcel dodges an oncoming vehicle, and lunging to one side, experiences the unevenness of two paving stones, which immediately triggers that same pleasure he felt at the taste of the madeleine. This sparks an involuntary memory and, like the initial madeleine episode, the memory and the happiness that had accompanied it are fleeting, prompting Marcel to rock back and forth on the uneven paving stones, in a type of trance. Once again his attempts are to no avail, until “oubliant la matinée Guermantes… tout de suite je la [mémoire] reconnus, c’était Venise, dont mes efforts pour la décrire et les prétendus instantanés pris par ma mémoire [volontaire] ne m’avaient jamais rien dit” (RTP IV 446). The uneven paving stones of the Guermantes’ courtyard so resembled in sensation those of the courtyard of Saint-Marc that Marcel was struck dumb, unsure whether the “azur profond [qui] enivrait mes

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19 all of Combray and its surroundings, all of this, acquiring form and solidity, emerged, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea (48).
20 This repetition, in an attempt to re-incite the fleeting involuntary memory mirrors Marcel’s multiple samples of the madeleine and may have a connection to the Freudian compulsion to repeat, discussed later. See Benjamin’s discussion of Marcel’s repetitions in CC 327.
21 forgetting about the Guermantes’ party… almost at once I realized that it was Venice, all my efforts to describe which, and all the so-called snapshots taken by my [voluntary] memory, had never communicated anything to me (SLT VI 175).
“yeux” was truly in front of him, or the memory of “les mosaïques de marbre et de verre du pavage” that covered the courtyard in Venice (445; 224). The involuntary memory rose up in front of Marcel in such fullness and accuracy that the “plaisir délicieux” laid bare to him the literary inspiration he had been seeking. This would only be the first in a series of such episodes throughout the night.

While attempting to ruminate on the implications of this involuntary memory and simultaneously returning to his duties as invitee, Marcel enters the second floor of the Guermantes’ and hears a butler accidentally knock a spoon against a plate, triggering the range of trees that he had found so difficult to describe on his train ride back into Paris, to erupt into the Guermantes’ library. This second involuntary memory in succession appeared from that sound’s exceeding similarity to the sound of a mechanic fixing something on the train in front of the woods. The episodes continue with a napkin, starched to the same degree as those of Balbec. This concluding sequence of mémoires involontaires, provokes Marcel to be, “cette fois,… bien décidé à ne pas me résigner à ignorer pourquoi… étant résolu aujourd’hui à trouver la réponse” to the questions that had plagued him since the scene of the madeleine (445-6). The only thing that Marcel knew was that, in contrast to the despair and ennui in both his literary abilities and in literature itself that mémoire volontaire had caused, mémoire involontaire filled him with a happiness that had caused his growing distaste with literature and the arts to disappear along with any difficulties that had accompanied them. These had restored Marcel’s faith in his own memories, the elements required to become a man of letters, and perhaps more importantly faith in literature itself.

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22 a deep azure intoxicated my eyes; the marble and glass mosaics which paved it (ibid; SLT V 610)
23 This time… had decided not to resign myself to not knowing the reason for it… determined to find it that day (175-6)
Through all of his attempts at a literary life, Marcel was relegated to using the moments of *mémoire volontaire*, the memories of the past that held no component of the past, as the raw material of his art, relegating his stories and descriptions to the lifeless road that such memories forced it down. Since memories constitute the material for great works of art and literature, those memories should be vibrant, inspiring, carry depth and definition and Marcel found none of those elements in *mémoire volontaire*. In *mémoire involontaire*, Marcel was able to find something qualitatively different from the raw materials that he had known: the elements necessary for artistic inspiration. Proust therefore concluded that “ce n’est guère qu’aux souvenirs involontaires que l’artiste devrait demander la matière première de son œuvre” (*Textes* 289).24 *Mémoire involontaire* rises to this challenge by shading the details and subtleties of memory, giving the memory depth and shadow, in which the artist is able to re-live, re-experience, rather than simply re-member, these moments. These involuntary souvenirs are mixtures of not only light but also shadow, necessary for dimension. In other words, “ils nous rapportent les choses dans un exact dosage de mémoire et d’oubli” (*ibid*, my emphasis).25

*Mémoire Involontaire*

Proust considered *mémoire volontaire* a visual memory, a memory that is under the sway of our intelligence. Proust added to the madeleine scene a short but pivotal explanation to his distaste for the use of the visual as the material of art. Finally pinning down his involuntary memory, Marcel wonders why, despite having seen the small pastry...

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24 the artist ought to seek the raw material of his work pretty well only in involuntary memories (Hodson 84).
25 they bring things back in an exact mixture of remembering and forgetting (*ibid*, my emphasis).
numerous times since his childhood, it was only the taste that gave him the overwhelming joy that he would eventually translate into literary inspiration. Indeed, why did his mother’s invitation to eat the madeleine, the use of its name, not trigger the ensuing involuntary memory? “[P]arce que, en ayant souvent aperçu depuis, sans en manger, sur les tablettes de pâtissiers, leur image avait quitté sec jours de Combray pour se lier à d’autre plus récents” (RTP I 46). 26 Every time that Marcel saw a madeleine, a trace of that exact moment of remembrance becomes associated with the image of the object. In other words, mémoire volontaire is additive, and therefore necessarily deformatifive. Eventually, the accumulation of these new associations between the pastries and the patisseries’ shelves on which Marcel saw them became overwhelming to the original memory of the madeleine from Combray. The visual sense, in depositing these new memory-traces deform, and in this case eventually wholly replace the original visual memory from Marcel, leaving him cold at the sight of the pastry.

The visual sense, through its repeated use as remembrance, becomes in turn a deformatifive force of forgetting. When Marcel attempts to voluntarily recall his childhood hometown of Combray, the memory of the intelligence does what it can with what it’s given, accumulating and assembling a series of long since deformed, though not yet entirely forgotten, visual elements from his childhood. It is then little wonder that these voluntary memories were unable to revive in Marcel the experience of his youth, or to inspire in him the desire to describe it in literature. The intellect’s amalgamation of a series of these half-forgotten deformations, performed by the visual act of recall, are what turn the experience of a beautiful spring day into the deformed and discolored facsimile

26 [B]ecause I had often seen them since, with out eating them, on the shelves of the pastry shops, and their image had therefore left those days of Combray and attached itself to others more recent (SLT I 47).
of a bad painting. Proust devalues the visual sense as mémoire volontaire when, more than a tool of memory or forgetting, it is a tool for reappropriation. Mémoire volontaire “has remoulded events into a condensed version, through time,” combining, flattening, and reappropriating similar figures into a larger, less descript amalgamation (Flieger 78). When it is used solely as a tool for memory and forgetting, it is an exceedingly bad one, slow and deformative. Mémoire volontaire can more accurately be considered a deformative reappropriation of visual memories, slowly leading to a complete reappropriation of the visual form, and only then its total oblivion. However, Marcel looks to the other senses for a system capable of creating literary inspiration: oubli pur et rapide.

“Mais, quand d’un passé ancien rien ne subsiste… l’odeur et la saveur restent encore longtemps” (RTP I 46).27 The key factor separating the visual sense from that of odor and taste is that of activity. The visual sense and its associated deformative powers are able to pass over a myriad of objects with a mere sideways glance. From the safety of the sidewalk, Marcel is able to see a row of madeleines sitting on a baker’s shelf through the shop window. The sight of his Aunt Léonie’s madeleine is slowly but surely deformed into merely another pastry in the window. However, the smell and taste of the actual object are guarded safely behind the baker’s glass. Over time, the sight of Léonie’s pastry has been overtaken by a generic, catchall madeleine. However, the taste of her madeleine had been hermetically sealed inside of the madeleine from the instant of that initial experience, isolated from any deformative or reappropriative powers of either the visual sense or the intellect. In this way, the memory of the taste can be truly forgotten, rather than merely transformed as sight had been, into another memory. The cumulative

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27 But, when nothing subsists of an old past… smell and taste still remain for a long time (SLT I 47).
effect of a series of visual reappropriations and deformations, which lead to the visual form’s complete separation from the original episode, the original sensation, unaccompanied by any parallel reappropriation or deformation by the other senses, most notably smell and taste, leave the pure sensory interior with no shell, no visual exterior to warn us of its mnemonically shocking contents. This bygone landmine of pure, forgotten memory comes to us in the only way that we can get close enough to it: the object.

Proust recounts in *Sainte-Beuve* passing through a courtyard with friends: “je m’arrêtai net au milieu des pavés inégaux… un objet plus important m’attachait… c’était en posant le pied sur le pavé” (212, my emphasis). While it may be more convenient to imagine a specific, defined madeleine as object, Proust’s use of *objet* here may shed more light on his full conception of it. Proust’s relation to the object is one which holds the potential of *mémoire involontaire* entirely inside, where the visual exterior has been degraded by *mémoire volontaire* to such an extent that there is no forewarning of its contents. Therefore, the object is transformed into a receptacle for the lost sensation: “L’objet… [est] la sensation, puisque tout objet par rapport à nous est sensation” (211).

These sensations, entirely lost and forgotten to us, with our intelligence unable to find them for the very fact that it has unwittingly tampered with every visual signpost that may have guided us to their hiding place, are embodied and exteriorized in some foreign, material object. For Marcel they returned in the form of a pastry dipped in tea, a pair of uneven paving stones, and a slightly starched napkin.

Marcel was far less explicit though no less forceful in his use of the object-sensation. While the madeleine is first and foremost thought of as an object in the usual,
visual sense, that is, as a unique and discrete form, an explanation of its missing visually striking shell is required, lessening its impact as a fully formed object-sensation. It is an object-sensation that foregrounds the object. The *pavés inégaux* are specifically neither unique nor discrete in visual form as the madeleine was, but rather an object-sensation which foregrounds the sensation of unevenness. The starched napkin, which recalls all of Balbec, is the final and perhaps the perfect embodiment of the object-sensation. As object, it is both discrete and unique, unlike the paving stones. However, as sensation, the stiffness and starch which differentiates it from the myriad of other napkins Marcel had surely used over the course of his life, is entirely invisible and requires a tactile closeness to reveal. We can come into contact with that sensation only through the non-visual, and therefore non-intellectual, senses. The sensation, the trigger of the *mémoire involontaire*, hides in plain sight as an externalized material object. As externalized, the object-sensation of *mémoire involontaire* is fully outside the possibility of the deformation of mental tampering. It is truly *l’oubli pur et rapide*.

The creation of an unbridgeable gap in time and space between a sensation and the detrimental effects of the intellect necessitating its pure forgetting is the defining characteristic of *mémoire involontaire*, just as the inability to bring about true forgetting but rather to serve as a reappropriation of the visual form is the defining element of *mémoire volontaire*. The sensation of being outside of time that Marcel describes in the courtyard of the Guermantes highlights this gap. It is not merely the stoppage of time, but rather being outside of the linear, additive, reappropriative time of living *mémoire volontaire*, “a positive deliverance from temporality” (*Tactics* 173). This deliverance from *mémoire volontaire* is the source of Marcel’s felicity, his literary inspiration.
Consumed by the desire to find this literary inspiration, Marcel begins to more fully enumerate the central role of forgetting in his monomaniacal quest. “Oui, si le souvenir, grâce à l’oubli, n’a pu contracter aucun lien… il nous fait… respirer un air nouveau” (RTP IV 449).30 The inspiration that Marcel has sought for so long stems from that fresh breath, “plus pur que les poètes ont vainement essayé de faire régner… et qui ne pourrait donner cette sensation profonde de renouvellement que s’il avait été respiré déjà, car les vrais paradis sont les paradis qu’on a perdus” (ibid).31 That is to say, the central preoccupation of Marcel is the creation of a true theory of forgetting.

30 Yes, if the memory, thanks to forgetfulness, has not been able to make a single connection… it suddenly makes us breathe a new air (SLT VI 178).
31 this purer air which the poets have tried in vain to make reign in paradise and which could not provide this profound feeling of renewal if it had not already been breathed, for the only true paradise is a paradise that we have lost (179).
Benjamin was fully aware of the importance that forgetting played in the works of Proust. In his only in-depth study, “Zum Bilde Prousts,” Benjamin poses the rhetorical question: “Steht nicht das ungewollte Eingedenken, Prousts mémoire involontaire dem Vergessen viel näher als dem, was meist Erinnerung genannt wird” (GS II.1 311)?32 With this question, Benjamin positions without equivocation mémoire involontaire as Proust’s theory of forgetting, the forgetting with which he ties memory together as do all remembering authors. As such, this theory is the aim of Proust’s work, forsaking in its narrative, plot, unity, and flow. From the beginning, Benjamin considers Proust’s work almost exclusively an exposition on a coherent theory of forgetting. The great importance that Benjamin saw both in Proust’s forgetting mémoire involontaire, and his frenetic and frenzied search to theorize it, was its constant struggle against the destructive and reappropriative forces of mémoire volontaire. Carol Jacobs, focusing exclusively on Benjamin’s reading of Proust as opposed to Proust’s theories in and of themselves, notes Benjamin’s recognition of that reappropriation in her reading: “Memory, like language, seems to be the trace of that which existed before and the promise of its reappropriation… There is merely a repetition without origin, a repetition which is never

32 Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust’s mémoire involontaire, much closer to forgetting that what is usually called memory (SW II.1 237)?
identity” (917). Benjamin sees voluntary memory in precisely the way we have described it, based solely on additive and therefore necessarily deformative reappropriation of the origin, or identity. Benjamin is attempting to counter precisely this reappropriation with a theorization of Proust’s forgetting.

Describing the task of the remembering author, Benjamin first turns to Penelope, consistently weaving and un-weaving a burial shroud, where the weaving of recollection is the most important, though with a fatal flaw. “Am jeden Morgen halten wir, erwacht, meist schwach und lose, nur an ein paar Fransen den Teppich des gelebten Daseins, wie Vergessen ihn in uns gewoben hat, in Händen” (GS II.1 311). For the successful Penelope work of recollection a tight weave is required, and the act of waking, of opening our eyes and seeing, begins the destruction of that invaluable work. “Aber jeder Tag löst mit dem zweckgebundenen Handeln und, noch mehr, mit zweckverhaftetem Erinnern das Geflecht, die Ornamente des Vergessens auf” (ibid).

When Benjamin goes on to write that no text is more tightly woven than Proust’s, the implication is clear that he would like to remove Proust from the list of remembering authors and place him atop a new list of forgetting authors. Jacobs recognizes Benjamin’s differentiation of the destructive memory of mémoire volontaire from the pure forgetting of mémoire involontaire that combats it: “But the movement of the mémoire involontaire, like that of the sign, repeatedly marks the impossibility of this reappropriation” (Jacobs 917). Benjamin implicitly agrees with Proust’s devaluation of the waking memory, even though mémoire volontaire is never explicitly named by Benjamin. “[D]ay finally

33 When we awake each morning, we hold in our hands, usually weakly and loosely, but a few fringes of the carpet of lived existence, as woven into us by forgetting (238).
34 [W]ith our purposeful activity and, even more, our purposive remembering each day unravels the web, the ornaments of forgetting (ibid).
becomes transformed to night, and with it the apparent priority of memory over image or ornament [of forgetting], becomes reversed” (913). We can begin to see Benjamin’s implicit agreement with Proust’s mémoire involontaire. The agreement becomes explicit in Benjamin’s use of a Proustian object-sensation.

Benjamin writes: “Sein [Prousts] wahrer Anteil gilt dem Zeitverlauf in seiner realsten, das ist aber verschränkten Gestalt” (GS II.1 320).35 One could easily continue the clarification by stating that Proust’s true interest is in the passage of time in its relation to material form, that is to say, in the object. Moreover, Benjamin highlights the very elements of the object that make it so important to Proust and his theory of forgetting. The object, outside the purview of, hidden from, and therefore unaffected by the intellect, was first and foremost valued for its exteriorization. Benjamin notes Proust’s distaste for the inwardness, the ‘sirène intérieures,’ of the romantics that had come before him. This distrust of the interior therefore values the exterior, the object as a type of sanctuary of forgetting from the destructive elements of our purposive remembering. Through the course of Benjamin’s reading, he uses a series of metaphors to visualize involuntary memory, each an object: a carpet, a rolled up stocking, and a net full of fish. This sanctuary object is also the corresponding sensation’s prison, to which our non-visual senses (holding the tatters of the carpet, unrolling the stocking, feeling the weight of the fishing net) are the sole key finally unlocking artistic inspiration. From this standpoint, we can see what Benjamin means when he writes: “Physiologische Stilkunde würde ins Innerste dieses Schaffens führen” (323).36

35 His [Proust’s] true interest is in the passage of time in its most real – that is, intertwined – form (244).
36 A physiology of style would take us into the innermost core of this creativeness (246).
A discussion of the key role of sensation is far less explicit in Benjamin’s reading than in Proust’s text itself. However, as Proust had inexorably connected them already, a connection of which Benjamin was certainly aware, sensation is implied merely by the inclusion of the role of the object. None the less, the role of the sensation is explicated at the culmination of “Zum Bilde Prousts” with the introduction of smell, a sensation highly valued by Proust. Describing that favoritism, Benjamin places that sense in relation to memory: “So wird niemand, der die Zähigkeit kennt, mit der Erinnerungen im Geruchssinn (keineswegs Gerüche in der Erinnerung!) bewahrt werden, Prousts Empfindlichkeit gegenüber Gerüchen für Zufall erklären können” (ibid). This is a tightly woven sentence that brings together in one quick motion many of the elements of Proust’s mémoire involontaire for Benjamin’s use. While the non-visual sense of smell preserves with great tenacity the memory tied to it, smell is not at all given the same protection by memory. In other words, it is the scent of a near-by object that carries and protects the memory, rather than the memory delivering the untarnished experience of the smell. The sense of smell is, therefore, forgotten. Benjamin values the involuntary memory based on a forgotten object-sensation over the memory of recall, but moreover, finds the returned memory as an amalgamation of both sensation and visual image, the final dialectical motion that brings together the two elements of forgetting and memory. Mémoire volontaire, the memory of the intellect and eyes offers to us only visual images, which are unable to make the all-important connection between the visual memory and forgotten sensation that mémoire involontaire gives us.

37 No one who knows with what great tenacity memories are preserved by the sense of smell – but by smells that are not at all in the memory – will be able to call Proust’s sensitivity to smells accidental (ibid).
Only mémoire involontaire is able to return to us our past in an exact mixture of the visual images that our intellect actively recalls and the non-visual sensations that only a forgotten object-sensation can give us, rather than the solely visual images that our purposive memory is able to return. The most involuntary of memories, that is to say the most forgotten, are the memories that appear to us “nicht mehr einzeln, als Bilder, sondern bildlos und ungeformt, unbestimmt und gewichtig von einem Ganzen” (ibid).\(^{38}\) This whole, the successful reunification of the visual images of memory and the forgotten sensations of objects into the reliving of an experience, is what Benjamin has called the actus purus of memory, predicated on the actus purus of forgetting. He also called it Prousts Bild. This turn of phrase has vexed translators. Jacobs summarizes some of their problems: “Does the essay present a portrait of the man Proust or is it rather a discussion of the literary image, a consideration of the Proustian metaphor” (911)? According to Benjamin: “Prousts Bild ist der höchste physiognomische Ausdruck, den die unaufhaltsam wachsende Diskrepanz von Poesie und Leben gewinnen konnte” (GS II.1 311).\(^{39}\) For both Proust and Benjamin’s reading of Proust, literature is inspired by its relation to forgetting and life to memory. It is the gulf between these two poles, literature and life, forgetting and memory from which Proust’s image emerges, finally ably to bridge that gulf by weaving together elements of the two. We are beginning to see what exactly Benjamin means by this term. Consistently separated from the purely visual image (Gesichtsbilder), Proust’s image comes from the dialectical relationship between forgetting and memory, emerging suddenly from the world of the forgotten to return to

\(^{38}\) no longer appear singly, as images, but tell us about a whole, amorphously and formlessly, indefinitely and weightily (247).

\(^{39}\) The image of Proust is the highest physiognomic expression which the irresistibly growing discrepancy between literature and life was able to assume (237).
the attendant memory from the other side. Benjamin has succeeded in his goal of calling up Proust’s image, the relationship between life and literary work that “he subtly connect[ed to] the weaving of remembrance and forgetting,” naming it simply the image (Farguell 318).

“Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire”

Benjamin’s definition of image, built on the theorizations of Proust, is charged with the dialectical relationship between forgetting and memory. We can see that what was once a cryptic definition given by Benjamin becomes more a clarification of what has been laid out throughout “Zum Bilde Prousts.” However, the difficulties that plagued the translators of *Prousts Bild*, are transformed into the problems facing critics attempting to unpack *das Bild*. Benjamin’s *Das Passagen-Werk* is full of references to the image. His convolute N acts as a methodological kernel from which the remainder of *Das Passagen-Werk* grows. At the center of both Marcel’s and Benjamin’s methodology is the image and one of the more popular (and popularly difficult) references to the image is [N2a,3]. Max Pensky reassures us that “even the most seasoned Benjamin expert might be forgiven a feeling of helplessness in the face of such a powerful and enigmatic array of claims,” though our reading of “Zum Bilde Prousts” gives us a uniquely clear connection to Benjamin’s definition of the image (*Method* 177). However, when Benjamin uses enigmatic expressions such as “Dialektik im Stillstand” in relation to the image,\(^\text{40}\) it is easy for us to turn to Proust. The dialectical image, which Benjamin states is the only true

\(^{40}\) dialectics at a standstill
image, “ist die Zäsur in der Denkbewegung,” that is to say, the interruption of the movement of a reapproprative mémoire volontaire by the spontaneous return of a forgotten sensation, by mémoire involontaire, mirroring Proust’s deliverance from temporality (PW [N10a,3]). When Benjamin states that “der Ort, an dem man sie [dialektische Bilder] antrifft, ist die Sprache,” it brings to mind Benjamin’s statement in “Zum Bilde Prousts” that Proust’s sentences are the method by which Proust raises from the depths le temps perdu, the forgotten ([N2a,3]).

It is not our intention to bolster a Benjaminian definition of either the image or the dialectical image. It is however important to show the centrality of forgetting to not only Benjamin’s idea of the image, but the importance of forgetting-in-image to his work as a whole, most notably Das Passagen-Werk. The image is the “locking [of] thought for an instant into a countermovement of remembrance and forgetting” (Farguell 313). Pensky places the dialectical image and therefore, perhaps unknowingly, Proust’s image as both “methodological cornerstone” and “methodological heart of the Arcades Project” (Method 178). A proposed book, Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus was to be drawn from the mountainous collection of fragmentary quotes that made up Das Passagen-Werk. The middle section of this book was to be entitled “Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire,” which was initially rejected by both Adorno and Horkheimer for publication. Rather they urged Benjamin to formulate the central section of this central section, which Benjamin would call “Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire.” Benjamin himself called “Das Paris des Second Empire bei

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41 is the caesura in the movement of thought (AP [N10a,3])
42 the place where one encounters them [dialectical images] is language ([N2a,3])
43 For attempts at defining the dialectical image, see Buck-Morss’ The Dialectics of Seeing, and Jennings’ Dialectical Images. For a focused account on Proust’s role in the dialectical images, see Teschke’s Proust und Benjamin.
Baudelaire” a “sehr genaues Modell der Passagenarbeit” (Briefe 765).\(^{44}\) It is therefore easy to see the thread of Proust’s image, forgetting-as-image, weaving its way from “Zum Bilde Prousts” and the contemporaneous early sketches and fragments of Das Passagen-Werk through to the initial attempts at unifying those fragments in his work with Baudelaire. The image, and therefore forgetting itself with which it is infused, is indeed a constant undercurrent of “Baudelaire.” As we’ve seen, the simple fact that Benjamin introduces Proust introduces forgetting.

However, as Adorno noted, there is a need for more than an undercurrent of forgetting, whether as a leftover trace from its methodological origin or implication through the use of its original author as character. It is perhaps for this reason that Adorno considered his criticisms largely insignificant in light of his general approval of the work. Adorno was surely aware of the “blank spaces… produced by the more or less violent excisions of material from the larger corpus of the Baudelaire book” in which the dialectical element of forgetting may have remained hidden (Jennings 93). Benjamin’s response to Adorno’s criticisms mirrors this likelihood, admitting that he will be unable to avoid this criticism for long, should he continue his work. However, Adorno felt the need for an unambiguous discussion of forgetting, specifically in relation to Benjamin’s theory of experience and its relation to reification. Adorno believed that an explicit discussion of forgetting would be necessary before “Baudelaire” could acquire “ihre universale gesellschaftliche Fruchtbarkeit” in connection with this “Frage der Verdinglichung die Grundunterscheidung” (BW 418).\(^{45}\) Before resigning Benjamin to un-

\(^{44}\) very precise model of the Arcades project (C 567)
\(^{45}\) its universal social potential; question of reification (321).
dialectical thought in “Baudelaire,” let’s search for those elements, however hidden they may be, to which Benjamin might have been able point in his response to Adorno.

“Meant to present a large-scale theory of modern experience,” “Baudelaire” begins with a discussion of Bergson and his *Matière et mémoire* (Jennings 93). And while the title of Bergson’s work suggests a link between memory and a theory of experience, Benjamin is quick to note the shortcomings of Bergson’s theory. Benjamin almost immediately contrasts this with Proust and *La recherche* which can “als den Versuch ansehen, die Erfahrung… auf synthetischem Wege herzustellen” (*GS* I.2 609).

Immediately, we can see Proust’s image in Benjamin’s valuation of the synthetic memory, that is the image that comes from the synthesis of visual images and forgotten sensations, the distance between life and literature. By later recognizing Proust as a Storyteller, Benjamin ascribes to Proust the very elements that had been lacking in Bergson, a connection between the theory, in this case of forgetting, and the context from which it was born. However, Proust the Storyteller’s *La recherche* “senkt es [das Geschehen] dem Leben des Berichtenden ein, um es als Erfahrung den Hörern mitzugeben,” that is to say, experience in a synthesis of Bergsonian information and Proustian, and therefore forgotten, sensation (611). Having overcome Bergson, Benjamin hastily puts Proust and Freud in contact.

The application of Freud to Proust had long been a thought of Benjamin’s:

“Jenseits des Lustprinzips« ist wahrscheinlich der beste Kommentar, den es zu Prousts Werken gibt” (*PW* [S2,3]).

Freud’s reading of consciousness, a series of interconnected

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46 as an attempt to produce experience… in a synthetic way (315)
47 See Benjamin’s particular use of the word storyteller in *SW III* 143-67.
48 embeds the event in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening (316).
49 “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” is probably the best commentary there is on Proust’s works (*AP* [S2,3]).
and pre-mastered memory traces, which remains unchanged while it catalogues and registers new sensations into their appropriate collective pile, is contrasted with the most powerful and most enduring memory fragments, which never came into contact with consciousness. In other words, consciousness is nothing more than a classificatory system, which arranges stimuli based on the pre-determined rubric of previously mastered memory traces. Those fragments of stimulation that are unclassifiable, are relegated to being outside the purview of the classificatory nature of consciousness. This allows Benjamin to make immediate ties to Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*. “Übertragen in Prousts Redeweise: Bestandteil der *mémoire involontaire* kann nur werden, was nicht *ausdrücklich* und mit *Bewusstsein* ist ‘erlebt’ worden, was dem Subjekt nicht als ‘Erlebnis’ widerfahren ist” (613, my emphasis).50

Consciousness as little more than a classificatory system becomes an apt example of *mémoire volontaire*. Benjamin made just such a connection. “Die *mémoire involontaire* dagegen ist eine Registratur die den Gegenstand mit einer Ordnungsnummer versieht, hinter der er verschwindet” (*PW* [H5,1]).51 Never allowing a unique memory trace, but rather replacing that trace with a reappropriating classificatory name-tag, an additive and deformative squeezing together, a condensation, of the new sensation with the already mastered memories from the past, consciousness “würde diesen Vorfall… für die dichterische Erfahrung sterilisieren,”52 just as *mémoire volontaire* had so often failed as Marcel’s literary inspiration (*GS I.2* 614). As Benjamin stated, only from *outside of*

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50 Put in Proustian terms, this means that only what has not been experienced *explicitly* and *consciously*, what has not happened to be subject as an isolated experience, can become a component of *mémoire involontaire* (*ibid*, my emphasis).
51 The *mémoire volontaire*, on the other hand is a registry providing the object with a classificatory number behind which it disappears (*AP* [H5,1]).
52 would sterilize this incident for poetic experience (*SW IV* 318).
the classificatory consciousness can the forgotten sensations of *mémoire involontaire* return. Marcel did not mention the taste of the madeleine in his description of Combray before having tasted it again that famous evening in Paris. Nor did he describe uneven paving stones in Venice, the sounds of train-workers hammering the wheels, or the starched napkins of Balbec. These sensations were the always already forgotten sensations “oft am stärksten und haltbarsten, wenn der sie zurücklassende Vorgang *niemals zum Bewusstsein* gekommen ist” (612-3, my emphasis). However, this is where Benjamin continues with Freud’s conception of consciousness as more than a system of classification, but rather a protection against stimuli, and where the relationship between Proust and Freud begins to drift apart.

While Freud gives an elegant solution to the sterilization of memories under *mémoire volontaire* by way of consciousness, the introduction of traumatic shock as an element of the unconscious opens a Pandora’s box of consequences, which begin to show discrepancies between Proust’s *mémoire involontaire* and Freud’s theorization of the unconscious. To this point, Freud and Benjamin have combined to describe what happens to sensations classified by consciousness (*mémoire volontaire*) and the potential energy gained by those sensations that remain wholly outside of consciousness (*mémoire involontaire*). Benjamin highlights a third possibility of consciousness as a protective shield against stimuli. While *mémoire volontaire* and *involontaire* were based either in or outside of consciousness, the traumatic shock is based in a type of destruction of, a particular interaction with consciousness. While continually under the umbrella of Freud’s theory, this is the point of transition from Proust to Baudelaire. Being outside of

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53 often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that *never entered consciousness* (317, my emphasis).
consciousness, there is no contact between involuntary memories and consciousness, let alone violence, no trauma and no shock in the Freudian sense. In contrast, Baudelaire, the flâneur par excellence, “hat also die Chock-erfahrung ins Herz seiner artistischen Arbeit hineingestellt” (616).54 Baudelaire has become a master of traumatic shocks as opposed to Proust, who is defenseless against, perhaps even oblivious to them. In transitioning to Baudelaire from Proust, Benjamin has also transitioned to the interior traumatic shocks, breaking through the protective shield of consciousness of the traumatophile flâneur Baudelaire from the always already forgotten sensations, which had been fully externalized and never entered consciousness, that constitute mémoire involontaire. It is then no surprise that there is no further discussion of mémoire involontaire or the forgetting so central to its theory between this transition in the third chapter and the tenth of “Baudelaire,” long after Freud’s theory has been exhausted.

The return of Proust’s mémoire involontaire in “Baudelaire” is reminiscent of its incarnation in “Zum Bilde Prousts,” and is a unique transition back from Baudelaire. Recalling a line from Baudelaire’s Le goût du néant,55 Benjamin seizes on the combination of the sense of smell and its loss. “Das Insichzusammengesunkensein der Erfahrung, an der er früher einmal teilgehabt hat, ist in dem Worte perdu einbekannt. Der Geruch ist das unzugängliche Refugium der mémoire involontaire” (641).56 Again, the connection between perdu, that is to say oubli, and mémoire involontaire should not go without note. The visual image of spring is nothing without the accompanying sensation of experience, the smell of the object itself, which has been forgotten. Spring without its

54 placed the shock experience at the very center of his art (319).
55 « Le Printemps adorable a perdu son odeur »
56 The word perdu acknowledges that the experience he once shared is now collapsed into itself. The scent is the inaccessible refuge of mémoire involontaire (335).
scent, has become one of the many inexact facsimiles of a formerly beautiful spring day. The leap to Proust from a line in Baudelaire’s *Le goût du néant* describing a sensation that has been lost, that is to say forgotten, is a powerful, if not entirely explicit, return to the forgetting in *mémoire involontaire*. However, the use of *mémoire involontaire* and its theory of forgetting continues through the eleventh chapter, which focuses on aura, Adorno’s other criticism of Benajmin’s lack of forgetting.

From the first sentence of the eleventh chapter, Benjamin ties together the idea of the aura with Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*. With the knowledge of the unique placement in Proust’s theory of the object-sensation as refuge of the always already forgotten, the idea of forgetting and the aura seems immediately tied, though once again merely implicit. Benjamin comes closer to an explicit link between the two later in the chapter. “Die Funde der mémoire involontaire entsprechen [der Erfahrung des Auras]. Sie sind übrigens einmalig: der Erinnerung, die sie sich einzuverleiben sucht, *entfallen sie*” (647, my emphasis). However, this moment of explicitness is fleeting, though its connection to *mémoire involontaire* and the forgetting that supports it is not. Quoting his own formulation of the aura later in the chapter, from his “Kleine Geschichte der Photographie,” Benjamin states: “Was ist eigentlich Aura? Ein sonderbares Gespinst von Raum und Zeit: einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag” (*GS II.1* 378).

There are a number of associations that spring to mind between Proust and this definition of the aura. From the use of the word *Gespinst*, recalling Benjamin’s idea of Proust’s work as a Penelope-work of forgetting, or the use of *Raum und Zeit*, recalling Proust’s

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57 This ability corresponds to the data of the *mémoire involontaire*. These data, incidentally, are unique: they are *lost* to the memory that seeks to retain them (338, emphasis added). A discussion of the difficulties facing the use of the word *entfallen* as opposed to *vergessen* can be found in Chapter V.

58 What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be (*SW II.2* 518).
interest in the passage of time only in space, that is to say, the externalized object, the connection between the forgetting of mémoire involontaire and the aura is implied. However, it is the use of Ferne that truly brings forgetting and the aura into more explicit contact.

The forgotten object-sensation that triggers mémoire involontaire and its distance from Marcel, no matter how close, is perfectly exemplified by the madeleine on the other side of the window or the invisible starch in a napkin not yet touched, both perfect examples of Benjamin’s idea of the aura. In “Zum Bilde Prousts,” Benjamin uses a similar construction: “die freisteigenden Gebilde der mémoire involontaire sind noch zum guten Teile isolierte, nur rätselhaft präsente …” (GS II.1 323). Proust was explicit about the causes of this distance inherent and necessary to mémoire involontaire: “Oui, si le souvenir, grâce à l’oubli, n’a pu contracter aucun lien, jeté aucun chaînon entre lui et la minute présente, s’il est resté à sa place, à sa date, s’il a gardé ses distances, son isolement dans le creux d’une vallée ou à la pointe d’un sommet, il nous fait tout à coup respirer un air nouveau…” (RTP IV 449, my emphasis). Benjamin has been explicit in his debt to Proust in regards to his theories on the aura. While the connections between the two seem obvious, they are certainly not explicit and very likely could have avoided some criticism had they been emphasized. In response to Adorno, Benjamin could have pointed to these connections, which seem so abundant to us, promising to strengthen

59 the unattached objects of la mémoire involontaire are still in large part isolated – though enigmatically present… (246)
60 Yes, if the memory, thanks to forgetfulness, has not been able to make a single connection, to throw up a single link between it and the present moment, if it stayed in its place, at its date if it had kept its distance, its isolation in the depths of a valley, or at the peak of a summit, it suddenly makes us breath a new air… (SLT VI 178, my emphasis)
them in possible future editions of “Baudelaire.” Instead he chose his *locus classicus*: Der blonde Eckbert.
CHAPTER IV

ECKBERT

Der blonde Eckbert is considered one of Tieck’s, and more generally early Romanticism’s, most beloved stories and has spawned multiple debates, most often of its uneasy categorization as somewhere in between fairytale and novella, and simultaneously both. This ambiguity of genre spills over into the narrative ambiguity of the fantastic in Eckbert. The narrative ambiguity of the fantastical tale is compounded by its status as “die erste Geschichte vom Vergessen” (Rath 262). Eckbert is a tale in which fantasy, ambiguity, and forgetfulness become entangled inside the consciousness of the reader, requiring that she engage “in a process of perpetual interpretation and reinterpretation” (Tatar 610). As such, a myriad of readings have been put forth. Many view Eckbert from a psychoanalytical standpoint, focusing on the incest motive, while others have centered on its relationship to forgetting. As his own appropriation of Freud’s Jenseits des Lustprinzips on Proust and Baudelaire seemed to make clear, Benjamin considers psychoanalysis an apt tool in the discussion of memory and forgetting. In his “Baudelaire,” Benjamin concedes that Freud’s work may not be perfectly suited to it, but rather the work of his students, specifically Theodor Reik. In 1925, Reik wrote his

61 Sandra Kluwe’s essay “Strohmian” offers an excellent summation of the multiple theories of Eckbert as a “Grenztext” between these various genres and forms.
62 the first story of forgetting (my translation)
Geständniszwang und Strafbedürfnis, in which he first enumerated his theory of the compulsion to confess where neurotic conditions such as stuttering or blushing are types of unconscious confessions attempting to escape. A guilty secret, repressed in the unconscious of a subject, repeatedly attempts to escape from its repression while punishing the subject for that repression. This can be seen as a unique analogy to Freud’s compulsion to repeat, wherein the subject continually returns to the scene of a trauma in an attempt to retroactively master it. Indeed, the idea of repeating shows itself regularly in Eckbert, in Bertha’s repeated telling of her childhood story to Eckbert or the bird’s repeated song, repeating even as Eckbert falls to the ground and dies. Benjamin was certainly aware of this relationship between Reik’s compulsion to confess and Freud’s compulsion to repeat. As much of Reik’s work focused on the correlation between memory and consciousness, it is not difficult to imagine a Benjaminian reading of Eckbert beginning with and heavily involving Reik.

There are many elements in Eckbert that indicate this compulsion to confess and they begin almost immediately with the narrator. “Es gibt Stunden, in denen es den Menschen ängstigt, wenn er vor seinem Freunde ein Geheimnis haben soll, was er bis dahin oft mit vieler Sorgalt verborgen hat, die Seele fühlt dann einen unwiderstehlichen Trieb, sich ganz mitzuteilen, dem Freunde auch das Innerste aufzuschließen, damit er um

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64 This work was written at the peak of the excitement in the psychoanalytical circles directly following the publication of Freud’s Jenseits des Lustprinzips in 1920, not 1921 as suggested by Benjamin.
65 Freud first set forth this neurosis in Erinnern, Wiederholen, und Durcharbeiten (1914), but did not fully theorize it until Jenseits des Lustprinzips. With the compulsion to confess, one returns to the “scene of the crime” where the original secret of guilt was relegated to the unconscious in an attempt to overcome and master that guilt’s power over the subject.
66 For further discussion on the importance of repetition in Eckbert, see Liliane Weissberg’s “Wiederholungen” and Roland Borgards “Halbpart des Vergessens.”
so mehr unser Freund werde” (Tieck 9). Reik himself might be hard pressed to give a more precise example of the confession compulsion. Having introduced both the scene and the characters, the narrator gives us, before beginning its proper story, one of its main themes: confession. The tale instantly launches into such a confession, the story of Bertha’s guilt and trauma-filled childhood around which Eckbert centers. This is much more than a simple story shared between friends. Rather this was a compulsion by Eckbert who suggested the story and by Bertha who gladly told it. Once the mood became sufficiently confidential, Eckbert put the confession into motion. Walther is immediately reminded that this is indeed a confession, a story that both Eckbert and Bertha hold secret and are unwilling to tell others. Highlighting the compulsion to confess, this passage also inexorably links Eckbert to this compulsion, this confession, and this secret.

As the initial instigator of the confession, Eckbert placed himself in a similarly precarious position as wedded to her guilt. He quickly tries to justify both himself and his marriage to Walther by way of yet another quick, seemingly involuntary confession just as Bertha’s is finished, highlighting her enigmatic beauty at the time of their meeting. Moreover, according to Eckbert, “unsere Verbindung hat uns bis jetzt noch keinen Augenblick gereut” (ibid, my emphasis). Something has obviously changed in Eckbert’s mood, up to this point supremely relaxed in hearing his wife’s tale told to Walther but now concerned that the confessions may have gone too far. He “chooses to extol the virtues of marital bliss by pointing to the absence of remorse; that he should

67 There are hours in which men are worried, should they keep a secret from their friend, which he had previously kept so carefully hidden, when the soul feels an incontrollable impulse to communicate itself, revealing its innermost self to that friend, to make him so much more our friend (all translations of Tieck are mine, unless noted).

68 our marriage has up to now not given a moment of regret (my emphasis).
focus on the absence of this particular emotion only strengthens the suspicion that for some reason he fears its presence” (Tatar 617). This foreshadows not only the final moments of the story in which that remorse returns, but also the immediate *Wendepunkt* of this tale, the naming of Strohmian by Walther.\(^6\) Bertha is almost immediately driven to her deathbed, but not without reiterating her compulsion to confess. “Du weißt, dass ich mich immer nicht, *sooft ich von meiner Kindheit sprach*, trotz aller angewandten Mühe auf den Namen des kleinen Hundes besinnen konnte, mit welchem ich so lange umging” (Tieck 22, my emphasis).\(^7\) At this point, Eckbert becomes aware of a distinct change in Walther’s role in their lives and any concern over the extent of Bertha’s confession is quickly replaced.

Walther has transformed from a passive listener of Bertha’s confession into a semi-narrator of the confession with “his uncanny ability to retrieve lost memories (names in particular) from the depths of consciousness” (Tatar 617). While one may assume that his wife’s delicate health would worry him, he merely glances at her “mit einem tiefen Gefühl… dann sagte er ihr einige tröstende Worte und verließ sie” (Tieck 22).\(^8\) Moving quickly from both Walther’s potential greed and his wife’s sickness, Eckbert comes to focus on his new concern and anxiety about Walther’s transformation from friend to informant. More pointedly, Eckbert focuses not on Walther the informant, but rather on his relationship with that informant. His dying wife next door, Eckbert could think about nothing other than Walther and his quickly crumbling friendship with him. “[Walther] war dieser Mensch jetzt der einzige in der Welt, dessen Dasein ihn

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\(^6\) Both Benjamin and Bloch focus on this precise moment as the point of interest in *Eckbert*, as told by Bloch in his “Bilder des Déjà Vu.”

\(^7\) You know that, *so often speaking of my childhood*, I have never been able, despite all the applied effort, to recall the name of that small dog with which I lived so long.

\(^8\) with deep feeling… then said a few comforting words to her and left.
The strength of Eckbert’s dismay at the transformation of his friend into an informant foregrounds his own secret and his compulsion to confess that may expose it. “Philipp Walther’s naming of the dog Strohmian represents the point at which Eckbert’s guilty secret becomes enmeshed with Bertha’s guilty secret” (Tatar 619). In an attempt to clear his head and calm his nerves, Eckbert decides to go hunting, where he comes across Walther, lowers his bow, shoots, and watches Walther fall. As he had imagined: “Eckbert fühlte sich leicht und beruhigt” (23). His secret is now presumed safe and his compulsion to confess safely removed from the possibility of its immediate exposure. After the death of Bertha and Walther, Eckbert again felt the need to confess to his new friend Hugo, eventually revealing his entire story. Almost immediately, he becomes distressed at the impression that Hugo and Walther may be one and the same; that is to say, Hugo may have Walther’s same power to expose hidden secrets. Hugo and Walther are indeed one and the same, and moreover are found at the end of the story also to be the old woman who had raised Bertha. Walther’s initial ability to name secrets remains as the old woman names Bertha as not only Eckbert’s wife but also sister, killing him. The final words of the tale: “Dumpf und verworren hörte er die Alte sprechen, den Hund bellen, und den Vogel sein Lied wiederholen” (26, my emphasis).

The compulsion to confess is a compulsion to repeat, to repeatedly return to the scene of the guilt, of the secret. Freud based this repetition on the attempt to retroactively

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72 [Walther] was the only man in the world whose existence oppressed and tortured him. It seemed to him that he would be happy and relieved if only this one person could be removed from his way.

73 Eckbert felt relieved and calm.

74 Dull and confused, he heard the old woman speaking, the dog barking, and the bird’s song repeating (my emphasis).
master a trauma. In this respect, Reikian guilt in the compulsion to confess is analogous to Freudian trauma in the compulsion to repeat. Benjamin connects the idea of this guilt/trauma with that of forgetting: “Im tiefsinnigen »Blonden Eckbert« Tiecks steht der vergessene Name eines Hündchens – Strohmian – als Chiffre einer rätselhaften Schuld” (GS II.2 430, my emphasis). The connection between a traumatic event, in Bertha’s case the abandonment of the old woman and in Eckbert’s the familial drama of a daughter from adultery, and forgetting is the center of a Benjaminian, and in that respect psychoanalytical, reading of Eckbert. Freud gives an account of his experience regarding those who attempt to forget their guilty or traumatic memories. “Ich weiß nur, dass ein solches [beabsichtigte] „Vergessen“ den von mir analysierten Patienten nicht gelungen ist… sowohl die Gedächtnisspur als auch der Vorstellung anhaftende Affekt sind einmal da und nicht mehr auszutilgen” (GW 62-3). This is our first indication that Eckbert may not conform to the definition of forgetting as mémoire involontaire that Benjamin had used up to this point. Rather, Freud’s use of the word memory-trace [Gedächtnisspur] makes us immediately think of that other element of memory that was so intimately tied with it, mémoire volontaire.

According to Benjamin’s use of Freud in his “Baudelaire,” only a memory that enters consciousness is able to leave a memory-trace. It is not hard to imagine that secrets and guilt would certainly leave memory-traces, that is interact with the conscious. For Bertha and Eckbert, the interaction of the trauma that becomes the guilty secret within the conscious and the after-effects of that interaction make up Eckbert. Despite the fact that

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75 In Tieck’s profound story Der blonde Eckbert [Fair Eckbert], the forgotten name of a little dog, Strohmi, stands for a mysterious guilt (SW II.2 810, my emphasis).
76 I only know that this kind of [intentional] ‘forgetting’ did not succeed with the patients I analyzed… Both the memory-trace and the affect which is attached to the idea are there once and for all and cannot be eradicated (CPW 48). This is a quote from Die Abwehr-Neuropsychosen (1894).
Bertha had used the name so often as a child, she is now utterly incapable of recalling its name after her traumatic abandonment of the dog and old woman and the ensuing guilt. However, she is compelled to repeatedly tell the story of that trauma and guilt. Eckbert’s guilty secret, the name of his sister and wife that would tie the two together, was buried and transformed deep within his consciousness, causing a host of particular psychoses. As we have seen, Eckbert carried a great anxiety of some unfortunate event, his guilty secret seeing the light of day, which he enumerated at its final release at the end of the story: “Warum hab ich diesen schrecklichen Gedanken immer geahndet” (Tieck 26)?

The psychological and physical manifestation of this anxiety is Bertha and Eckbert’s extreme isolation and solitude, a type of counterweight to their compulsion to confess. Despite his dramatic attempts at isolation for both himself and his wife in order to hide their secret(s), rather it indicates the manifestation of the conscious attempt to bury guilt and trauma within, to separate it. This unavoidable tension between the traumatic secret’s attempts at escaping consciousness and the consciousness’ attempts at keeping it hidden are played out in Reik’s compulsion to confess and Freud’s compulsion to repeat. That is to say, the entire drama of a traumatic or guilty secret, no matter its peculiarities, plays out inside of consciousness, a system that precludes forgetting as both Benjamin and we have so far defined it. What then is the exact relationship between a guilty secret and what we have seen as the formation of a theory of forgetting?

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77 Why had I always had a forecast of this horrible thought?
78 The theme of solitude and isolation may have a role to play in an eventual theory of forgetting outside of our current discussion regarding the compulsion to confess. In Eckbert, nonetheless, it is most striking in the birds continual use of the German Waldeinsamkeit. However, Bertha and Eckbert live in nearly absolute solitude, with a stone wall literally separating them from their neighbors. Their only companion is Walther. Bertha’s youth is spent in almost complete isolation. Eckbert reflects at the end of the story on the terrible loneliness that has comprised his life.
In both Eckbert and Bertha a guilty secret from youth, either in the form of a traumatic abandonment and theft in the case of Bertha or a passing reference to a long lost sister in the case of Eckbert, is named; that is placed in consciousness, by the respective subject. Bertha has bundled the trauma of her flight from the old woman in the name Strohmian while Eckbert has bundled his in the name of his wife Bertha. The psychological attempt by Eckbert and Bertha to “intentionally forget” is, according to Freud, doomed from the beginning. Rather, the goal of consciousness as a defense against stimuli is “aus dieser starken Vorstellung eine schwache zu machen, ihr den Affekt, die Erregungssumme, mit der sie behaftet ist, zu entreißen” (GW I 63).\(^79\) This excitation “muss aber einer andern Verwendung zugeführt werden,”\(^80\) resulting in their compulsions to confess and repeat (ibid). Only by naming their secrets is the old woman able to reattach the sum of this excitation to the original idea, the weakened memory. The potential energy of the tension which had held the memory apart from its initial force, causes a traumatic break in consciousness, and ultimately both Bertha’s and Eckbert’s deaths. We can see that an application of psychoanalytical theory through both Freud and Reik, does not appear to speak to any form of forgetting as we have up to this point described it. Freud goes so far as to explicitly exclude forgetting, considering it a failed endeavor. In the place of this impossible forgetting, the memory is deformed and subjugated further to the work of consciousness, which tries constantly and retroactively to master it, through various compulsions, while the memory attempts to remain in its full, and therefore traumatic, form. “Tendentious forgetting (repression) thus performs the curious function of both deforming memory and preserving memory…” (Flieger 77).

\(^{79}\) to turn this powerful idea into a weak one, in robbing it of the affect – the sum of excitation – with which it is loaded (CPW I 48).

\(^{80}\) must be put to another use (49).
Therefore, we can see this as more an aberration of common memory than something that could be considered a strong case for any attempted theory of forgetting. These names have been placed into consciousness, and are therefore unable to be forgotten. They are struggling to get out from underneath the accumulated reappropriations, in Bertha’s case of resignation to her inability to recall the name and in Eckbert the overwhelming reappropriation of the name Bertha as the name of his wife. Therefore, if Eckbert is in any way a tale of the forgetting of elements of memory, it is a tale of the exceedingly bad forgetting, slow and deformative, of mémoire volontaire. In short, Eckbert is not a tale of forgetting as either Benjamin or we have up to now defined it. That is not to say, however, that Eckbert could not be a tale of a new form of forgetting, a new element in what might one day become that elusive theory of the forgotten.

In the case of Eckbert, memory interacts with consciousness and therefore remains necessarily inside of it. Nothing can be forgotten in the common use of the term. In this case, memory cannot be thought of as an element to be brought into contact with its dialectical counterpart forgetting. However, we can see that what was once the unity of the memory itself is divided and its aspects subsequently isolated from each other by a protective consciousness. The unity of memory is now split between what Freud would call the excitation of an idea and the idea itself, each new aspect now isolated from the other. This division is vital to the defense mechanism of consciousness, robbing each half of the former unity from its attendant potential. This division combined with reappropriation, both of which are performed by and within consciousness, is excellently represented along with its involuntary overturn in Eckbert. In Eckbert’s case, his sister’s name Bertha has certainly not been forgotten but rather reappropriated to become the
name of his wife, nor had the excitation of that memory been forgotten but transformed into an anxiety resulting in solitude and the compulsion to confess and repeat. Rather, it was the division of these two elements by consciousness and their subsequent separation and isolation that caused the connection between the two aspects to wither and be forgotten. The forgetting of the connection between disparate elements of a former whole rather than the forgetting of the disparate elements themselves, seems to have an allegorical association with Benjamin’s idea of the web and weaving of forgetting (warp) and memory (woof). Forgetting weaves, that is connects, the disparate elements of memory together. Eckbert’s forgetting is not a forgetting of a lost sensation as it had been in Proust where one half of the whole had gone missing. Rather the forgetting in Eckbert is a division and reappropriation of both halves of the memory itself, causing Eckbert to forget the connection. This is the primary difference between what Benjamin had up to this point called forgetting by way of mémoire involontaire and what Eckbert posits. In short, Marcel forgets sensations while Eckbert forgets connections.
CHAPTEY V

CONCLUSION

Of the two criticisms under the umbrella of a theory of forgetting that he offered on “Baudelaire,” Adorno was quick to note the difficulties that the problem of the aura posed between the two thinkers, difficulties that have not always been tied to the appropriation of a theory of forgetting.\footnote{For a discussion of the debate between Adorno and Benjamin regarding the aura, see Robert Kaufmann’s “Aura, Still,” Michael Rosen’s “Benjamin, Adorno, and the Decline of the Aura,” and Miriam Hansen’s “Benjamin’s Aura.”} It would therefore be very easy to believe that the root of Adorno’s difficulties is in fact with Benjamin’s theory of the aura, rather than his particular use (or lack) of forgetting in that theory. Benjamin has been consistent, if not always explicit, in his appropriation of Proust, and therefore mémoire involontaire, in his work on a theory of the aura. While neither Proust nor his work is referenced in either of Benjamin’s two major essays on the aura, “Kleine Geschichte der Photographie” and “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,” we have seen that many of the ideas introduced in them are directly related to Proust’s mémoire involontaire. This connection did not change in the chapter on the aura in “Baudelaire” or the many of the quotes in Das Passagen-Werk from which both it and “Das Kunstwerk…” was culled. The only directed criticism from Adorno regarding the aura points to the use of investing an object with the ability to return our gaze. This description of the aura is a faithful reformulation of mémoire involontaire and therefore of forgetting. The investment of an always already forgotten Proustian sensation into an
object and its possible involuntary return mirrors the investment in an object to return our
gaze. While Adorno likens this investment to the narrow moment of human labor,
Benjamin responds to this criticism by preferring an encompassing Proustian sensation, a
“Spur des vergessenen Menschlichen” (BW 418).\footnote{trace of the forgotten human nature (my translation)} In this way, Benjamin defends the
Proustian sensation against Adorno’s use of a Marxist conception of human labor.
Benjamin needs simply to explicate further the connection that he has consistently drawn
between Proust’s theory of forgetting and the aura to counter Adorno’s criticism.
However, the criticism regarding reification, which makes up the bulk of Adorno’s
concerns, may not be so easily countered.

While Benjamin confronts Adorno’s aura criticism, Benjamin largely avoids the
problem of reification in his response. Only two sentences in his response to a theory of
forgetting are not directly tied to the criticism of the aura. They are the sentence naming
Eckbert as locus classicus of forgetting and the sentence questioning Proust’s ability to
fully answer the phenomenon of forgetting. We can therefore imagine these two
sentences as the response, no matter its brevity, to Adorno’s criticism regarding
reification. Adorno says: “Objekte werden dinghaft im Augenblick, wo sie festgehalten
sind, ohne in allen ihren Stücken aktuell gegenwärtig zu sein: wo etwas von ihnen
vergessen ist” (BW 417).\footnote{objects become purely thing-like the moment they are retained for us without the continued presence of
their other aspects: when something of them has been forgotten (CC 321)} It is then little wonder that Benjamin has moved away from
Proust and mémoire involontaire as a theory of forgetting as reification. As we have seen,
an object in relation to mémoire involontaire is never purely thing-like, but is in a way
overdetermined with the human sensations with which we imbue it. As we have seen,
Proust was entirely explicit in equating an object with the sensations we deposit within it,
and which it may eventually return to us. The object of *mémoire involontaire* becomes a pure interior of imprisoned sensations. This is the opposite of the reified, underdetermined, thing-like shell of an object that Adorno describes. This line of thought may be what prompted Benjamin to question Proust’s ability to fully answer Adorno’s call for a theory of forgetting. Rather, Benjamin introduces a new theory that may have more to say in relation to forgetting and reification, a theory of forgetting in which the various elements of an object remain intact (even if reappropriated), but simply the connection between them is forgotten. As we have read, *Eckbert* may fit our, and Adorno’s, needs quite well.

Benjamin then introduces *Eckbert* as a theory where an object does not retain the presence of their other aspects, that is to say, where the connection between the object and the aspect has been lost. In highlighting a theory of forgetting focused on the atrophied connection between various elements of a former whole, rather than the loss of elements themselves, Benjamin has placed *Eckbert* at the center of the discussion on reification and displacing the element-centered Proustian *mémoire involontaire*.84 Benjamin’s earlier formulation of the forgotten as something isolated, yet enigmatically present suits both *Eckbert* and Adorno’s reification criticism. However, we begin to see in this line of criticism and the response that it requires an inconsistency and difficulty in the definitions used in the original criticism. The isolation of a thing from its attendant aspects, allegorized in *Eckbert* by the isolation of a memory from its traumatic potential, is only one aspect of Adorno’s reification criticism. The second half of Adorno’s critical sentence makes a dramatic shift from the idea of a non-presence to a more traditional

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84 From this standpoint of a connection-centered theory of forgetting, however, one could argue that *mémoire involontaire* be considered a unique case of a theory of forgetting based upon *Eckbert*. Proust’s idea of distance focuses on the lack, or forgotten, connection between two halves of a former whole.
definition of forgetting, now relating the reified object to the site of a true forgetting. In other terms, it is a shift from a theory of forgetting centered on connection (Eckbert) to a theory of forgetting centered on elements (mémoire involontaire). As we have seen, this remains a problem for Eckbert, whose theory prevents the elements of a unified memory from being forgotten. However, Proust’s mémoire involontaire seems unable to theorize the underdetermined object that reification requires. Adorno’s conflation of non-presence and forgetting in his reification criticism appear to predetermine Benjamin’s eccentric response, which simultaneously tries to juggle both elements of Adorno’s criticism at once. From this vantage, we see that this questioning criticism rather raises questions of the criticism itself.

In his criticism, Adorno equates a theory of forgetting with a theory of reification. However, while quickly defining reification, he utilizes both the language of forgetting and the language of non-presence. In attempting to balance these two elements, Benjamin’s initial response is to introduce a theory of non-presence as forgetting while diminishing the presence of his previous theory of forgetting. Benjamin also mentioned the difficulty of this problem, hoping to save it for a later work worthy of the lengthy discussion that it would require. For a coherent theory, one must first properly frame the question by defining forgetting as either the forgetting of an element or the forgetting of a connection, a simple non-presence.85 It is only after this question of framing is decided that the dialectical theory of forgetting can be reinserted into “Baudelaire,” as Adorno

85 At this point we see that Derrida’s work (see La dissemination and De la grammatologie) with non-presence may have something of worth to add to any future discussion of a theory of forgetting. Maurice Blanchot’s work (most notably his essay on forgetting in L’entretien infini) comes down firmly on the side of a theory of forgetting centered on the element rather than its presence. However, in the work of Merleau-Ponty often likens forgetting to the “undifferentiated” status of forgetful non-remembering, a forgetting based on its relation, that is its connection, with the other. For a brief introduction to the role these theories may play in a Benjaminian theory of forgetting, see Amresh Sinha’s “Forgetting to Remember.”
had hoped. From the point of a strong definition and possible differentiation of *Vergessen* and *Entfallen*, Benjaminian criticisms of the conflation of *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung* in Freud can be further explored and can finally come into contact with their true dialectical counterparts. As well, only from this differentiation can a theory of reification as either an inability to recall or as a true forgetting be entirely thought through, and Benjamin’s theory of *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* takes its full social relevance. As we have seen, however, Benjamin was forced to take something of a step in the wrong direction, reducing the role of Proust’s *mémoire involontaire* in a theory of forgetting and calling *Eckbert* a *locus classicus* of forgetting rather than of non-recall, conflating Bertha’s conscious inability to recall the name Strohmian with having completely forgotten the name. While we have likely answered why Benjamin had inverted his previous valuation of Proust over *Eckbert* in answering Adorno’s criticism of reification, still more questions are raised. If one consistently remembers that they’ve forgotten something, can it be called forgetting? Where does momentary forgetting become slow memory? Is memory then nothing but trivia? The specter of these questions in the face of a theory of forgetting based upon *Eckbert* forces us to look back fondly on the clarity and decisiveness of Proust’s theory of forgetting and Benjamin’s readings of it and with distrust at a definition of reification that would conflate one theory with the other.

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86 This is how Freud described forgetting, most often as the inability to recall a person’s name. See his “Zum Psychischen Mechanismus der Vergesslichkeit.”
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