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**Imagined Encounters: Historiographies for a New World**  
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Article

# Contingencies of display: Benjamin, photography, and imagining the medieval past

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**Abstract** This essay examines Walter Benjamin's historical dialectic of cult value and exhibition value through the prism of the history of the photography of medieval sculpture. The technology of reproducible media can offer, on the one hand, images that claim historical authenticity in the presentation of medieval sculpture, and, on the other hand, a subjective point of view that emphasizes the presentness of that object over its historicity. By contextualizing the long history of the photography of medieval sculpture around Benjamin's thesis, larger issues centering on reception and visuality emerge – issues that are current in recent discourses of art history and medieval studies.

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At the height of the Middle Ages, the ancient view of the world was in large measure finally forgotten, and, in the diminished world that remained, there was born the scholastic rationalism and the self-consuming yearning of the Gothic. – Walter Benjamin, *On the Middle Ages* (1916)

In his 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,' Walter Benjamin anticipated a symptom of modernity that lies at the heart of current discourses on art history and visuality: namely, that technology mediates the dialectic between historicity and subjectivity. To put it another way,

- 1 Three-dimensional sculptures, on the other hand, could possess similar sacral or ritual aura as reliquaries and icons (see Fricke, 2007). Although Benjamin's theory of the auratic has garnered the most attention in relation to medieval art and aesthetics (for example, Jaeger, 2011), and has rightly been criticized by Bredekamp for his argument that graphically reproducing medieval cult images decreases their ritual value (Bredekamp, 2009), aura is not my focus here.
- 2 Bredekamp's essay is an important exception (Bredekamp, 2009).

the technology of reproducible media can offer, on the one hand, images that claim historical authenticity in the presentation of a certain object or monument (for example, a medieval sculpture), and on the other hand, a subjective point of view that emphasizes the presentness of that object over its historicity. In discussing how photography destroyed the cult value of ritual objects while simultaneously raising their exhibition value, Benjamin made a curious statement regarding the presentation of medieval architectural sculpture to viewers. He claimed: 'Cult value as such tends to keep the artwork out of sight [...] certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are not visible to the viewer at ground level. *With the emancipation of specific artistic practices from the service of ritual, the opportunities for exhibiting their products increase*' (Benjamin, 2008, 25). In this instance, exhibition value mediated by photography increases the visibility of medieval sculptures while simultaneously dislodging them from their own historicity.

Benjamin's statement is curious for two reasons: First, architectural sculptures were not generally considered cult images (*Kultbild*). Whatever kind of cult value they had, if any, it was not the same auratic value possessed by reliquaries or miraculous images.<sup>1</sup> Second, while almost all sculptures on medieval cathedrals are visible to viewers at ground level, they are often not perceptible as representations from certain standpoints on the ground. They were not necessarily kept out of sight, but simply difficult to see or to understand from certain standpoints at certain distances away. For these reasons, Benjamin's claim that 'certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals' lose their cult value through technological reproduction seems dubious on a historical level. His statement does, however, problematize the issue of original versus copy that lies at the heart of his argument and raises other interesting problems regarding exhibition value that have not been as thoroughly worked through in medieval studies or in the history of medieval sculpture.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I will pursue more closely Benjamin's point about medieval sculpture's exhibition value, which is crucial to understanding the stakes of visual culture today. By contextualizing the long history of the photography of medieval sculpture around Benjamin's controversial thesis, larger issues centering on reception and visibility emerge. The exhibition value of medieval sculptures through their modern photographic reproduction – reproductions that depend heavily on the contingent circumstances of the photographer – lies in the photographs' ability to allow modern beholders to imagine certain encounters with objects that were impossible for medieval beholders. These contingencies reveal productive tensions between historicity and subjectivity that were imperative to studies of medieval sculpture in the early formation of art history as an academic discipline. I revisit the importance of photography for the history of medieval sculpture not simply as a matter of historiography, but one of methodology. In particular, I understand photography as a 'descriptive graphic medium' that still controls the techniques vital to fields of humanistic inquiry



devoted to the visual arts (Lieberman, 1990, 233), namely, the seeing *and* describing what we see ‘as others saw,’ to borrow a phrase from the title of Robert Nelson’s volume on pre-modern visibility (Nelson, 2000).

Benjamin’s essay on the ‘Work of Art’ emerged from his deep engagement with then-current methods and theories of art history, although he famously became ‘disenchanted’ with some of these early in his career (Levin, 1988, 78; Bredekamp, 2003, 427). He was especially familiar with the works of scholars like Erwin Panofsky, Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin, who sought to raise the study of historical artifacts to a science (*Kunstwissenschaft*). It is clear that the problems of reception and visibility that the photography of sculpture raises were not lost on the early practitioners of the emerging discipline. Wölfflin in his 1896 essay ‘How One Should Photograph Sculpture’ not only directly addressed what it meant to translate sculptural objects into two-dimensional images, but also made a systematic argument for how sculpture should ‘best’ be photographed (Wölfflin, 2012, 1896).

Wölfflin developed his critical categories of formal and stylistic analysis (the linear and painterly, tactile and optical values, and so on) in this essay, primarily through the use of photographic reproductions. These categories were made famous by his 1915 publication *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, where he not only laid out a systematic morphology of forms he believed applicable to all periods of art-making in Western Europe, but also introduced the notion that seeing could be historicized, that vision had a history.<sup>3</sup> He wrote: ‘the mode of vision, or let us say, of imaginative beholding, is not from the outset and everywhere the same, but, like every manifestation of life, has its development’ (Wölfflin, 1929, vii). While Wölfflin’s concept of the history of art as ‘the doctrine of the modes of vision’ was drawn along nationalistic and ideological lines, it was analytically based on the use of photography as offering an ‘objective’ account of historical beholding.

For instance, Wölfflin claimed there was one correct point of view that was inscribed in a sculpture’s historicity, and it was the job of the photographer to find that point of view and re-present it graphically to modern beholders. He illustrated this problem by comparing two different photographs of Andrea del Verrocchio’s *David* (c. 1473), one by the Alinari firm and one from a photographer he commissioned to correct the problems he found in the Alinari version. Geraldine Johnson explains:

He believed that there was only a single correct view: ‘usually there is one view that through [its] beauty and clarity makes itself felt to be the leading one.’ Wölfflin further specified that ‘this normal viewpoint is first of all naturally none other than the direct frontal view.’ He then demonstrated what a ‘correct photograph’ (‘Richtige Aufnahme’) should look like with an illustration he himself had commissioned. (Johnson, 2012, 27)<sup>4</sup>

Wölfflin all but stripped away any kind of artistic freedom from the photographer while establishing the photograph, if taken correctly, as a certain kind of

3 On the larger implications for Wölfflin’s claim about the historicity of vision, see Davis (2012).

4 For a published comparison of both photographs, see Johnson (2012, 14) and Wölfflin (2012, 4).

document that presented a historically accurate point of view betraying the sculptor's intent. Though he was not alone in believing that one could take up, or find, the historically accurate point of view in front of a sculpture (both Adolf von Hildebrand and Johann Joachim Winckelmann before him understood sculptures to have a primary point of view that one could locate), his argument was often turned on its head in the succeeding years. For example, in his 1929 essay on reproductive media, Panofsky recognized the importance of 'good' reproductions in transmitting some quality of aesthetic experience to the beholder, even if they presented aspects of the sculpture the artist did not intend. Panofsky's example is a photograph of medieval sculpture stripped of its polychrome, like those taken by Charles Nègre of Chartres cathedral in the 1850s (Panofsky, 1930).<sup>5</sup>

5 On Nègre's photographs of medieval French sculpture, see especially Villiger (1997).

6 On the historiographical and political implications of this essay and its relationship to Wölfflin's essay on photography, see Luke (2010).

Panofsky also made a clear distinction between photographs of sculpture and photographs of paintings, claiming that photographs of sculpture were 'a form of idiosyncratic reproduction for the photographer,' who is 'no less "free" than the painter in terms of cropping, distance, pictorial orientation, focus, and lighting' (Panofsky, 2010, 337–338).<sup>6</sup> To Panofsky, photographers made stylistic choices in translating sculptural objects into reproducible images that, in some ways, mirrored those of painters. He was referring specifically to contemporary photographers of German medieval sculpture, like Walter Hege, whose painterly style of photography, which Panofsky deemed 'melodramatic' (Panofsky, 2010, 338), popularized sculptures like the c. 1230 Bamberg Rider to contemporary audiences throughout Germany (Figure 1). Hege's photographs caught the eyes of the Nazi party, who subsequently imagined the Rider as a symbol of racial purity and included his photograph in a controversial 1937 exhibition of 'great faces' of Germany's past, 'Das Deutsche Antlitzim Spiegel der Jahrhunderte' (McDonald, 2010, 2).

Friedrich Kestel has recounted that Hege was thought of as an 'artist' in his own day and was praised for having 'an influence on the imagination of [the] people and their relation to pictorial arts' (Kestel, 1995, 284). Hege brought to life dead stone through a variety of techniques he learned by working with Hugh Erfurth, who was a portrait photographer especially of celebrities. Hege famously shot the medieval sculptures at Naumburg and Bamberg utilizing a portrait style that relied on backlighting and tightly cropped, focused compositions. Seen in the photograph reproduced here, the young, handsome knight seems dramatically disembodied and spatially decontextualized. His horse is nowhere to be found and his location, high upon a pier in the Eastern end of the church adjacent to the ceremonial entrance (the Fürstenportal), is obscured. His gaze, which shoots across the nave toward the Western choir, is now the sole subject of a photograph meant for the modern beholder (Rowe, 2006, 32). Not taken from the ground like a medieval or modern beholder would see the Rider, the photograph relies on artificial means (that is, a ladder or scaffolding) for its presentation.

In Benjamin's terms, the Bamberg Rider loses any claim to historicity in Hege's photograph. Its cult value, whatever that amounted to in the Middle Ages, has



**Figure 1:** The Bamberg Reiter, 1230/1240. Bamberg, St Peter and George. Recording no. 226/292 (18×24).

Source: Photo by Walter Hege. © Foto Marburg/Art Resource, NY.

been thwarted by its exhibition value: *'In photography, exhibition value begins to dive back cult value on all fronts.* But cult value does not give way without resistance. It falls back to a last entrenchment: the human countenance' (Benjamin, 2008, 27). The Rider's countenance, mediated by Hege, was only visible to medieval beholders at a remove; however, this image facilitated a modern cult of the Rider championed by the Nazis. The view offered by Hege is contingent on a number of factors that produce a highly subjective way of seeing the sculpture: the photographer's physical (and even ethical or moral) points of view and his or her technological mastery.

Richard Hamann, one of the founders of the Marburg Kunstinstitut in the late 1920s, promoted this type of photography and was also, ironically, a student of Wölfflin's. I say ironically because the concept of photography Hamann favored was in strict opposition to Wölfflin's. As Angela Matyssek and Pepper Stetler have demonstrated, rather than tasking the photographer to unearth the correct historicized point of view, Hamann believed he or she should bring sculptures physically closer to modern beholders for their own aesthetic enjoyment (Matyssek, 2008, 209–224; Stetler, 2011). Photography, he thought, could make

visible what was invisible. It was through photography that beholders could see many sculptures and sculptural details through views that were not possible on the ground – a sentiment Benjamin shared, I would argue. At Marburg, photography was taught as a process of art-historical investigation and discovery for the students. It trained their ‘art-historical eye’ (Stetler, 2011, 314). Through the heavily illustrated books on medieval and classical art he and his colleagues at Marburg published in the *Kunstgeschichtliches Seminar* series (for example, *Deutsche Köpfe des Mittelalters*, 1922), Hamann thought they were inventing an art-historical ‘way of seeing’ (Stetler, 2011, 317).

This art-historical ‘way of seeing’ was not limited to Marburg either. This style of photography can be seen in a variety of publications and traveling exhibitions that helped to promote the study of medieval sculpture through photographic reproductions. For example, Arthur Kingsley Porter’s groundbreaking 1923 *Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads* contains one volume of text and nine volumes of photographs that, for the most part, he and his wife Lucy took on a number of photographic campaigns throughout Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century (Kestel, 1994). In the first edition, the 1500+ photos were not bound, allowing an ambitious reader to follow his pan-European stylistic voyage with the photographs taken from various volumes arranged on a table. In fact, this is still the only possible way to follow his arguments visually. With over 45,000 photographs and negatives still existing between Harvard University (Cambridge, MA) and the Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles), it is easy to see that Porter was an avid photographer. But he reached beyond his own camera and purchased photographs from Hamann himself, with whom, as Kathryn Brush has demonstrated quite thoroughly, Porter had become close during the 1920s (Brush, 1999, 14; Brush, 2002).

Porter also traded photographs with William Henry Goodyear, the head curator of the Brooklyn Museum of Art until 1923 and an avid photographer of medieval architecture (Tallon, 2013). In an unpublished letter from 1909, Goodyear thanks Porter for sending a photograph of Modena cathedral and then explains that he ‘did not learn photography until 1901,’ after which he made ‘all of his own photographs’ (HUG.1706.104, 1909/10–1920). The theme of the art historian taking up his or her own camera and producing ‘better’ photographs than those by commercial firms runs through the few places where Porter wrote about photography. In his essay ‘Pilgrimage Sculpture,’ he claims: ‘the truth is that sculpture can be studied intelligently only by the aid of more photographs and better photographs than are anywhere at the disposal of the public’ (Porter, 1922, 1). Furthermore, in an unpublished review of Adolph Goldschmidt’s *Die Bronzetzungen von Nowgorod und Gnesen* (1932), he laments the state of photography of medieval art before Hamann began his photographic campaigns at Marburg, stating: ‘until this series [*Kunstgeschichtliches Seminar*], photographs of medieval works had generally been of two kinds: either those by commercial photographers, often



**Figure 2:** The Prophet Micahs, c. 1100. Modena, cathedral of San Geminiano.  
*Source:* Photo by Arthur Kingsley Porter, Courtesy of Special Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University.

excellent technically, but made by men who lacked the point of view of the historian of art [...] or those made by amateurs, including [some] art-historians themselves, who worked often with an inadequate apparatus.' Hamann, on the other hand, 'photographs with extraordinary amplitude' (HUG.1706.145, 1904–1956).<sup>7</sup>

Like Hamann and, later, Benjamin, Porter believed in the power of photography to reproduce aspects of medieval sculptures that would normally escape the eyes of modern viewers. While it is difficult to pinpoint just one photographic style in Porter's oeuvre, many photographs display the tightly cropped, portrait style utilized by Hege and Hamann. To take but one example, in an unpublished photograph (n.d.), the Prophet Micah is pictured dramatically out-of-scale and monumentalized (Figure 2). He is one of six prophets that vertically line the interior right doorpost of the central portal of Modena's cathedral (c. 1090) and is no more than a foot tall. Much like Hege's photograph of the Bamberg Rider, Micah is decontextualized from its sacral and iconographic surroundings, leaving the viewer to imagine the medieval context of the sculpture mediated only by Porter's own subjective vision, a vision he reproduced and exhibited through publication in great quantity.

<sup>7</sup> While Porter's review is to my knowledge unpublished, Orsolya Mednyánszky also discussed this text in her MA Qualifying Paper, Tufts University (Mednyánszky, 2011).

Benjamin claimed that with the rise of technological reproduction and the vast increase in scope of exhibitions, the artwork shifted from cult to construct [*Gebilde*] ‘with new functions’ (Benjamin, 2008, 25). It is worth asking what ‘new functions’ medieval sculpture has taken on as a result of the shift from cult to construct *via* technological reproduction. Aside from illustrating a point about style, iconography, or technique, what is at stake in reproducing an art-historical ‘way of seeing’ instead of a historicized point of view? If photographs of medieval sculpture no longer offer contextual evidence of the cultic or liturgical historicity of the cathedral or church, what function do they serve? There are many answers to these questions, too many to unpack in this essay, but it is worth pointing out a few ways in which medieval sculpture served nationalistic and institutional agendas through its photographic reproduction. Janet Marquardt, for example, has demonstrated how stylized photographic reproductions of Romanesque sculpture in the *Zodiaque* series, *La Nuit des Temps*, begun soon after the Second World War, helped to shape French national identity as well as to establish the origins of the Romanesque in France (Marquardt, 2015). The *Alpina* travel guide series, published in Paris, did the same for Gothic sculpture and architecture through photographs by the famous Patrice Molinard (Monmarche, 1950).

In her book *Legends in Limestone*, Linda Seidel brought to attention the 1963 issue of *Artforum* that celebrated Giselbertus of Autun after an exhibition of some 60+ photographs traveled from France to San Francisco on a tour (Seidel, 1999, 20). This exhibition sought to promote the ‘career’ of the supposed sculptor of the cathedral of St Lazare (Autun, Burgundy) after a number of scholars, including Arnold Fawcus of Trianon Press, rediscovered the sculptor in the 1950s. Under the auspices of the American Federation of Arts, the exhibition traveled across North America from late 1962 until 1964, reaching Flint (MI), Allentown (PA) and Oberlin (OH), among other locations. Museums with collections of medieval art, like the Cloisters in New York City and the Fogg Museum at Harvard, rejected the exhibition – the Fogg declined to present the show on the basis that they already had ‘thousands of photographs of medieval art’ (that is, Porter’s photographs), which were not, incidentally, exhibited in the Fogg at the time (A.F.A, 1961–1963).

As the press release makes clear, aside from whatever pedagogical value the exhibition provided about medieval French sculpture, the exhibition was meant to promote the publication of a recent book by Fawcus’s own Trianon Press (Grivot and Zarnecki, 1961) and, arguably, the town of Autun as a tourist destination. The large-scale photographs taken by Gerard Franceschi over a number of years were equally as important as the sculptures *in situ*: ‘they speak for themselves [as] sufficient evidence (for those who cannot see the originals) that Giselbertus’s achievement was of the highest order’ (A.F.A, 1961–1963). As this photograph of an installation of the show in Paris demonstrates, Franceschi’s photographic style is familiar: a close-up view of the figure of Christ, impossible to behold from ground level, dominates the life-size photograph of the tympanum



**Figure 3:** Installation view of Giselbertus exhibition, c. 1961.

*Source:* Unidentified photographer. American Federation of Arts Records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute.

relief (Figure 3). Though some relief sculptures were originally promised to American lenders to accompany the photographs, these did not travel in the end.

The idea that the photographs provided ‘sufficient evidence’ strikes at the heart of the dilemma modern technologies of reproduction offer, and echoes important questions about reception and visibility. The tension between an art-historical ‘way of seeing’ and a medieval ‘way of seeing’ exists between the historical beholder and the modern beholder – the art-historical ‘way of seeing’ is highly conditioned by photographs that, in many instances, disregard historical topographies of beholding. Wolfgang Kemp has described this effect most acutely:

The institutions, academic studies, and modern technologies of reproduction in modern art have formed an unholy alliance, one whose intention is to present their objects as unrelated monads – ubiquitous, homeless, displaced – as aestheticians of the twenties and thirties already realized with some alarm (i.e. Benjamin, Heidegger). (Kemp, 1998, 185)

What is missing from these ‘unrelated monads’ is an understanding of how historical beholders on the ground encountered these objects. A comprehension of a medieval ‘way of seeing’ is probably more important now than ever before, as the field has long since passed the point where it can ignore the site specificity of

8 See, for instance, the recent work of Jung (2013a, b).

9 My translation.

these objects.<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that turning a blind eye to a historicized spatial context does not continue to happen today. Too often the style of photography favored by Hamann and Porter neutralizes important optical illusions and refinements that were built into the sculptures by presenting the figures from a direct line of sight. The photographs compress the very historicity of beholding that Wölfflin, for one, privileged. They do not represent the real spatial experience of viewing, but rather a contingent ‘way of seeing,’ one that ‘educates’ the eye to ‘the fantasies of the sculptor,’ to quote Remigio Urro, the author of the 1986 photographic campaign documenting Niccolò of Ferrara’s major works from the twelfth century (Urro, 1985, 19).<sup>9</sup>

Although all photography is a technological act of mediation between past and present, arguably the type of photography that privileges subjectivity, the art-historical ‘way of seeing,’ is more contingent on the disposition of the photographer and how he or she interprets sculpture mechanically than photographs striving for historical accuracy. The photographs by Walter Hege, Arthur Kingsley Porter, or Remigio Urro are interpretative. Each photographer presents aspects of medieval sculpture to modern beholders that would have been nearly impossible for most medieval beholders to see. Each produced photographs of sculpture according to a set of standards associated with an art historical ‘way of seeing,’ which stand in marked contrast to those photographs meant to serve as historical documentation or even historical reconstruction. Neither type of photography is right or wrong necessarily. Each presents different types of information to the modern viewer, information based on the contingent circumstances of the photographer. Each presents different ‘ways of seeing’ or even different ‘modes of vision,’ in Wölfflin’s terms. We do not have to choose one over the other.

In fact, used together, both types of photographs can be useful in easing the tension between historicity and subjectivity the camera presents. For example, photographs of Ferrara’s *Piazza Duomo* taken by the Alinari firm in the 1920s reveal considerable differences in the placement and number of sculptures in front of the west façade from those we see today (Figure 4). As I have demonstrated elsewhere, I take this evidence into account when calculating how the tympanum relief of St George of 1135 originally stood in relation to observers on the ground. Miscalculating just a few feet would misrepresent the figure’s original, tightly controlled appearance and the sculpture’s optical refinements that produce a highly developed form of perspectival naturalism when seen from below (Lakey, 2015, 126–128). However, it was only by comparing photographs taken by Porter and Urro with those taken from the ground that this evidence presented itself as a viable means of historical reconstruction.

By representing both the real spatial context of the St George sculpture and tightly cropped and enlarged details, the two types of photography taken in tandem could be understood as analog precursors to recent technological developments in digital three-dimensional imaging, such as those enabling



Figure 4: Cathedral of San Giorgio, west façade, Ferrara.

Source: Photo by Alinari, Courtesy of Special Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University.

Stephen Murray and Andrew Tallon's enterprising *Mapping Gothic France*. That project seeks to elide the temporal and physical distance between architectural space and modern beholders and, consequently, could be understood as a hybrid between the two types of photography described above. Murray and Tallon argue that 'whereas pictures can be satisfactorily represented in two dimensions on a computer screen, space – especially Gothic space – demands a different approach, one which embraces not only the architectonic volume but also time and narrative' (Murray and Tallon, n.d.). While this approach is pedagogically innovative and increasingly important as a research tool, one could argue that, by collapsing these temporal and physical distances and presenting spatially complex monuments in real time on a computer, such projects might displace the desire to imagine a medieval past as their users become enveloped in the presentness of the platform. Moreover, I disagree that 'pictures can be satisfactorily represented in two dimensions' necessarily, and could not also benefit from an approach that embraces volume, time and narrative. Just think of how the texture and portability of an illuminated manuscript is negated when pixilated. Or try to understand on a flat computer screen a sculpture in the round that demands physical movement on the part of the beholder, or even architectural relief that demands to be seen from more than one point of view from the ground.

These are not new problems to wrestle with. The photograph has always presented similar issues in terms of materiality, faithfulness to the historical subject and so on. Nevertheless, the seemingly endless and effortless possibilities of circulation, copying and creating different perspectives on multiple platforms raises the stakes of how we encounter this past in our present. Do these new digital endeavors represent the end, the synthesis, of the historical dialectic Benjamin established in his ‘Work of Art’ essay? Possibly, but perhaps it is still too early to say for certain. I would argue, however, that in our excited rush to embrace new media and digital humanities promising unmediated access to a medieval point of view, and to create simulacra of medieval monuments ‘much closer to the original’ than past attempts, as Murray has argued (Murray, 2009), it would be misguided to lose sight of the long history and nuanced relationship between an art historical ‘way of seeing’ and ‘seeing as others saw’ that the camera has afforded us. Benjamin, for one, understood this relationship and embraced the dialectical tension it forced on historical subjects. By understanding Benjamin’s account of exhibition value in terms of approaches to medieval sculpture, we can begin to unpack the dialectic of historicity and subjectivity. Depending on what point of view is taken, one is necessarily privileged over the other.

While it is impossible to know precisely what sculptures Benjamin was referencing, based on his romanticized notion of the Middle Ages, expressed most poignantly in the essay’s epigraph, and the fact he was living in Paris at the time he wrote his essay, it is possible he was imagining the marginal and monstrous gargoyles of Notre Dame that rest high upon the balustrade level of the urban cathedral and are difficult to see from the ground. Ironically, as Michael Camille has argued in the posthumously published book *The Gargoyles of Notre Dame: Medievalism and the Monsters of Modernity*, it is likely that Benjamin only knew these sculptures through reproductions in the form of postcards and photographs (Camille, 2009, 309). But, as Camille put it so elegantly, ‘for it is not the view from below that has dominated our vision of the chimeras, but our place among them, as spectators of their spectating’ (Camille, 2009, xiv).

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