Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Change is an eclectic collection. Presenting a series of Benjaminian analyses of political and aesthetic phenomena including architecture, film, mass cultural kitsch, fashion, photography, posters, the art market, and political economy, it provides some fascinating insights into his writing, and into the links between politics and perception. Such eclecticism, however, should not divert us from the philosophical unity of Benjamin’s work, and in this review essay I begin to show how locating such unity will require us to think through the philosophical problem of idiosyncrasy. As this collection indicates, Walter Benjamin was probably the most idiosyncratic of 20th Century thinkers of comparable influence; understanding his theory of emancipation as awakening will mean attending to this fact.

According to a common prejudice, in the Athenian city-state an idiotic person was someone who did not partake in public life; someone who, as Hannah Arendt puts it, spent his life ‘in the privacy of one’s own (idion), outside the world of the common’ (1998, p. 38). From this Arendt seems to infer that the Greeks thought private life was idiocy in the modern sense of the word, but there is more nuance to the original term than this might indicate: it could also mean someone without an official public rank, or someone not qualified in a particular field, a layperson or non-professional (cf. Sparkes 1988). It is this latter sense that appears to have prevailed in influencing the modern usage of the word ‘idiot’ as synonymous for ignorance, but the Greek ἴδιος (idios: pertaining or particular to oneself, private) and even its
noun form ἰδιώτης (idiōtēs) were by no means always insults. This may help explain the etymological role of idios in forming the English words ‘idiom’ (from the French idiome via the Latin idioma and the Greek ἰδιώμα) and ‘idiosyncratic’ (from the French idiosyncrasie via the Greek ἰδιοσύγκρασία) which do not necessarily carry a connotation of idiocy. To be idiomatic or idiosyncratic is to be peculiar, to be the single member of a set, which chimes with the early modern English use of ‘idiopathy’ to signify a hypothesised unique or private sensation (distinct from its current medical usage as describing a disease with an unknown cause) as well as the idios kosmos spoken of in fragment 89 of Heraclitus, which Kahn translates as follows: ‘The world of the waking is one and shared, but ... the sleeping turn aside each into his private world’ (1979, p. 104).

The fragment encapsulates something crucial about Benjamin’s supremely idiosyncratic mode of thought: the possibility of waking up from the uneasy dream of commodification. This is in keeping with two of Marx’s dictums, which Benjamin quotes in Konvolut N of The Arcades Project: ‘... the world has long possessed in the form of a dream something of which it only has to become conscious in order to possess it in reality’ (quoted in Benjamin 1999, p. 467; this translation from Buck-Morss 1990, p. 281); and: ‘The reform of consciousness consists solely in... the awakening of the world from its dream about itself’ (quoted in Benjamin 1999, p. 456). If the aura of the thing is the light cast by its ‘uniqueness’ (2006a, p. 105), then for Benjamin the tendency of capital is to extinguish this auartic particularity through exchange and technologies of reproducibility. Benjamin takes this undermining of particularity to be coextensive with the ‘shattering of tradition’ (2006a, p. 104) that marks the development of capital: the loss of aura is a loss of those structures of meaning by which things participate in a unified cultural whole. But as we should expect from Benjamin, the question arises as to what new potentials have been opened up as a result of this process of dissolution. This is an aspect of his politicisation of aesthetics, or in the terms set up in Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Change, it is part of Benjamin’s ongoing attempt to use the methods of aesthetics in attempting to unearth dialectical images of potential social transformations. This is why Benjamin writes that the shattering of tradition is ‘the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind’ (2006a, p. 104, my emphasis). If the concept of a decline of aura is Benjamin’s take on the classic Weberian problem of the disenchantment of the world, then his contribution to it is dialectical enough to allow him to rework it: for Benjamin, the disenchantment of the world is not something to be deplored, but rather a stage on the way toward disenchanted awakening. What kind of disenchantment is this? What kind of awakening?

At this point, another question is useful: is there an object that cannot be subsumed in exchange, whose particularity cannot be extinguished? Jean-Luc Nancy gives us the only possible affirmative answer: ‘it is existence itself which is without price’ (2005, p. 439).
Nancy makes this claim in the context of an argument about the necessary relativity of every value, pointing out that the condition of the possibility of something’s having a particular value is its place in a system of exchange: every price is ‘measured by another thing’ (2005, p. 437). And the only thing that is truly unmeasurable, the only thing that could never be relative to anything else, is the world itself as the supremely idiosyncratic object. Here I want to invoke two key Benjaminian claims, one from one of his earliest texts and the other from (the notes to) his very last. The first is Benjamin’s statement in ‘On the Program for the Coming Philosophy’ that the Kantian system will have to be reworked so as to allow for ‘a new and higher kind of experience yet to come’ (2004, p. 102). If the rigor and critical character of Kantianism constitutes a crucial advance over dogmatic philosophy, then for Benjamin this came at the cost of a philosophical delegitimation and subsequent impoverishment of any experience of the absolute; the coming philosophy of which he writes, then, would be a philosophy capable of integrating such an experience without abandoning critical rigor. As Philip Quadrio writes: ‘It is a reworking that transforms Kant’s transcendental philosophy, which focuses on the conditions of the experience of empirical consciousness, into a speculative metaphysics of experience - one that dissolves the bounds of Kantian experience and opens the experiential possibility of the absolute’ (2003). The fact that Benjamin makes his argument in the future tense is crucial: this is an experience to come, an experience that will (or may) become possible. As such it can be linked with Benjamin’s messianism, and set against his saying that ‘the messianic world is the world of universal and integral actuality’ [allseitige und integrale Aktualität] (2006b, p. 405). Placing the young Benjamin together with the Benjamin of the Theses in this way, and reading them both in the light of the crucial role of idiosyncrasy in his work, we may find that what emerges in the historical awakening Benjamin sought is nothing more or less than an experience of the world itself in its absolute idiosyncrasy. His dialectical gamble is that if capital has succeeded in undermining tradition, impoverishing experience, and showing up the relativity of every value, then it may have also opened up the possibility of a new experience of the world as one and shared, the actuality of our being in common. If we can awake from the commodification of experience it would be toward the world itself as the shared particular.

As this collection indicates, there are many senses in which we can understand Benjamin’s own work as idiosyncratic (a moniker that, with the possible exception of Blanchot, he deserves more than any other 20th Century thinker of comparable influence). In the first and perhaps most historically detailed article in the book, Renate Holub makes clear a crucial source of Benjamin’s undeniable singularity: the fact that, thanks to the rejection of his habilitation thesis by Frankfurt University, he never held a tenured academic position. This gave Benjamin a freedom afforded by the absence of disciplinary constraints (but of course, also placed him under the constraints associated with the economic precarity of life as a ‘freelance’ critic, translator and journalist). Here Holub links Benjamin with Antonio
Gramsci and Karl Polanyi, two other intellectuals who were forced by circumstance to work outside the university, and who were thus able to cultivate intellectual histories which endowed them with the capacity to produce “productive-directive concepts” that responded effectively to very particular socio-historical demands (2010, p. 19). Despite the economic precarity in which Benjamin was forced to work, then, the fact that he lived outside ‘the system of punishment and reward central to mainstream academic operations’ allowed him to develop a ‘probing, experimenting, questioning’ style of thinking that was ‘open to the future eventualities of new social facts or relations’ (2010, p. 19). Benjamin was thus a public intellectual of a very peculiar kind, in that his status as a kind of ‘non-professional’, as a thinker excluded from academia, meant he was able to attend with particular originality to the social developments of his time. In other words, Benjamin’s idiosyncrasy, the fact that he was in a sense not ‘qualified’ to be a philosopher (Holub contrasts Benjamin here with Schmitt, Heidegger, and Arendt), allowed him to become a public intellectual of particular radicalism and provocativeness. It is not just that Benjamin was able to respond to political events without institutional blinkers; more than this, his exclusion from the set of recognised philosophers allowed him to develop a properly idiosyncratic and highly idiomatic mode of thought that is (and will more than likely remain) uniquely fascinating. The peculiarity of idiosyncrasy, its consignment to the unique or private, gives way to a particular and indeed peculiar insight regarding public affairs. As Benjamin’s work shows, this breakdown in the difference between the private and public is the call sign of the idiosyncratic in extremis.

Graeme Gilloch’s article turns to another of Benjamin’s idiosyncrasies: his obsession with certain European cities, and the hallucinatory fragments he wrote about them. Benjamin’s style in such fragments can be usefully contrasted with that of Heidegger. In Heidegger we find a jug, bridges, stars, shepherds, and a pair of peasant shoes (i.e. the stuff of a fairly standard stock of lyric and pastoral scenes and metaphors); in one essay by Benjamin we come across ‘yellow domes of lemons’, a ‘marshland of cress’, ‘warty’ shellfish, ‘paste jewellery’, ‘shell limestone’, and ‘a stink of oil, urine and printers ink’ (Benjamin quoted in Gilloch/Pusca 2010, pp. 83-4) (can we even imagine Heidegger wandering stoned through proletarian Marseilles?) As Gilloch’s piece makes clear, Benjamin’s texts incorporate a ‘writerly’ or ‘literary’ element which we would be entirely wrong to understand in terms of some attempt at decoration.2 Here Gilloch makes a perceptive link between Benjamin’s Marseilles writings, with their display of what he calls the ‘observational acuity of the image maker’ (2010, p. 83), and cinema, in particular with Kracauer’s Theory of Film. Gilloch quotes the following from Kracauer’s text, which reads like a note to Benjamin’s essay on the work of art:

Film renders visible what we did not, or perhaps even could not, see before its advent. It effectively assists us in discovering the material world with its psychophysical consequences. We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual non-

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existence, by endeavouring to experience it through the camera.
(Kracauer, quoted in Gilloch/Pusca 2010, p. 90)

I take the metaphor of dormancy to be crucial: Benjamin’s writings do not just provide a theory of awakening, they attempt to practically demonstrate that theory by enacting it in prose. Just as the flaneur wakes up from the somnambulism of Parisian street life by breaking with the set patterns of movement and practises of consumption and wealth display expected in the arcades, Benjamin works in his texts to wake us as readers through the deployment of sets of vivid, precise, and deeply idiosyncratic images. What Gilloch’s article makes clear is the cinematic character of this strategy; it can help explain why Benjamin writes in his artwork essay that the ‘most powerful agent’ (2006a, p. 104) of the shattering of tradition is film. This is how and why Benjamin’s writing compels us to attend to ‘that which has simply faded into the background’ (2006a, p. 90).

Esther Leslie’s investigation into the aesthetics of change in Benjamin contains an extended discussion of his fascination for snow globes. Citing Adorno’s remark that Benjamin counted them among his favourite belongings, Leslie links this with Benjamin’s early fragment ‘On Ships, Mine Shafts, and Crucifixes in Bottles’, and speculates that his interest in objects behind glass was ‘stimulated by his investigations of the late 19th Century bourgeois parlour that had been his own childhood home’ (2010, p. 97). Leslie claims that Benjamin’s fascination must have stemmed from the ambiguous status of such objects. As items of kitsch mass cultural detritus, they cannot possibly make a claim for being art, and yet the separation between viewer and viewed that the glass barrier affords means they nevertheless fit one of its key criteria: the fact that it is always ‘placed out of reach’ (2010, p. 97). They exist, then, on a kind of borderline between art and kitsch, exemplifying the separation and reification characteristic of art in its bourgeois mode while also remaining entirely graspable in virtue of their status as mass produced; in the object behind glass we encounter the eminently dialectical nature of the problem of commodification. Leslie writes:

These objects, appropriable by the masses, are not artworks, but democratically manipulatable forms of culture, things after art, and, as such, prefigurations of a new political age. Is the contemplative glassed-over scene an artwork because it is withdrawn from touch? Or is it rather there to be grabbed as object, a small world taken into the hand? (2010, p. 97)

And of course, the snow globe exemplifies these problems with a special clarity: the globe’s contents are glassed off and out of reach, but the whole point is to grab and shake the thing. For Leslie, there is a political promise contained in this act, where the ‘furry’ it produces ‘is an illustration of the overturning of settled values...’ (2010, p. 99). Indeed Leslie goes further than this, suggesting that Benjamin’s aesthetics of change ‘alights upon an object’ that ‘envisions change as a prelude to the much-awaited cosmic change’ (2010, p. 99). While
this reference to a ‘cosmic change’ may sound overly mystical, it is productive to read the overturning Benjamin pursued in terms of a radically this-worldly event. One thinks here of the famous snow globe from Citizen Kane. Kane is the archetypical capitalist, and we can read his fumbling of the globe as an image of profound impotence in the face of the world’s idiosyncrasy, of that which can never be exchanged. It is important, then, that Kane’s fumbling coincides not only with the moment of his death, but also with his utterance of the profoundly enigmatic signifier rosebud. This is Kane’s returning to his private world, his death as the ultimate private experience; he utters a word or rather perhaps the word of his private language just as he loses his grip on reality. Benjamin’s this-worldly cosmic change is what can take place after capital’s reaching its absolute limit; it would flow out of the realisation that the world is inappropriable except in common, that to reach out and take it can only be a shared task. The snow globe contains a dialectical image of the possibility of our awakening to the world as one and shared, of a collective action in which the particularity of the world is actualised (Benjamin: ‘... historical materialism has every reason to distinguish itself sharply from bourgeois mental habits. Its founding concept is not progress but actualization’ (1999, p. 459)).

Elizabeth Howie turns in her article to Daguerre’s famous images of the Boulevard du Temple, producing a Benjaminian analysis of the objects in an attempt to show that they ‘haunt’ (2010, p. 141) his work on photography. She argues that the daguerreotype represents an important limit case for Benjamin’s theory of the aura: as photographic images, they participate in the anti-auratic transformation of sense perception by following the ‘desire of contemporary masses’ to ‘overcome the uniqueness of every reality but accepting its reproduction’ (2010, p. 133); yet as singular, non-reproducible objects, daguerreotypes ‘exemplify the type of aura that photographic reproduction destroys’ (2010, p. 131). Noting the unique historical circumstance of Daugerre’s work (because of the long exposure time required for a daguerreotype, the crowds of people that would have been walking on the Boulevard have not turned out; yet a man pausing to have his shoes shined stood still for long enough to appear in one of the images and thus may have become the first human being to be photographed), Howie links Daugerre’s images of the Boulevard du Temple with Benjamin’s theory of historical awakening, arguing that they function as ‘monadic emissaries from the past’ that are ‘still... capable of shocking, and awakening, the viewer’ (2010, p. 139). It is unfortunate (but, given the ambiguity of Benjamin’s remarks on aura, also understandable) that Howie does not fully clarify the relationship between the auratic nature of the daguerreotype and its power to induce a kind of experiential break in the ‘continuum of historical succession’ (2010, p. 139). Does its special status stem entirely from its concrete uniqueness? Or should they also be placed on par with other early works in photography which Benjamin claims offered ‘a last refuge for the cult value of the picture’ (Benjamin quoted in Howie/Pusca 2010, p. 131). In either case, a further question remains: what is the political significance of this alleged
persistence of aura, given that Benjamin equates not the persistence but the destruction of aura with a new potential for mass emancipation?

Even if it doesn't give final answers to these difficult questions, Howie's piece does have the merit of documenting an interesting (and quite 'Benjaminian') historical occlusion: the fact that Daguerre's image presents not just one human figure, but two. Comparing the two images included in Howie's essay makes this clear: in the image with a human figure, there is a second, shadowy human presence—it has to be the bootblack—crouching down behind a sapling. As Howie points out, the fact that the bootblack has been invisible to most commentators on the piece is itself a pointed illustration of Benjamin's theory of the phantasmagoric nature of capital, its tendency to reflect 'images of people as consumers rather than producers, keeping the class relations of production virtually invisible' (Buck-Morss, quoted in Howie/Pusca 2010, p. 136). In the light of this, it is extremely interesting that Giorgio Agamben also fails to see the bootblack in his statements on Daguerre's images in Profanations. Finding in the 8am piece an image of the Last Judgment, Agamben writes that the piece demonstrates how 'the judgment concerns a single person, a single life: precisely this one and no other' (2007, p. 23). While his thesis that the judgment taking place in the 'supreme instant' will see each person 'given over forever to his smallest, most everyday gesture' (2007, p. 23) is very interesting, perhaps it is somehow telling that he cannot see the bootblack. This means more than subjecting Agamben to the critique that he is somehow blind to class difference; it may show something important about the ontological status of gesture, which is the physical and temporal display of idiosyncrasy. Can there be gesture in a purely private world? Isn't it rather the case that a gesture has to be made in public, in the world of a collective of human forms-of-life? If idiosyncrasy is thought in relative terms, then someone can be more or less idiosyncratic than another. Idiosyncrasy would be necessarily collective, but only in the rather weak sense entailed by the fact that one can only be idiosyncratic in relation to another. If we think idiosyncrasy in absolute terms, however, then this hierarchy is destroyed, and the collective nature of gesture becomes clearer. An absolutely idiosyncratic form-of-life is the single member of a set, but every form-of-life is absolutely idiosyncratic: absolute idiosyncrasy is non-relative but nevertheless shared. It is both absolutely private and absolutely public, and shows itself in a zone of indistinction between the two. This supports but in a deeper sense runs counter to Levinas's claim about the privacy of being. Levinas:

It is ... the being in me, the fact that I exist, my existing, that constitutes the absolutely intransitive element, something without intentionality or relationship. One can exchange everything between beings except existing. In this sense, to be is to be isolated by existing. Inasmuch as I am, I am a monad. It is by existing that I am without windows and doors ... [M]y relationship with existing ... [is] the interior relationship par excellence. (1997, p. 42)
My existing, my absolutely particular response to the absolute particularity of existence, is non-relational and entirely private, unique to me alone; yet so is yours, and that of any other human being. Idiosyncrasy is saved from the unspeakability to which Levinas consigns it if awakening to it means awakening to an experience of our shared exposure. Gesture, on this understanding of idiosyncrasy, is precisely the publicity of the private. When Buck-Morss writes that the unconsciousness of the dreaming collective stems not only from its dreaming but also in its support of a certain fantasy of privacy, the belief that we are ‘atomized individuals, individuals who imagined their commodity dream-world to be uniquely personal’ (1990, p. 260), then she indicates something of the political stakes of this: to make a gesture is to wake those around you by publicising the private. It is to show that the idiosyncratic is also the common.

The analysis of the experiential features of capitalism that Benjamin presents in his Passagenwerk are centred on the Parisian arcades of the 19th Century, chosen because they present in nascent form crucial aspects of the socioeconomic changes that were to mark the 20th. The question may arise, then, as to whether this method of returning to the source can be relevant in the face of qualitative changes taking place since the late 19th Century, when economic and technological development first allowed for a massive expansion of the sphere of consumption. The remaining articles in the collection approach this problem, attempting to use Benjaminian theoretical categories for the task of understanding more recent social, technological, and economic changes. Zoe Thompson’s piece is a case in point: it critiques a certain type of urban renewal project, focusing in particular on the recent developments in Gateshead, Tyne. Thompson finds a kind of brutality behind the mantras of ‘urban renaissance’, where the vaguely modernist rhetoric surrounding statement buildings like The Sage conceals the fact that they function not as examples of a revitalisation of public space but rather of ‘the current colonization of the city in the form of ... pre-scribed, pseudo-public space’ (2010, p. 64). There is a peculiar type of alienation at work here, where the utopianism of massive public works projects is paired with and indeed neutralised by a managerial capitalism that seeks to turn cities into tourist attractions. The neoliberal brutalism that results consists of ‘chimera[s] of cultural participation’ built without real regard for local and historical context, both monuments to and participants in the phantasmagoric erasure of memory typical of the ‘myth of progress’ (2010, p. 60) that Benjamin worked all his life to critique. Thompson writes:

Whilst such buildings, and certainly in the case of Tyneside, are generally perceived as successful in rejuvenating former industrial sights blighted by the wane of their manufacturing industries, projects such as The Sage form part of a homogenous wave of ‘image make-overs’, brutally inserting shiny new architectural forms where once there was an industrial wasteland. (2010, p. 59)
Comparing The Sage to the Parisian arcades, Thompson claims that while the former were ‘dream worlds housing commodities’, buildings like The Sage ‘are themselves commodities: big, shiny temples lulling the tourist, the consumer and the city-dweller to them in choreographed somnambulism’ (2010, p. 65). And though the sheer scale of urban renewal projects like the one that has transformed Gateshead may separate them from many of their 19th Century ancestors, such an approach to urban planning does have precedents from the time: consider for instance Benjamin’s ‘Paris: Capital of the 19th Century’, which critiques the state sponsored urban developments that displaced the slums and working class areas of the city between the 1850s and 1870s. In particular Benjamin turns to the ‘strategic embellishment’ (2006a, p. 42) projects of Baron Haussmann, which transformed the old Paris: boulevards were widened, streets and their intersections rationalised, parks built, and a slew of new building regulations instated. Such projects raised rent in city centres, forcing the proletariat out into the suburbs. They also had a statist political intent. As Benjamin writes:

The true goal of Haussmann’s projects was to secure the city against civil war. He wanted to make the erection of barricades in Paris impossible for all time ... Widening the streets is designed to make the erection of barricades impossible, and new streets are to furnish the shortest route between the barracks and the workers' districts. (2006a, p. 42)

There are echoes of Haussmann’s ‘totalitarian aesthetics’ (Buck-Morss 1990, p. 90) in contemporary urban renewal projects such as the one which has transformed Gateshead (one also thinks here of Rudolph Guiliani’s efforts to ‘clean up’ Times Square), even as the political situation has changed: ‘The thresholds of The Sage serve to filter out undesirables: those who are not partaking in conspicuous consumption or city-break tourism’ (Thompson/Pusca 2010, p. 65). Thompson’s piece also indicates the extent to which the task of critical theory has remained essentially the same in this case: seeking out the ‘traces of the “weak messianic power”’ that may allow us to take a critical distance from those ‘discourses of urban regeneration’ that ‘privelege new developments as progressive’ (2010, p. 76). Petra Hroch, Konstantinos Vassiliou, Rolando Vásquez, and Claes Belfrage continue in this vein, showing how Benjamin’s analyses can and should be renewed: Hroch extends Benjamin’s theory of fashion, attempting to show the ‘revolutionary potential’ of ‘online flanerie’ and ‘cycle chic’ (2010, p. 122); Vassiliou works to read changes in the art market in the ‘digital era’ (2010, p. 164) in terms of the Benjaminian category of aura; Vásquez turns to the role of the poster as he tries to show how Benjamin’s theory of the commodity image remains relevant ‘in our present consumer society’ (2010, p. 156); and Claes Belfrage argues that a Benjaminian approach to aesthetics is crucial in understanding and critiquing the ‘financialization of daily life’ (2010, p. 171) typical of the neoliberal reconfiguration of Keynesian/Fordist and post-Keynesian economies. In doing so they all show the continuing relevance of Benjaminian categories for theorising the
nature of experience in contemporary capitalism, and for holding open the ‘small door’ through which we can glimpse the possibility of change.

It is difficult to assess the overall merit of a collection like this, consisting as it does of an eclectic range of articles from scholars working in a variety of disciplines (including sociology, politics, and art history), united around the relatively vague theme of the aesthetics of change. While it certainly demonstrates the continuing vitality of Benjamin’s work, and shows the extent to which it remains relevant to a wide variety of fields of inquiry, this eclecticism may have the unfortunate result of contributing to the image of Benjamin as a thinker whose extreme idiosyncrasy makes his thought too obscure and diffuse to contribute in any meaningful way to philosophy or the critical theoretical project (Belfrage quotes Wieseltier: ‘among the great intellectuals, he was the one who least added up’ (2010, p. 172)). It is worth insisting otherwise, working to locate the philosophical unity which arguably lies at the basis of Benjamin’s work and unites his ‘early mystical’ and ‘later Marxist’ writings. Unearthing it would mean refusing to ignore or explain away the idiosyncratic aspects of his project, working instead to indicate just how crucial they are to his theory of emancipation as awakening. Nevertheless in showing how Benjamin links aesthetics with politics, perception with history, and awakening with the possibility of change, this collection contains some important insights into his work.

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Notes

1 Vlastos works to establish the philological accuracy as well as the philosophical interest of this fragment (1955, pp. 344-7).

2 In this sense he is like Heidegger, for whom style and content are not separable. This would obviously require further development, but one could say that if Heidegger attempts to utilise poetic effects in his texts, Benjamin remains on the level of prose; that if Heidegger’s experience of being is a poetic experience, then Benjamin’s is a prosaic experience of the world.

3 In an extended essay on the films of Abbas Kiarostami, Jean-Luc Nancy claims that cinema ‘makes conspicuous a form of the world, a form or a sense’ (2001, p. 12). Nancy again: ‘[Kiarostami’s cinema] imparts these words: look, I won’t let your attention become distracted, look! Instead of waiting for thrills and a dénouement, have regard for each image in itself …’ (2001, p. 10). This could also function as a description of Benjamin’s method. Little wonder, then, that Nancy ends up echoing Benjamin’s ‘The Coming Philosophy’ when he speaks of cinema’s pointing to a ‘newly configured way of experiencing’ (2001, p. 20).
Even if the relative length of the shadows depicted in each would seem to indicate that they have been mislabelled in terms of the time of day at which they were taken—surely noon is the time of the shortest shadow?

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