

stead, Martin McQuillan has assembled hitherto unpublished texts and translations by de Man, most of them polished, some left incomplete. The texts range throughout his career and so are by no means only juvenilia that would only be craved by hard-core de Manians.

Some of the pieces are fascinating and revelatory, such as the drafted introduction to the *Portable Rousseau* and "On Reading Rousseau." They are valuable not least as the most general statements by de Man on the author that mattered most to him. They have an admirable economy as well as numerous formulations and insights not found in the second half of *Allegories of Reading*, the closest thing to a book that de Man ever wrote. That the introduction was for a Viking paperback geared to an undergrad and college-graduate audience does little to prompt de Man to mollify the complexity of his arguments.

One could probably live without de Man's grad student essay on John Keats, but there are sparks of de Man's fierce intelligence in virtually each piece in the volume, even once in a while in the tamer bureaucratic writings (such as his evaluation of the Rutgers comp lit program), which are not unlike Kafka's "office" writings though a notch up in intellectual content.

Is it *de trop* to publish de Man's translations of texts available in other published versions? Actually, no. It is excellent to have his and his wife's translation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. It is, I think, the most precise translation now available as well as a provocative one, as when the de Mans render the word *transference* with the charged (psychoanalytic?) term *transference* in this passage from Rousseau: "I feel that the reader must object and ask how it is conceivable for a statement to have a figural prior to a proper meaning, since the figure comes into being only as the *transference of a proper meaning*." Something is happening in the departure from the more obvious and perfectly good choice of the English *translate* to render the French *translation*. And indeed Rousseau's passage goes on to chart a psychological drama of the most far-reaching consequences, when original "man" mistakes other men for giants. This is one gem in a volume with many scattered throughout. This book is not just for de Man "completists"; there is almost always something of substance to learn from de Man's framing of issues and his very pointed observations.

Wendy Kozol. *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. 271 pp.

JOSEPH DARDA

Since the end of the cold war, the United States has continually waged war on humanitarian grounds. Visuality has been fundamental to legitimizing these military violences as morally founded, especially as it relates to media representations of suffering in Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. This raises a challenge for visual culture scholars, who must struggle with how to witness the suffering of others without either turning away or authorizing the state's humanitarian violences through a liberal sentimental gaze. In her carefully observed new book, *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing*, Wendy Kozol addresses the risks of watching war by foregrounding how mainstream visual media function as contested sites at which dominant visual regimes are consolidated but also renegotiated and subverted. Focusing on visual representations of the US-led NATO intervention in Kosovo and the twenty-first-century wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, she introduces an analytic of "ambivalent witnessing" to argue that images of distant wars are necessarily tied to hegemonic visuality and yet, as relationally produced, are rarely contained by the discourse of humanitarian

militarism. Taking on the challenge of how to view conflict photography in an era in which images of human suffering are used to rationalize further violence, *Distant Wars Visible* makes the case for witnessing as a way of actively reckoning with visual representations of warfare as productive of one's own imperial subjectivity.

Kozol's book is the latest in a series of works to tackle the war on terror using the critical tools of visual culture studies, including those by scholars such as Ariella Azoulay, W. J. T. Mitchell, and Nicholas Mirzoeff. Indeed, confronting the militarization of visibility has been among the field's foremost tasks for more than a decade. One fault of *Distant Wars Visible* is that Kozol cedes too much ground to these other critics, whom she cites generously, rather than stressing the contributions of the work at hand. Crucially, her book dismantles the distinction between ethical witnessing and spectatorial looking by arguing that ethical encounters with distant wars can only occur through an engagement with spectacles of violence. Like Azoulay, Kozol sees photography as a many-sided and fluid interaction among subject, photographer, viewer, and the institutions that archive and circulate visual media. In this way, spectacles of violence are constructed through and constructive of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual markers of difference, but they also offer a venue for troubling these self/other distinctions on which war is founded. For Kozol, spectacle is a necessary part of engaging ethically with the suffering caused by military violence. "Without visibility, and without spectacle," she asks, "how can representations acknowledge the ways in which trauma is not a universal experience but rather occurs in historically specific contexts that mobilize gender, race, sexual, religious, and other factors to produce differences foundational to such violence?" (p. 57). The answer, of course, is they can't.

Distant Wars Visible is especially concerned with how to visually represent the suffering of others without merely reproducing the imperialist narrative of benevolent rescue. The second chapter, for example, turns to Judith Butler's theory of precarity—a condition of differential vulnerability structured by state violence—to consider visual representations of Afghan women from American news coverage of the war in Afghanistan. The veiled woman was figured in this coverage as the principle victim of human rights abuses and, subsequently, as the ideal beneficiary of humanitarian warfare. Laura Bush was among the first to legitimize the wars in the Middle East as being fought for the liberation of Muslim women from "premodern" social structures. This recruitment of women's human rights to military ends has been heavily criticized by feminist scholars. And yet Kozol encourages an alternative, ambivalent reading that takes account of where these Afghan subjects trouble the visual framework of gender precarity and, in turn, the wars allegedly fought on their behalf. In other words, these photographs may advance their own internally directed critiques.

While ambivalence is an occasionally unfocused analytic device, Kozol delivers compellingly new ways of viewing many images that have already been through the critical mill. This is particularly the case with the book's personally searching and provocative fourth chapter. To explore the affective complicity of the American viewer in looking at the Abu Ghraib torture archive, Kozol draws on her own intimate experience with a relative's collection of World War II battlefield trophies. Discovered while cleaning out the relative's house after his death, the personal archive includes photographs likely taken from a Japanese body in the Marshall Islands. Through an analysis of this family archive, Kozol investigates "the affective politics of recoil" to interrogate her own feelings of complicity in viewing these photographs and instinctive desire to look away (132). This intimate encounter with military violence frames a dynamically original reading of the Abu Ghraib images in which she attends to acts of hailing—the smiles and thumbs-up given by the American guards—that situate the viewer as "in on it." Questioning one's desire to recoil from this national interpellation, she writes, "can lead to a more critical stance for witnesses who recognize not only the crimes committed by the torturers but, equally important, the political complexities of citizenship in

relation to this abuse" (p. 156). Visual archives produce subjectivities relationally, and so the critic too, Kozol suggests, must contend with the first-person pronoun.

The concepts on which *Distant Wars Visible* is built—ambivalent witnessing and ethical spectatorship—are valuable additions to the critical repertoire of visual culture studies and feminist studies. Most importantly, Kozol introduces a way of approaching visual culture that does not merely distinguish hegemonic from counterhegemonic forms of visibility but rather emphasizes the contingency of viewing spectacles of violence. This is an indispensable insight when mainstream media provides many Americans with their only window into the traumas caused by the nation's distant wars. To recognize visual witnessing as an intersubjective and unstable process is also to see that the alternative, not looking, is too risky.

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Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014. 768 pp.

DAVID FERRIS

Biographies need time to take the measure of their subjects. Walter Benjamin has received several biographical treatments that mark not only his importance as critic and thinker but also reflect an evolution in the task of biographical writing as it addresses those crucial figures of twentieth-century thought and criticism whose work and influence eclipses and distances itself so strongly from the daily vicissitudes of a life. Added to this task, the biographer of Benjamin is faced with a difficult task since so much of the details of his life evaporated as the social and political upheavals of his time took their toll on the preservation of historical records, of personal memories. So much of the living traces of a generation were dispersed and lost amidst the displacements and exiles placed upon those like Benjamin, whose thought, career, and even simple existence was radically estranged from any hope of stability. Faced with these challenges, Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings have rightly sought and successfully produced the thread that gives a biography of Benjamin the kind of weight and significance his influence deserves. In doing so, their work tackles one of the most pressing issues bequeathed to us as we now take stock of those critics and philosophers of the twentieth century whose work formed the watersheds that define current critical and cultural analysis.

Both Eiland and Jennings are exceptional choices for this, the first full-blown biographical account of Benjamin in English. Their close and exhaustive knowledge of Benjamin's writings and their role in fostering a greatly expanded view of Benjamin's work in English place them at an intersection and a moment that their work as editors and interpreters of Benjamin has produced, a moment that demands a fuller and more comprehensive account of Benjamin's enigmatic, esoteric, eclectic (in the best sense), and evolving thought. The only biography of comparable weight to date has been the 2009 French "essai biographique" by Bruno Tackels. Yet the focus of the Tackels volume—its preference for the texts rather than the life—does not approach the level of what can be done. Here, the Eiland and Jennings volume excels. Ever aware of the constant cultural, critical, and political refraction that Benjamin practiced on life and experience, they have chosen to follow that line of refraction as the one constant and