

**CONSTELLATION OF AWAKENING:
BENJAMIN AND ARCHITECTURE**

SPRING / SUMMER 2016

Introduction

How to Read (With) Benjamin:**From Cultural History of Materialism to Materialist History of Culture**

Patrick Healy and Andrej Radman, editors

Visual Vertigo, Phantasmagoric Physiognomies:**Joseph Roth and Walter Benjamin on the Visual Experience of Architecture**

Stefan Koller

Without Pictorial Detour:**Benjamin, Mies and the Architectural Image**

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The Architecture of a Lifetime:**Structures of Remembrance and Invention in Walter Benjamin and Aldo Rossi**

Jolien Paeleman

Benjamin and Koolhaas:**History's Afterlife**

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Benjamin's Dialectical Image and the Textuality of the Built Landscape

Ross Lipton

Revolutionary Climatology:**Rings of Saturn, Ringed by Red Lightning**

Sarah K. Stanley

Review Articles by Rodrigo Rieiro Díaz, Stéphane Symons and Stephen Witherford

Contents

- I Introduction
How to Read (With) Benjamin:
From Cultural History of Materialism to Materialist History of Culture
Patrick Healy and Andrej Radman, editors

- 11 Visual Vertigo, Phantasmagoric Physiognomies:
Joseph Roth and Walter Benjamin
on the Visual Experience of Architecture
Stefan Koller

- 27 Without Pictorial Detour:
Benjamin, Mies and the Architectural Image
Lutz Robbers

- 51 The Architecture of a Lifetime:
Structures of Remembrance and Invention
in Walter Benjamin and Aldo Rossi
Jolien Paeleman

- 65 Benjamin and Koolhaas:
History's Afterlife
Frances Hsu

- 75 Benjamin's Dialectical Image and the Textuality of the Built Landscape
Ross Lipton

- 91 Revolutionary Climatology:
Rings of Saturn, Ringed by Red Lightning
Sarah K. Stanley

Review Articles

- 109 **The Memory Works:
Between Monuments and Ruins,
the Case of Contemporary Budapest**
Rodrigo Rieiro Díaz
- 121 **Paris and Berlin:
On City Streets and Loggias**
Stéphane Symons
- 129 **Bankside Urban Forest:
Walter Benjamin and City Making**
Stephen Witherford

Introduction

How to Read (With) Benjamin: From Cultural History of Materialism to Materialist History of Culture

Patrick Healy and Andrej Radman, editors

Only images in the mind vitalize the will. The mere word, by contrast, at most inflames it, to leave it smouldering, blasted. There is no intact will without exact pictorial imagination. No imagination without innervation. (Benjamin, 1920s)¹

Someday, when the prospect of an angel doesn't get readers hot and bothered to identify with it at any price, Benjamin's chastened scrutinizers will realize they'd been had, and that the too-renowned Angel of History Benjamin gives a sentence or so to before literally annihilating it in his Theses was a front and bait for the very identificatory and recuperative takes on him he disowned in the first theses – that, say, of the Marxist dialectician (Adorno) and the theo-hebraic allegorist (Scholem). Benjamin had already identified Klee's 'new angel' with something more ferocious, without anthropomorphic accoutrement (no ruddy cheeks, nice wings, no fake sorrowful back glances at his own hypocrisy toward the dead readers looking to his face). (Cohen, 2016)²

Introduction

Reading Walter Benjamin always seems like a promise to re-read, to take up again the texts which have been saved and presented as his works. They range from essays, monograph studies, large unfinished research projects, book reviews, occasional aphorisms, to radio broadcasts for children, memoirs, autobiographical fictions, travel writing, philological notes, significant epistolary communication, translations – of Proust, Baudelaire – even what might have to be termed feature articles, and

rough working notes. His poems have only recently received a translation and analysis in English.³ Most of his writings were posthumously published.

There is a necessary deferral when first reading Benjamin, a recurring hesitation, as if a first reading avoids the charge of being an intrusion by the concomitant commitment to re-read, and an increasing awareness of the complex demands the multiplicity of Benjamin's written productions makes on any reading at all.

Our reading involves listening attentively to what Benjamin reads. One has only to turn to his essay 'The Task of the Translator' where without offering much by way of example, Benjamin eliminates the very reception and reader-response theory that would become such a mainstay for his interpreters, at least in the Anglophone world, since his texts became available from 1948 onwards.⁴

The essay makes any potential reader aware that translation occurs not only between languages but equally within languages, and the problem of the word/object and object/image for a materialist historiography has to recognise this complex gamut of the interpretative, where a reader often staggers towards a kind of a hermeneutic *mise-en-abyme*.

According to George Steiner, relating a meeting with Gershom Scholem, in which this topic was discussed, a reader of Benjamin would have to meet a host of demands so as to deal with the

kaleidoscope of his writings. Steiner and Scholem came up with a formidable list. One would need to be aware of the emancipation of the German Jewish middle class after Napoleon, understand the phenomenon of Jewish secularization via Marx and Freud, and grasp a persistent idealised version of France among the newly emancipated German Jewish intellectual community.

Further one would need to explore and master the history of German youth movements and the development of Zionism, and at the same time be sensitive to the little studied development of German pacifism, which accounts for Benjamin's substantive silence about the First World War and his constant ambivalence about Theodor Herzl's idea of The Old New Land, *Altneuland*, of Palestine, the title of the novel which when translated into Hebrew as 'Tel Aviv' was to inspire the choice for the city of that name.⁵

After the withdrawal of his *Habilitationschrift* in 1925 further questions arise that require clarification: the issue of Benjamin's relation to academic life and research institutes, his experiments with drugs and the additional claim that in order to read Benjamin one would have to register his life as a bibliophile, collector, and assess his professional activity as a graphologist.

Other requirements made up by Scholem and Steiner was how to evaluate the issue of Benjamin and his writing in German, his complex relationship with the women in his life, and what is termed his 'theology'. Steiner in his address to the Amsterdam congress allowed himself the gratuitous *boutade* of suggesting that most academics who write on Benjamin today would not have the level of German necessary to read him suggesting that only Arendt, Adorno, Löwith and a few others could really meet the demands, and no one singly.⁶

In all of what Steiner posits for the 'ideal' reader, he never raises the question of what is understood by 'history' after Benjamin's researches, and its implications for any reader at all. It would be useful to turn to the Adorno-Benjamin correspondence to see how this question becomes so central to their respective concerns, and the differences that emerge.

Adorno's Benjamin

Adorno in correspondence with Benjamin especially between 1935 and the letter sent by Benjamin in December 1938 is an example of a reader who prides himself on having been familiar with Benjamin's writings and positions himself to both criticise and request from Benjamin work that he – Adorno – takes to be more consistent with his – Benjamin's – development. In one sense Adorno insists on reading Benjamin 'from Benjamin'. He is mainly responding to drafts of the study in which Benjamin has been directly engaged since 1927, and which he will continue until his suicide fleeing Nazi persecution in 1940.⁷

Adorno excuses his own frankness in the name of their friendship and on the basis of a conversation between himself and Benjamin in San Remo. Benjamin is chided for de-dialecticising the dialectical image. The charge sheet is long but turns firstly on criticising Benjamin's citation of a phrase from Michelet that each epoch dreams the following, *chaque époque rêve la suivante*.⁸ This single phrase is for Adorno an undialectical sentence, it makes of subjective alienation a collective idea of consciousness, and the dream is given a utopian future impulse which denies class difference. This individuality of dream, thus pushes it into the bourgeois realm, and in the case of Benjamin, the realm of Jungian psychology.

Adorno raises further telling objections, insisting that the fetish character of commodity, on which

Benjamin focuses, is not a fact of consciousness since dialectics in the eminent sense shows it produces consciousness. Further the dialectical image is undialectical, in that the dialectical image, as it lacks mediation, disallows its own contrary in the concept. It is the dream that needs to be externalised and the immanence of consciousness understood as a construction of reality 'in which Hell wanders through mankind'. This also applies to the way in which Benjamin treats the coalescence of the archaic with the new; by psychologising the dialectical image the work of Benjamin falls for the ruse which invents collective consciousness to deflect attention from the objective state of affairs of alienated subjectivity. Between society and singularity there is no classless dreaming collective.

For Adorno dialectical images in Benjamin are more akin to a model and not a social product; they are objective constellations in which the social structure represents itself. Adorno continues, and suggests that Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility' shows a tendency to obviate the issue of the relations of production by abstract references to the means of production.⁹ As with his acceptance of the first appearance of technology, Benjamin overestimates the archaic as such.¹⁰

Some of the claims he makes in the drafts of *The Arcades Project* as he sends them to Adorno, such as the first use of iron and glass as artificial elements in construction and architecture, indicate for Adorno a lack of historical accuracy.¹¹ Adorno is dubious about Benjamin's notion of distraction and thus the role of architecture for the masses, in Benjamin's account of the reproducibility of the work of art as provender for mass culture.¹²

Adorno also notes that montage is not as significant to film making as Benjamin thinks and that a highly constructed photographic realism is the order

of the day in film studios, one of which Adorno has just recently visited.

The criticism are then expanded, there is a weighty emphasis on Benjamin's lack of clarity at the theoretical level. Adorno declaring himself to be a 'faithful reader of your writings' suggests there is no lack of precedent in Benjamin's procedure, where he observes that motifs are assembled but not elaborated on, suggesting that this is typical of Benjamin's ascetic discipline of omitting decisive theoretical answers to questions and even obscuring what those questions are; they are known only to initiates.¹³

Adorno then raises various other points, some of which he has discussed with Max (Horkheimer): that Benjamin has been overly influenced by Brecht, and that he adopts a Marxist mien, which they consider unnecessary in the form it takes in *The Arcades Project*. He then adds a troubling question about Benjamin's entire methodological approach and direction: 'I remember [...] your essay on Proust and Surrealism in the *Literarische Welt*...' ¹⁴ Adorno questions whether the method applied in those pieces can be deployed in *The Arcades Project*: panorama, traces, *flâneur* and arcades, all without a theoretical interpretation. Adorno wonders if that is not material that can await decipherment without being consumed by its own aura.

His focal point for critique is that Benjamin's is an anthropological materialism with a profoundly romantic character, and further that the materialist determination of cultural traces is only possible if it is mediated through the 'total social process'. The most salient point is that Benjamin's dialectic lacks one thing: 'mediation'.

His very dwelling on detail makes of Benjamin's concreteness a risk for all interpretation, as it gives features from the superstructure a materialist turn

by linking them to corresponding features of the infrastructure.

Benjamin's omission of theory is fatal, Adorno maintains, for the empirical evidence and the theological motif of calling things by their names – effectively a charge of nominalism – becomes then a change into a wide-eyed presentation of mere facts; a nominalist who becomes a jejune empiricist. More to the point, Adorno says that Benjamin's study is located at the crossroad of magic and positivism.¹⁵

The very potential readership he sought from his isolation in Paris and which would give him the detachment needed from his work, by the act of publication, was controlled by those very readers such as Adorno and Horkheimer who exercised direct political power in terms of Benjamin's outreach. Thinking about the issues involved in the correspondence is also a good way of understanding Benjamin's own work and its contemporary actuality.

Benjamin in his response to Adorno will hold on to his 'construction', the way in which the various parts of the work hold together. If his precautionary considerations seem like methodological deficiency, Benjamin suggests that the model he has in mind for the section about the Man of the Crowd, which he refers to as the euphemistic interpretations of the masses – the physiognomic view of them – could be shown by a study of the novels and tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann or more pertinently the work of Victor Hugo, whom he suggests articulated more than any other writer the experience of the masses, as the demagogue in him was a component of his genius.¹⁶

Benjamin finds the focus of the critique relevant, but shows that as he has deployed the term 'modernism', inevitably, from Baudelaire, and the issue of magic/positivism is in fact dissolved in Benjamin's physiognomic and philological astonishment.

He does take the idea of the trace from Poe, but it is conceptually set against the concept of aura, and in some sense it is the concepts that become the source of the dialectical tensions and resolutions: they too have an inclination and collision that eventuate in the archaic/new of modernism as taken up by Baudelaire.¹⁷

In the opening article of this issue, Stefan Koller re-engages with this crucial aspect of Benjamin's own understanding of the relation of physiognomy, expressionism and phantasmagoria, and the matrix of conceptual and dialectical terms deployed by Benjamin's actions as a writer.

Benjamin insists that what he has done bears on method in a precautionary way, since the concept in a monadic rigidity is released by what he calls the base-line of the immanent historical that is the present of decipherment. This decipherment that has in its purview the activity of the detective (Poe's impact on Baudelaire, the *flâneur*, is analogous to the problem of the poet in an industrial capitalist society), the issue of what experience is possible, and the rag-picker who gives the useless another use-value. Benjamin allows a remit of working through citation and novelistic accounts as being of as much value as any vaunted 'primary data' of the professional historical industry which was exploding at this time. It is in the very materiality of image and concept that Benjamin is the furthest removed from Adorno. In the terms of reference in which the 'exchange' between them is joined, Benjamin ineluctably insists on the terms 'panorama', 'traces', '*flâneur*', and 'arcades', and contra Adorno, maintains that this is the material which awaits patient and detailed decipherment.

Benjamin is alive to the colportage and masquerade of space, and how in the new principle of construction the architect is forced, in competition with the engineer to resort to an architecture of masks. The street is also forced into being an

interior and the arcades reveal themselves unwittingly as the furnished and familiar interior of the masses. If there is a role for the *flâneur* in idleness he or she devotes time to exploring the ancient dream of humanity in the labyrinth.¹⁸ Within the dream Benjamin wishes to plot the way that an awakening becomes possible. There is no doubt that the figures he concentrates on, the *flâneur*, the collector and the *Lumpensammler* (rag-picker), all have different complicities in the dissimulations of phantasmagoria.

Benjamin's city

In convolute N of *The Arcades Project* Benjamin makes his own reading a reading that relates to architecture. His aim is to abolish from the historical the notion of progress or rather, as he puts it, decline, and he will attempt to 'encompass both Breton and Le Corbusier', which is the only way to give an account of the expressive milieu.¹⁹ Benjamin goes on to discuss the expressive character of the earliest industrial products of architecture and machines, and to ask in what respect Marx's social-economic theory shares the expressive character of the material products contemporary with it. This makes of theory a material and productive fact. It also identifies Marxism as a product of its time and thus destined to decaying into an image. This is how Benjamin understands giving dates their physiognomy.

A materialist interpretation of history necessarily contains an immanent critique of progress. Benjamin does not require the mediation that Adorno suggests he lacks. His analysis interrogates both the way in which the aesthetic is in flight from the technical, and the way in which the literal masquerade of bourgeois self-protection deploys historicising masks as a refuge: in this flight from reality, architecture has the role of an alibi. The problem of awakening within the multiple simulacra which capital generates and uses to install a phantasmagoria/reality is still the central process that is initiated in his 1938 'Le Paris

du Second Empire chez Baudelaire'.²⁰

There is no gainsaying the way in which Benjamin links the phantasmagoria in Louis Auguste Blanqui's writing *L'Éternité par les astres* to the work of Baudelaire and Nietzsche, and it is in that final phantasmagoria that a critique is made of all that proceeds: finite bodies in infinite space are destined to eternally repeat a small number of possible combination and assemblages, and are running out in terms of time.²¹ More significantly in Benjamin's reading of Blanqui – an author whom he rehabilitates – is the incoherence of the concept of progress in this mechanised and materialist vision of eternal recurrence.

The problem of the tension of and the dissimulation of phantasmagoria and the technical social transformations in capitalist modes of production goes directly to the analysis of urban form as a concretised expression of historicising masks and in what way the role of architecture expresses such a process where expression also means that it both reflects and drives.²² Sarah Stanley's contribution examines the implications of Benjamin's view and his deployment of method, thus enriching a possible understanding of the way in which Benjamin works through his search for affinities and correspondences within the dream-work of mythologising, and the construction of history for the Capital shaped by capital. Three kindred elaborations are offered in this issue's section of review articles featuring Budapest, Paris/Berlin and London by Rodrigo Rieiro Díaz, Stéphane Symons and Stephen Witherford, respectively.

Crucial to this is the way in which Benjamin situates the urbanist master plan of Baron Haussmann who is seen as the purveyor of the tabula rasa, and whose urbanist vision and deployment of perspective are destined to erase the city's history and at the same time, via the work of the artists, install the 'kitsch' of the eternal empire of Napoleon III, and

turn Paris into the most elaborate monument-filled graveyard. The *enfilade* of streets are the *toujours la même* which factories develop for the individual object; homogenisation and serial production are the keys to the urban plan.

The urbanist is imbued with pseudo-artistic aims, and what has taken place in the interior as a flight from the real, from work, from labour, from the transformation of use value to exchange value, is also seen in the destruction of the real history of the city, reduced now to a theme park of empty signs. An impressive engagement with the urbanistic nihilism which is incorporated, in Benjamin's view, in the work of Haussmann, is taken up in this issue in the nuanced reflection by Jolien Paeleman on the structure of remembrance in the work of Benjamin and Rossi.

It might be added that Adorno had fatally misunderstood Benjamin's idea of image and its relation to a past that is never present and a present that feels the past as a future tension, without any suggestion of either progress or decline, thus removing the image from a developmental theory, and understanding its materiality as an already dialectic event. The emergence of the image is thus contingent and memory is a recognition of layer upon layer, that is momentarily halted and recognised. Likewise, the relationship between past, childhood and his own family life should be a strong indicator for any reader:

Wherever the boundary may have been drawn, however the second half of the nineteenth century has within it, and to it belong the following images, not in the manner of general representations, but of images that according to the teaching of Epicurus, constantly detach themselves from things and determine our perception of them.²⁴

In this passage from 'Berlin Chronicle' Benjamin gives an account of his childhood, and points to how

the realm of the dead juts into that of the living, as he is trying in fixing the boundaries of his childhood memory to situate the remoter past which belongs to it. The situation is not dissimilar to Joyce's conclusion to his short story 'The Dead', the past that comes to meet you: the complex and layered composite of memory which is arrested in some decisive moment or image, is literally for Benjamin like a snap-shot.²⁵

Frances Hsu in her article sees the understanding of the dialectical image as crucial for reading Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* and in a fascinating interpretative 'collision' also reads the Rem Koolhaas publication *Delirious New York* as similarly engaged. She examines the way in which the myth – the story told – and logistics in the constellation of image for the city of New York leads to a better grasp of Benjamin's absolute resistance to the evacuation of the temporality of the image, the double temporality of the present/past, past/future which requires different genealogies and concretions. In Ross Lipton's article the textuality and the ambivalent double of image is explored from another set of view-points, which give the image a dialogic character, a necessary ambivalence, and does not disclaim the spectral and haunting element which is traced in an overview of Benjamin's work. Both authors read Benjamin in the prismatic and philosophical sense that Benjamin mentions to Adorno in correspondence. In all of this the problem of the 'historical' remains crucial. The issue of phantasmagoria and image is also explored in terms of the constant flight from the real, the denial of the technical through the plush of middle class escapism or ideological self-protection, which keeps death and violence out of view. Benjamin had discovered when visiting his grandmother that the interior was the place where death did not enter, it was kept at bay by the accumulation of constructed interiors and a specific object world.

Conclusion

A past that contains a future, a past that has never been a present, the notion of what is sent from the past, that which reaches us, is a key to the deeper discussion between Benjamin and Adorno. Adorno will return to the difference in his lectures of the 1960s available in English under the title *History and Freedom*.²⁶ Adorno is still engaged with the work of Benjamin, and with the problem of knowledge and ideology. A certain loss of confidence in being able to give a coherent account that is methodologically self-critical, and that allows for reason to operate without transcendental justification, nor simply reduce it to the question of convention and relativising tropes, is evinced. For Adorno the issue of the dialectic as essentially negative comes to the fore.

The so-called truth of the object is put into question, if only because of the doubts which arise as to the adequacy of concepts which acknowledge there is no immediate givenness, and the process of definition and determination of the object is driven by the conceptual awareness that there is always something more, something of an 'excess' which points back to the Kantian impasse of the antinomies of reason, or what today is taken as the correlationist problem: knowledge from the side of the subject as radically contingent, when no knowledge of the thing in itself is available to the senses, the irrefrangibility of any unity of subject and object, that non-identity of subject and object if they are posited as relational and disclosive entities.²⁷

For Adorno the resistance of the object to knowledge and the way in which the subject exceeds its powers thus failing in its aim, a failure that yields awareness of the complex contradiction for the subject of the negative, places the antinomies of Kant in a more dynamic context; where they are no longer intrinsic limits, but boundaries that facilitate the start of enquiry and which all enquiry seeks to extend. The contradiction in the 'desire' for knowing

is a challenge for knowledge to be a critique, and recognises the disintegration of the apparent identity between concept and reality. In the course of the lectures given by Adorno it is in Lecture 10 that we find him squaring up to the differences between his own work and that of Benjamin. He calls on his students to read Benjamin's theses on history. In the lecture he focuses on several aspects of Benjamin's research and argues, which is central for the concerns also of this issue of *Footprint*, what kind of analysis is required for an effective materialist history of culture as opposed to a cultural history of materialism. From the theses on history Adorno selects the notion of the absolute contrast Benjamin makes between a universal history (Hegel, Marx, Engels), and his own account of what he takes to be a 'materialist historiography' based on a constructive principle.

The question of the distinction of a materialist history as opposed to a cultural history of materialism, must also be traced in very specific exempla, and some of this requires a re-reading of Benjamin's own reading. Lutz Robbers in his article for this issue gives a guide to how this can proceed in detail and via the encounter of Benjamin with the work of Sigfried Giedion and others.

It would be foolish to suggest that Steiner's demands could ever be met in reading Benjamin, but it is surely not improper to suggest that one can learn to read Benjamin again, with the help of other readers. The articles assembled in *Footprint* 18 encourage us to go on, and learn what it means to read Walter Benjamin, with *innervation* yet without *prosopopeia*.²⁸

Notes

1. Tom Cohen, 'Trolling "Anthropos" – Or, Requiem for a Failed Prosopopeia' in *Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols*, eds. Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook, J. Hillis Miller (London: Open Humanities Press, 2016), 197.

2. Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. E. Jephcott and K. Shorter (London: Verso, 1979), 75; partially cited in Brian Massumi, 'Surfacing (Too Late)' in *Deleuze, Guattari, and the Philosophy of Expression (Involuntary Afterword)*, ed. Brian Massumi (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1997).
3. For this see Walter Benjamin, *Sonnets*, translated and with commentary by Carl Skoggard (New York: Publication Studio Hudson, 2014).
4. For this see *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, vol. 10, 2 (1997), and especially Susan Ingram's article "'The Task of the Translator": Walter Benjamin's Essay in English, a *Forschungsbericht*', 207–233.
5. Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland* (Leipzig: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1902).
6. The anecdote was related at the International Walter Benjamin Congress in Amsterdam, July 1997. Steiner's key-note address was entitled 'To speak of Walter Benjamin'.
7. For the correspondence between Adorno and Benjamin see *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). We have drawn in the main from the exchanges between 1935 and 1938.
8. *Ibid.*, letter from 2 August 1935.
9. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility' appeared in a French translation by Pierre Klossowski, in 1936 in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*.
10. See Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 16. 'Whereas for Benjamin industrial technics, as the essential phenomenon of reproducibility, opens a new political question – imposing on philosophy a new task, new criteria of judgement, a new critique (a new analytic for the new perceptual possibilities arising with the organological turn constituted by the technologies of the reproducibility of the sensible) – for the thinkers of critical theory, this fact was, on the contrary, apprehended essentially and exclusively as a critical regression.'
11. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press, 2002).
12. Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, letter from Adorno, 18 March 1936. On the notion of 'distraction' see: Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).
13. It is perhaps ironic that some submissions to this issue have been refuted by peer-reviewers on the basis of exactly the same reproach.
14. *Ibid.*, letter from Adorno, 10 November 1938.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, letter from Benjamin, Dec 9, 1938.
17. On Benjamin's notion of 'aura' see: Félix Guattari, *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 164. 'The Benjaminian aura [...] arise[s] from this genre of singularizing ritornellization. [...] Without this aura, without this ritornellizing of the sensory world – which is established, moreover, in the deterritorialized prolongation of ethological and archaic ritornellos – the surrounding objects would lose their "air" of familiarity and would collapse into an anguishing and uncanny strangeness.'
18. The whole conception of the *flâneur* in Benjamin can also be traced to Karl Gottlob Schelle's neglected and delightful text *Die Promenade als Kunstwerk* (On the Art of Walking), published in German in Leipzig in 1802.
19. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, N1a,5.
20. Walter Benjamin, 'Le Paris du Second Empire chez Baudelaire' in *Charles Baudelaire: un poète lyrique à l'apogée du capitalisme*, trans. Jean Lacoste (Lausanne: Editions Payot, [1938] 1979).
21. Louis Auguste Blanqui, *L'Éternité par les astres* (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière, 1872).
22. This is how Brian Massumi appropriates Benjamin's concept of 'shock': 'Every shift in attention against the background mood [...] may carry the ontogenetic charge of an alert triggering a regeneration of experience and its variation.' Brian Massumi, *Ontopower: War, Powers and the State of Perception* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 185.

23. For emphasis on this see Eric Downing, 'Lucretius at the Camera: Ancient Atomism and Early Photographic Theory in Walter Benjamin's *Berliner Chronik*', *The Germanic Review* 81,1 (Winter 2006), 21–36.
24. James Joyce, *Dubliners* (New York: Penguin Books, 1914), 177.
25. Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom (Lectures 1964–1965)*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).
26. The term 'correlationism' is coined by Meillassoux as 'the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other.' Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 5. For the most recent debate on the issue we refer you to Armen Avanesian and Suhail Malik, eds., *Genealogies of Speculation: Materialism and Subjectivity Since Structuralism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).
27. We would like to acknowledge the efforts by scholars who have approached Benjamin from the architectural point of view: Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Beatrice Hanssen, ed., *Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), Andrew Benjamin and Charles Rice, eds., *Walter Benjamin and the Architecture of Modernity* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009); Brian Elliott, *Benjamin for Architects* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); Gevork Hartoonian, ed., *Walter Benjamin and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Nadir Lahiji, ed., *The Missed Encounter of radical Philosophy with Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), to name but a few.
28. *Prosopopeia* (Greek: προσωποποιία) stands for the personification (of the inanimate), i.e. the hegemony of face or anthropomorphism in general – with the assumed correlation of the figurative and the affective. The term derives from the Greek roots *prósopon* face, and *poiéin* to make.

Biographies

After completing studies in Philosophy and later Sociology and Near Eastern Languages, Pontifical University Maynooth, University College Dublin, Patrick Healy has been engaged in writing, research and teaching, mainly in the area of aesthetics and contemporary art. His recent publications include works on aesthetics, the philosophy of science and artists' biographies, including a broad range of other activities associated with his work as Professor of Interdisciplinary research for the Free International University, Amsterdam, appointed 1997. He works as a Senior Researcher and tutor in the Architecture Theory Section at the Faculty of Architecture, Delft University of Technology, and provides lecture series in aesthetics and the philosophy of science.

Andrej Radman has been teaching design and theory courses at Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture since 2004. A graduate of the Zagreb School of Architecture in Croatia, he is a licensed architect and recipient of the Croatian Architects Association Annual Award for Housing Architecture in 2002. Radman received his Master's and Doctoral Degrees from TU Delft and joined the Architecture Theory Section as Assistant Professor in 2008. He is a member of the National Committee on Deleuze Scholarship.

Visual Vertigo, Phantasmagoric Physiognomies: Joseph Roth and Walter Benjamin on the Visual Experience of Architecture

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They kept their huts. Some wrote their names above their doors and began trading in soap, shoe laces, onions, leather. They returned from the wild and tragic expanses of fortune hunters to the sad modesty of small scale shopkeepers. In the meantime their huts, originally built for the occupancy of a mere handful of months, remained in place for many a year, and stabilised their transitory redundancy into a characteristic local *couleur*. – The huts remind one of exhibited stills in film studios, of primitive illustrations on book covers to Californian tales, of hallucinations. It appears to me (who knows several large districts of industry) that nowhere else do sober businesses bear such phantasmagoric physiognomies. Here, capitalism exuberates into expressionism. (Roth, 1930) ¹

This origin myth of (at the time) new towns in Polish Galicia reaches us from the pen of one Joseph Roth. Better known for his later novels, above all the 1932 *Radetzky March*, Roth sustained himself in the 1920s by regular dispatches from the Austrian ex-realm's frontiers. Presented in the format of newspaper reports published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (the above quote being an excerpt), Roth's journalistic texts dispatched from Paris to Brody soon celebrated a life of their own, reappearing in the author's 1930 collection *Panoptikum: Gestalten und Kulissen* (*Panopticon: figures and stage props*).²

The visuality of Roth's miniature prose in *Panopticon* – that of the travelling onlooker, moving by train, and writing home – may help put into clearer relief a much larger text, separated from

it by three years: that of Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, begun in Parisian exile in 1933 and published posthumously.³ Both texts begin life in the snippet and end up as albums (where a textual 'album' denotes the contingent, and partly arbitrary, termination point of an author's own re-arrangement of extant *textual* fragments, much like a photo album).⁴ Both fasten on a shared vocabulary: 'We find early contributions to the *physiognomy* of the crowd in Engels and Poe. The crowd is the veil through which the flâneur sees the customary city as *phantasmagoria*.'⁵ The flâneur's phantasmagorias, Benjamin adds, are of space, not time – a pun on the word *Raum*, which can mean both space *and* room, more particularly an interior room inside a house.⁶ His *Arcades Project*, we will see, associates such interiority with boundless phantasmagoria – and will associate both with our perceptual experience of the modern city, at once 'customary' and estranged. Both texts, finally, attempt a coming to terms, visually and verbally, with new urbanisms – an attempt that shall occupy me across most of what follows. For perception, and its representation in text, is a focal point of Benjamin's interest in the urban fabric of nineteenth century Paris – a city he beheld with the feverish, estranged sensitivity Heinrich Heine brought to London a century earlier.

What helps Benjamin and Roth 'come to terms' with the modern city is accomplished not simply via an accidentally shared language, or a shared set of observations such as the similarity of modern department stores to greenhouses.⁷ Rather, and not

coincidentally, they operate on shared key concepts, and view the urban fabric through the lenses of *expressionism*, *physiognomy*, and *phantasmagoria*. It is these concepts my paper aims to clarify above all. As this requires close attention to the authors who (re)introduced these concepts to architecture, and as I have to concentrate my efforts on those of whom Benjamin is the benefactor rather than the interlocutor, my own text is less an analysis of Benjamin's than an opening towards its re-reading. It proposes to view *The Arcades Project* both as a rather strange optical corrective to more customary (say, historians') forms of writing employed to bring yesteryear's architecture into clearer focus – and as less of a departure from modernist (historical) writing on architecture, from Hildebrand to Ozenfant, than that text's own physiognomy would have us believe.

Panopticon

'Panopticon': Steering wonderfully clear of Benthamite reverberations, the title of Roth's book seems to indicate the width and fleeting nature of the imagery reported and conjured by his texts, imagery from places far and near to the German speaking peoples in Central Europe. But the title also shows, at times, the phenomena reported, as preoccupied with splendid things seen in kaleidoscopic fashion, throwing new light on the very phenomenon of visual experience itself. Thus, one text collected in *Panopticon*, entitled 'Remarks on Sound Film', ponders the addition of sound to hitherto silent film. Roth remarks on the strange three-dimensionality and nearness (to the viewer) of recorded spoken sound, in voice and noise, compared to the remote flatness of the projected image – an image that, Roth adds, would now need its own technological innovation to bring it back to life, or at least, to a vividness equal to that of sound. For sonority, or voice, is now 'the triumphant competitor of the image.'⁸

It is nearly impossible to *not* extend Roth's diagnosis to the very medium he uses to report it – the

short, impressionistic travel report or *Reportage*, made famous by Heine in the German feuilletons a century earlier (we return to Heine below). For *that* form of conjuring up an image would now suffer from the growing competition by regular (sometimes weekly) newsreels in an increasing number of cinemas with footage from around the world, with such glorious titles as *Weltschau* (a survey or panorama of the entire world). Roth heavily critiqued the visual overload of (or clumsy handling of 'the unconscious' in) cinema at the hands of inept film makers, and lamented the visual fatigue suffered in cinemas' overly decorated and over-commercialised *interiors* (points that will play a heavy role in *The Arcades Project*, as we shall see).⁹ Nonetheless, Roth perfectly understood how the moving image, with its spatiotemporal proximity to worlds both near and far, would soon replace, be the 'triumphant competitor' over, journalistic writing such as his own. (A point with considerable contemporary resonance, provided we instantiate 'moving image' not by cinema but internet.)

Observe how, in our opening quote, Roth likens the picturesque charm of the transitory huts to what one can find on book covers to Californian stories – or, he adds, *in hallucinations*. The continuity of Roth's analogies from conventional text based media to vertigo is suggestive of *the means by which* Roth intends to solve the challenge to textual media. The solution's groping for vertigo, of which more below, strikes at the heart of much narrative paucity Roth detected in contemporary film making. He writes of one such director (the other target of his scorn being Fritz Lang),

In an age without cinema, a Richard Oswald would have become a connoisseur of images, a collector, constructor of painting galleries, a stage prop decorator with artistic pretensions. In the eye of *this* beholder we find the happenings (*Geschehen*) of the world, not its soul.¹⁰

The challenge from the (auditorially enhanced) moving image brings up the question of how to amplify, at a technological (mechanic, corporeal) level, the conjuring power of the text, to make it the equal of cinematic impression, just as the silent film image had to reinvent itself to be(come) the equal of recorded sonority. The key lies in expression (even *expressionism*), not impression, if the opening passage is to be believed – that is, not in recording someone else's experience (*Erfahrung*), namely the author's, but in invigorating a lived experience (*Erlebnis*) in the reader. Only thus can we avoid the dullness of sheer happenings (*Geschehen*) and their duller yet repetition, or re-enactment, on page or screen. And this brings us to Benjamin in three regards.

First, contemporary 'poverty of experience', Benjamin tells us, designates less a yearning for new experiences (*Erfahrung*) than a liberation from (our constantly having to make) them.¹¹ Secondly, Benjamin's *Arcades Project* is a project in reinventing the composition of text to endow it with new powers of the imagination – of imagination as, quite literally, the conjuring up (the expressing and not just impressing) of images from elsewhere, *ou-topos*, to relate us to remote places, geographically, historically, intellectually. Thirdly, the challenge of text to become the equal of the moving image – perhaps by *becoming* in moments itself a moving image – brings us from Roth's diagnostic worry, of one medium being the triumphant competitor over another, directly to architecture quite generally, and to Benjamin's engagement with it more specifically, as something to be captured in his own text.

In particular, we are brought to an overused quotation from another arch-Parisian text discussed by Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*: Victor Hugo's 1831 *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and its worry that the printed book would supplant, and not simply

supplement (exegetically, as it were), the built edifice, specifically the Gothic cathedral.¹² For the challenge now is to measure architecture itself in terms of its imaginary (imaginative and image-conjuring) power, provided we indulge (momentarily at least) the idea to see it as competitor, and not just as supplement, to other forms of image, such as text, sound, and projected image. Benjamin's key idea here, it seems, is to rethink architecture in ways not too dissimilar to how his text rethinks textuality. And the guiding idea for both, isolated in Benjamin's writings but anticipated by Roth in his 1920s writings, is that of 'physiognomy': to interpret buildings, as it were, in terms of surfaces, façades in terms of faces (the two are etymologically connected for a reason), and faces in terms of character – *persona*, the 'sounding through' of a presence behind, and traversing across the physical boundaries of, a mask. At one remove, the idea is to give the text its own (distinctive, unmistakable) physiognomy, insofar as an (increasingly fragmented) authorial voice can use text as a mask for the author's own persona.¹³ Whether this contest, or contention, between architecture and text ends in triumph for either one (and if so, in what kind of triumph) remains to be seen.

Physiognomy

The notion of physiognomy in- and outside architecture designates a project with considerable prehistory and problems. So when Benjamin, and his main source on the subject, Sigfried Giedion, tap into that notion so as to confront and render legible the buildings of the nineteenth century, they *ipso facto* inherit (and have to come up with responses to) those problems. More particularly, their challenge is to see nineteenth century buildings in terms of their faciality and persona, a challenge that is twofold.

For one, the buildings to be examined – here Benjamin squarely rests on Giedion – are no longer

the aesthetically elite projects of Beaux Arts architects, but factory halls (already explored for their architectural potential by Karl Friedrich Schinkel in 1826), train stations, construction bridges, railways, and more. So the object of study shifts, as does the medium by which we study it. The photograph replaces the craftsman's master plan (both beautiful and precise), and replaces the rendering in watercolours, with its perspective accentuating the scenic quality of the aesthetic object. But the change of (documentary) medium from one to another runs deeper than this: the photograph serves Giedion as his argument. He says from the beginning how the shown photos serve as proxy for, not simply quotations of text, but the very 'argument' such quotations would (co-)compose in a conventional monograph – thus Giedion's (in)famous 'Preface to the Hurried Reader' in his 1928 book *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (*Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete*).¹⁴ This, too, closes the gap from Giedion to Benjamin, as it explains the physiognomy that the latter's text would assume. It is a physiognomy at least partly rooted in contemporary writing on architecture, most importantly that of Ozenfant (whom Benjamin ostensibly read, and quotes from) and Jeanneret in their 1920s papers in *L'Esprit nouveau*, writing likewise driven in its argumentation by photographs of buildings.¹⁵ Moreover, some of these photographs were deliberately tampered with to better complement the authors' rhetorical goals in the text, and doubly so in the album that would literally incorporate these papers in the manner that Benjamin would later 'incorporate' Giedion: Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture*.¹⁶

Secondly, the project to bring physiognomy to the study of buildings – their faces, façades, and demeanour – has faced a stock objection since at least the mid nineteenth century. (Thus the second challenge.) Physiognomy itself is (typically taken to connote) a study of the face arrested in motion. This, architect and theorist Gottfried Semper points

out, wreaks havoc with anything but the most simplistic of architecture, since we must understand its elements and surfaces as already animated. Something as elementary as the rounded as opposed to pointed arch,¹⁷ he says,

permits a much freer application [...] and a more manifold characterization of the building; the minutest of deviations of forms and relations, as is the case in the formation of the human face, suffice to give the building a wholly different demeanour. By the rounded arch [...] architectural expression can nearly be elevated to physiognomic freedom.¹⁸

Semper's use of 'freedom' (juxtaposed to a delicate 'nearly') is elusive. His phrasing leaves it open whether architectural expression attains freedom *from* physiognomic constraints – or rather attains a particularly liberated physiognomy. (And in either case, what does architecture thereby gain?) Equally intriguing is Semper's explicit connection of physiognomy to *character*(isation) – a connection that will presently occupy us considerably. As to his passage's more immediate concern, I shall not here dive into the vast and rich literature on animated architecture, and refer, in place of much else, to Alina Payne's study on the moving wall, as made famous in Jakob Burckhardt's and Alois Riegl's inquiries of Baroque architecture.¹⁹ The reason to *not* dive into this literature is the stylistic irrelevance of, and remoteness from, *its* objects of study to those of Benjamin's and Giedion's studies. The challenge is to exploit, and redeploy, this way of decoding animated visuality in objects very remote from Baroque palaces and museums, or even Gothic cathedrals, and bring it to the apparently sterile, solid, resting, and unmoved structure of iron construction. Therein lies the real challenge for Giedion, and consequently for Benjamin in his difficult 'Chapter F' on iron construction.

How to bring physiognomy, a method of deciphering arrested features, to the apparently

arrested features of modern construction? Our clue comes from Roth. Anticipating his own self-imposed exile to Paris in the 1930s, he dedicates a section in his 1927 book *The Wandering Jews* to the (especially Eastern European) Jewish communities and exiles in the city, and writes: ‘they have it easy in Paris. Their physiognomy does not give them away. Their lively (*lebhaft*) natures do not stand out. Their humour meets that of the French half way.’²⁰ The genius of Roth’s exposition here is that the last two sentences are meant as a gloss, and not an expansion, on the phrase ‘their physiognomy’. That is, we are so used to think of physiognomy as a study of arrested facial features alone, of the curvature of noses and (minute alterations in the) pigmentation of the skin, that we forget that the term, *as originally introduced*, included things such as people’s lively natures and their distinct senses of humour. The founder of physiognomy, Johann Caspar Lavater, explains this in 1772 as follows:

Physiognomics is the science of recognizing men’s character (not the *accidentia*), in the widest sense of that term, from their exterior. *Physiognomy* in this widest sense would accordingly designate all outwardly recognizable features of the human body and the motions of the same, insofar as these permit recognition of human character. Given how many diverse [kinds of] characters one man can have simultaneously, that is, given how we can study man from so many points of view, then one and the same man has thus many kinds of physiognomies. Accordingly, physiognomics comprehends all characters of a man which surmount to his complete total character, and studies the physiological, temperamental, medical, physical, intellectual, moral, habitual, athletic, social or interpersonal character, and many more. The actual (simple or composite) expression of each of these characters in the human body, or in man’s exterior as such, is the concern of physiognomics. Insofar as it seeks to recognise character from its corresponding expression, one should call it *empirical* physiognomics; and insofar as it concerns itself with the causes

that give the origin of those expressions, bringing into view the direct relation between expression and character, [one should call it] *theoretical* physiognomics.²¹

The inclusion of a distinctly athletic personality might seem initially odd. Benjamin mentions the distinctly ‘bodily physiognomy’, describing advocacy lawyers’ ‘muscular emphasis in their rhetoric’.²² Here, ‘bodily’ does not attach to ‘physiognomy’ as a pleonasm but qualifies it as a kind.

As for Lavater, his entire undertaking (described above) is premised primarily on

what reason tells us, sc. that each thing in the world has an outward and inner side to it, which stand in an exact relation to each other[,] so that each thing – for this reason, as it is what it is, and not some other thing – has something to it, wherein we can discern what distinctness sets it apart from all other things.²³

The last line explains why Roth sees fit to say that, in Paris at least, the physiognomy of Eastern Jews – with all that entails – does not have them *stand out* as much. They are not singled out for attention, a point that held immense cultural and political significance for Roth who, first exiled to Paris, would later and prematurely die in the city, a year before its fall to the Nazis.

In terms of method, the ‘exact relation’ Lavater presupposes is (what he later calls) a ‘perfect congruency (or correspondence) between man’s soul and his body’. Due to that relation, the various inner states of men, the variety of their souls, correspond to and correlate with an equinumerous variety of bodies and outward appearances.²⁴ Lavater himself was not slow to apply this to a study and systematisation of the arts, and of motifs in art. And Hegel’s efforts to discredit the idea (and its use in art history) notwithstanding, by the 1880s Heinrich Wölfflin – Giedion’s mentor – uses Lavater to develop the foundations for a theory of architectural

styles. Daniela Bohde, who has recently written a monograph on (inter alia) the connection of Wölfflin to Lavater, writes, 'if the relation between built corpus and human bodies was the main theme in Wölfflin's early writings, then he later focused on the visual perception of art and architecture.'²⁵ This bears repeating: physiognomy is first and foremost a project *about*, as opposed to a project enlisting, the visual perception of architecture, specifically of architectural *body*. But what separates this project from other inquiries into architecture visuality? The major concern, ever since Lavater, is the correlation of (visual) characteristics with *character*, and we saw the same in Semper. Wölfflin's task now was to isolate what in Schinkel's writings had remained intractable: the ascription of character *to buildings*.²⁶ That ascription had figured just as centrally, and mystifyingly, in French architecture theory (especially Boffrand, Blondel, Boullée, and Viollet-le-Duc) and had, as in Wölfflin, formed part of a larger project – that of a developing a physiognomy of architectural styles.²⁷

The problem, for all of these architects and certainly for Wölfflin, was an unhelpful fixation on the physiognomy *of the human body* and on human bodily proprioception – to decode, via these, our visual experience of architecture. This restricted a potentially interesting inquiry, of a physiognomy of architecture, to the most superficial of anthropomorphic observations and claims, as when to buildings would be attributed, not a distinct character of their own, but a character that could only be described metaphorically, as the mood or physical bearing of a human being.²⁸ One of many trajectories shut down here was the application of Lavater's presupposition, of a one-one correspondence between inner character and its outward configuration, to his long list of the varieties of character, especially to moral character. And that omission is surprising given how, unlike the other arts, architecture had started its theoretical life in Vitruvius, specifically his requirement that a building have *decorum*. Given

the term's origin in Cicero's work on rhetoric, the

ethical branch of *decorum* also affected architecture, for [Cicero's] injunctions to seemingly social behaviour were transferable to a theory of representation of social structures through built form. [...] At its origin, the Greek term *prepon* (Latin *decorum*) qualified the relationship between appearance and the carrier of that appearance – that is, between that which is visible and meet's the viewer's eye and inner being.²⁹

So the fixation of architectural physiognomy on the human body was fatal in two regards: first, it interpreted the *outward features* in a metaphorical rather than literal manner (as being man-like), and secondly, it restricted the *character* expressed by buildings' overt features to mental states *of humans*, such as grief or elation. In short, it replaced the full reach of a budding *discipline* with the limited interest of a single *idea*.³⁰

But the reason this was a dead corner was not simply the restriction of its point of reference (and comparison) to a single body, moreover a non-architectural one (the human adult). Much worse, it understood that one body, and consequently the buildings it studied, in the most reductionist, physicalist sense possible, and narrowed Lavater's original project to what its author had rather disparagingly called *anatomical* physiognomics. A contemporary reviewer of Bohde fails to see her rehabilitation of physiognomy for what it is, and instead takes her to task for *confusing* the notion (which so obviously should be restricted to a study of facial features alone) for a fully generalised sense of morphology.³¹ In actual fact, it is neither.

The point of Wölfflin's appropriation of Lavater is rather its very *continuity* with Semper's attempts to port comparative morphology, familiar from the biological sciences, into architecture – and then drive such attempts towards a study of architectural *character*, as per Semper's own remarks earlier.³² For

physiognomy (-ics, in Lavater's parlance) operates on a more restricted set of shapes than morphology, but *not* because it by definition only deals with facial features. Rather, it occupies itself with those, and only those, features relevant to the study of character. A morphological study of Gothic cathedrals may legitimately focus on features they share with Romanesque structures: a physiognomic study cannot. (When Roth subtitles *Panopticon* a study of *Gestalten*, he has in mind shapes or features indicative of character. His work is thus one of physiognomy rather than morphology.) As if to remind his readers of this essentialist focus required for the perceptual study of architectonic form and body, Carl Boetticher selects, for his 1852 *Die Tektonik der Hellenen* (*Tectonics of the Hellenes*), a motto that is basically a variation on Lavater's congruency thesis between body and soul: 'The form of the body is the mirror of its very essence (*Wesen*) – penetrate one and you shall have unlocked the other.'³³ Such 'penetration' largely depends on the viability of one's philosophy, not so much of form and essence, as of architectonic body disclosed in perception. Here, Giedion's frustration in having to deal with the limitations of the physiognomic project in Wölfflin is palpable. But it falls on Benjamin to actually overcome them. To do so, like Roth before him, Benjamin reverses the central flaws of architectural physiognomy thus far, particularly Boetticher's. First, the built environment becomes, not an extension (or remote representation) of the human body, but an autonomous entity capable of challenge and threat to human sensitivity. Secondly, the body of the built is never just physical, anatomical, where sterile geometric descriptions purport the tectonic structure of buildings. For Boetticher, a Greek temple is foremost a calibrated system of static (horizontal and vertical) forces; the forces explain the static whole (in balance) which they compose, analogous to how the position of a table top relative to the floor is explained by the length of the legs that support it, and vice versa.³⁴ This is also Boetticher's take on iron construction that Benjamin

quotes, with little enthusiasm, in *The Arcades Project*.³⁵ Our task, Benjamin signals, is to overcome this restricted individuation of buildings – of built bodies whose character an architectural physiognomy needs to render intelligible – as closed physical systems. To do this, he reverses the direction of the gaze: it is not *our* voluntary perception of buildings, technologically enhanced or not, but their sensory overwhelming *us*, that reinstates a proper ontology of buildings, and in turn makes possible, by furnishing rich enough data and 'input' for, a physiognomy of architecture.

It is also here that the present paper departs most sharply from Detlef Mertins's work on Benjamin, entitled (in part) 'Using Architecture as Optical Instrument'.³⁶ Where I see Benjamin pursuing architecture as *itself* an optical corrective, Mertins regards buildings as optical *instruments* controlled by human subjects – in the manner one operates a telescope, with a static, controlled, and dead object at the other end of one's lens. Buildings' own capacity for shock and vertigo (on which more shortly) is here suppressed. Buildings are optical tools only, in Mertins, insofar as they furnish us with platforms from which to view new urban vistas (a point I return to below). Finally, it is ultimately not buildings, but their capture in new forms of photography discussed by Benjamin,³⁷ that for Mertins affords us an alternate and unsettling view of reality.³⁸ More importantly, photos help convey 'the immediacy of lived experience'³⁹ because they reveal

the physiognomic aspects of visual worlds which dwell in the smallest things, meaningful yet covert enough to find a hiding place in waking dreams, but which, enlarged and capable of formulation, make the difference between technology and magic visible as a thoroughly historical value.⁴⁰

While Benjamin's interest in photography (whether or not of architecture) is undoubtedly fascinating in

its own right, its relevance to our stated goal – to unearth Benjamin’s peculiar (optical) take on the urban fabric – is at best indirect. Let us therefore return to our earlier challenge.

How can we bring *physiognomy* to bear on the apparently arrested features of modern construction? For Roth, it meant to expand the term to all varieties of character, including moral character, and a wide variety of character’s indicators (characteristics). Writing of novel urban venues to enable women to exercise physically, Roth detects

a relation to modern dance: [the human body] renders itself subservient to the laws of space [*Raum*], [its] movement becomes architecture and not *only* stays [a mere concern for matters like] hygiene. [...] Such venues are of immeasurable social and moral value.⁴¹

Observe Roth’s ground- and category-breaking claim: the dancers literally *become* architecture. This can be read as a metaphorical re-description of what the dancers do. Or, it can be read as a quite literal statement, requiring, as it does, an expanded understanding of *architecture*, as something that includes and not merely facilitates movement. This expansion re-opens the project of architecture’s physiognomy, and connects that project to architectural phenomena legitimately *characterised* as holding, in Roth’s phrase, ‘an immeasurable social and moral value’.

For Benjamin, too, physiognomy needs enrichment by attention to the very feature that initially seems to threaten its prospect: it is thus married with an interest in movement itself, so as to break out of the restriction to the physically arrested body. Hence, when Giedion and Benjamin study architecture, they are always already interested in movement, and places of movement, or of places facilitating movement or other ‘transitory purposes’ of *others* (of machines, such as trains, and of peoples, across platforms).⁴² But that merely

isolates the phenomena, and still requires that we need to isolate the moving aspect of building itself, not of its tenants, the functions it houses, and so on. And here, I think we can see Benjamin’s creative genius – in bringing out (analogous to, if differently nuanced than Roth) the mobility of *architecture*, the vividness of the images it evokes, in more indirect and elusive senses. To this, we turn next.

Vertigo

Traversing a city from a pedestrian angle, we can get immersed in representations, and we can decipher these – from street signs, to objects displayed in arcades – in utterly cinematic terms. The close mechanical connection of the visual impressions one gathers on a train ride, to the rapid progression of film stills to make for an animated sequence, is well documented, as is the potential of either to produce vertigo in its onlookers:

One can imagine that a contemporary of Charles the Great does not essentially differ in biological constitution from a person today. But it is easily conceivable, that the environmental conditions of a metropolis – with its violent noise peaks, air pollution, hectic (com) motions – would be deadly to him. Schivelbuch, in his book on the history of the *Eisenbahn* (iron railway), mentions how the first travellers by train regularly fell into deep sleep, since the rapidity of impressions created by the landscape exploded the pacing of visibility (of episodes of seeing) they were used to. The senses (the entire biological constitution of man) need to come up with a response to changes in the social-historical world, so that man can live and remain alive.⁴³

Similar reports can be found in Heine’s 1827 travel reports from London, with the important difference that Heine does not single out the damaging impact of metropolitan life on the senses, but on sentimentality – that is, not on biological man, but on cultivated man:

I've beheld the strangest things this world can reveal
to an inquiring mind / I've seen them and remain at
a loss / In my memory still lies this petrified forest of
houses / And in its midst a stream of human faces with
all their varied passions/ all their horrid haste of love,
of hunger, and of hate / [...] This barren seriousness
in all things, this colossal monotony /this mechanical
motion, this weariness of joy itself – / It chokes imagi-
nation / and tears the heart asunder.⁴⁴

'Send a philosopher to London', Heine concludes,
'for all you hold dear, don't ever send a poet', having
no doubt in mind a philosopher with the cool *ratio* of
Kant, as opposed to the delicate, immensely fragile
senses of a Hölderlin. The devastation of the urban
on human sensitivity is total for Heine, as it is for
Schivelbuch's travellers. In both cases, devasta-
tion's entry point is the senses. For them, particularly
vision, operate at both junctures – nature and
culture. For now, let us stay with the (quasi)biolog-
ical restriction on vision, and see how to recuperate
vision's intactness from the assault it suffers from
new urbanism.⁴⁵

If we stick to the travellers falling into deep
sleep, then it is vertigo of this kind that, I think,
Benjamin's inquiry is after. (It is certainly the metric
by which Roth measures the disruptive potential
of urban visual phenomena. Berlin's verbal-visu-
ally agitated election posters cannot 'interrupt the
cold, precise rhythm of this town', as 'only a very
suggestive image of strong suddenness penetrates
the retina of the type of man who only knows work
and leisure.')

One loses one's senses after having
them overwhelmed rather than dulled; and one loses
consciousness after having one's mind too deeply
perturbed. On writing then rests the urgent task of
recuperating one's senses. The text, in particular,
is there to re-orient our own sensuality, and to
understand the very objects that gave us distress,
overpowered us, became the competitors 'trium-
phant over' our dormancy. It is here, of course, that
Benjamin's text explicitly connects us, his readers,

to the slumbers of a dreaming city, since it is the city
as much as ourselves that needs to be re-awakened
for a new dawn. The text, however, does not accom-
plish this immense task in opposition to the objects'
visual prowess, but in full complicity with them. After
all, only then can the two become *competitors*.

If vertigo of *this type* animates Benjamin's text,
how can it unlock (make vivid, re-endow with move-
ment) built objects with such vertigo? One way
architectonic objects provide visual vertigo is by
quite literally providing a platform from which one
can get unprecedented vistas. Thus one of the
most frequently discussed buildings in Benjamin's
chapter 'F', the Eiffel Tower,⁴⁷ quickly acquired the
added function of two platforms from which to obtain
urban vistas from a vantage point of unprecedented
height.⁴⁸ Its four steel cage 'columns' serve only one
purpose other than erecting the radio transmission
point at its peak – they house interior *staircases*
(and later, elevators) to move the would be subjects
to their vistas. Quite literally, then, architecture
serves as point of movement and mobility in two
senses: first, it transports people along a position
in space (vertically, in a tower, or horizontally, on a
bridge), and secondly, it provides sites of vista from
which to behold the environs. Architecture here puts
into *mise en scène* its own contemplation and spec-
tacle. A deeper, less literal, sense of architecture's
vertigo, however, lies elsewhere – on the inside of
architecture.

Boundless interiority

If iron railways can overwhelm us to the point of
unconsciousness, of falling into deep sleep and
uneasy dreams, the same holds for modern iron
constructions more generally, once we pay more
attention to the specific interiors of such buildings.
For here Benjamin's preoccupation with the exteri-
orization of built and artifactual interiors emerges,
interiors like that of museums or suitcases (the felt
lined *etui*).

The domestic interior moves outside. It is as though the bourgeois were so sure of his prosperity that he is careless of the façade, and can exclaim: My house, no matter where you choose to cut into it, is façade.⁴⁹

The very continuity of interiority on a building's exterior licenses Benjamin, and us, to read, as it were, the exterior as a quasi-interior, as if 'the interior and exterior were reflecting each other.'⁵⁰ This is all Benjamin's analysis requires to appropriate Lavater's foundational principle for the project of physiognomy to get underway – the correlation, and congruence, of inner character with outward appearance. Recall the importance of *façade* to the project of (architectural) physiognomy, given how it is the building's face or exterior demeanour; accordingly, the totalisation of interiority on the built exterior and *its* demeanour (the appearance of façade *no matter where you cut* or intersect a building) acquires a special significance. Benjamin himself locates 'the physiognomy of the arcade' in Baudelaire's observation that he could have passed the arcade's 'enchanted haunt so often' without having suspected crossing its entrance: boundless interiority, like a vaulted maze with no exit.⁵¹ He adds later, 'The interest of the panorama is in seeing the true city – the city indoors. What stands within the windowless house is the true. Moreover, the arcade, too, is a windowless house.'⁵² Despite the ubiquity of glass panels, none of them function as windows, that is, provide visual access to a world *outside* the arcade. The exterior world is similarly shut out (visually) in the museum, which 'appears as an interior magnified on a giant scale'.⁵³ You can cut the house any way you want. You will always find façade, but never – an outside.

It is in the interior where the phenomenological qualities raised above – the visual vertigo, the hallucinatory and imaginative power of architecture, on which its enigmatic physiognomy rests – emerge, and range in degrees of intensity 'from the banal

to the hallucinatory'.⁵⁴ Given how interiors are not merely 'receptacles of things, but also the support of affects', some of them are perfectly suited to furnish Benjamin with the consummate 'theory of phantasmagoria, enabling him to chart an interpretation of complex relationships between object and spectator.'⁵⁵ Particularly in the arcades' display areas of luxurious commodities, those fetishes of the worlds of fashion and design, human sensitivity encounters the fantastic, the exotic, the elusive, and the overwhelming. If this seems again a change of topic (we move from buildings to objects displayed *in* buildings), we have to remember that boundless interiorisation all but secures that the transition, not simply from outside to inside, but from building to displayed object, has been rendered seamless. Just as Roth's female dancers *became* architecture, Benjamin's displayed commodities do not simply *bestow* their phenomenal, hallucinatory, qualities *on* their display areas, but rather share these qualities with built interiority. They, and it, are now one and the same, are or have *become* architecture. Since iron construction's totalising *interiorisation* has no corresponding element in Giedion's analysis, Benjamin is justly critical of his main source, and writes,

Attempt to develop Giedion's thesis. 'In the nineteenth century', he writes, 'construction plays the role of the subconscious.' Wouldn't it be better to say, 'the role of bodily processes' around which 'artistic' architectures gather, like dreams around the framework of physiological processes?⁵⁶

Benjamin rejects the idea of construction and architecture, of unconscious and surface, as two neatly delineated strata, such that either one of these could be teased out with comparable ease in the analysis of an architecture historian's like Giedion.⁵⁷ Such an analysis would require no recourse to the metaphysical, the transcendental, the religious: it could dispense, in fact, with theology. Negate that,

and Benjamin's own orientation moves into clear focus. Since the two strata cannot be separated, and the exterior vertigo of the architectural mantle (whose inside and outside we can no longer separate) disrupts us visually and spiritually, nothing less than a spiritual, theological reading is required to bring it into focus, and 'come to terms' with it.

Benjamin's reorientation towards the spiritual further explains the messianic *habitus* he brings to his texts. For him, that *habitus*, the messianic as such, must extend to the order of the profane, that is, the order of things *The Arcades Project* imbues with such significant mythology. It is, as Benjamin puts it in his 1929 *Theological-Political Fragment*, this order which actually *explains* (as much as it is explained by) the messianic impulse, and actually beckons the coming (the nearing, *das Nähern*) of the messiah, and with it, redemption. For *The Arcades Project*, that beckoning is precisely grounded in material reality: 'each epoch', and with it the architecture of each epoch, 'not merely dreams the next but dreamingly pushes towards awakening'.⁵⁸ The messiah's task then becomes to quicken that 'nearing', and concomitantly his own. For him, mythological reality is thus intimately linked to material reality, of which architecture and fashion furnish the collective unconscious – a reality that historic materialism,⁵⁹ requiring for its success attention to 'things spiritual and refined', can only comprehend by enlisting 'the services of theology'.⁶⁰ The task for *The Arcades Project* thus became to render tangible this reality of everyday material objects – the dormant mythology of the profane.

This move (its attendant modification of historic materialism) would cost Benjamin dear among his Marxist friends, including Adorno.⁶¹ But it puts into sharp relief Benjamin's improvement on those who, like Giedion and Boetticher, now look like crude materialists lacking a developed sense for 'things spiritual and refined'. Benjamin's purported

improvement on his distinguished predecessors (not to mention, successors) in architectural non-materialism will look considerably less impressive, however.

The enigma and the cipher

Benjamin's *Arcades Project* rests on the shoulders of giants, certainly where its interest in architecture is concerned. He quotes and, to the delight of posterity, subverts the likes of Boetticher, Kaufmann, and Giedion, and thereby brings to fruition the long frustrated project of architecture's own physiognomy. At the same time, some stark omissions put a damper on the project's originality. By jumping from Boetticher's essay in the 1840s directly to Meyer's 1907 monograph on iron, Benjamin falls into the same trap as Giedion in overlooking the intervening decades of discussion in Germany on iron construction and its relation to architectonic form.⁶² Like Giedion, Benjamin omits any reference to Adolf Hildebrand's introduction of 'Wirkungsform', of form as psychological effect, as a third element to complement Boetticher's limited dyad of core form and art form.⁶³ Presenting himself as the first thinker to imbue Boetticher's dyad with the psychology of the unconscious, Benjamin is able to re-invent the wheel, and dress it in the verbal garb of unprecedented mystery – that of secular mythology.⁶⁴

Harder to place, however, is the absence of any nod to Joseph Roth, Benjamin's colleague at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Unlike Roth, who published sixty-five texts for the newspaper in his first three years alone, Benjamin barely landed twenty such texts in his lifetime.⁶⁵ Beyond quantity, Roth attained the status of a much sought after star critic as well as (soon thereafter) the paper's go-to person for French culture – Benjamin's self-professed if under-solicited area of expertise.⁶⁶ Benjamin held Roth in high esteem for his *Frankfurter Zeitung* texts, and would sometimes make notes from them for his own use; but he held little personal regard for their

author.⁶⁷ Neither did Roth care much for Benjamin, and their relation in the shared years of exile in Paris was accordingly muted, not to say cold.⁶⁸ As Jews fleeing Westward, both despaired when Nazi Germany set out to destroy their chosen refuge of civilization: the capital of the nineteenth century. Their premature deaths are the result of that despair and sixteen months apart to the day.⁶⁹ Roth's tomb stone in Paris reads, *écrivain autrichien – mort à Paris en exil*, and has now become part of the city's endlessly inscribed fabric.

Neither of them was capable of, much less interested in, sustained dialogue with the other. A summary of their hypothetical exchanges is thus as impossible as it is pointless. And yet the final physiognomy their textual albums assumed may provide a fragment to a larger explanation, as to Roth's absence in *The Arcades Project* – a rather odd absence, given how many of Roth's *Frankfurter Zeitung* texts look like crib sheets to that vast volume.⁷⁰ A contemporary reader of Roth's *Wandering Jews* puts it thus:

Again and again – with one neat phrase – Roth puts anxieties into words that it took others whole books to communicate, and then, only vaguely. Not even the magnificent Kafka comes close to a tidy phrase of self-condemnation such as this, referring to the deracinated Western Jew, with his 'secret perversities, his cringing before the law, his well-bred hat held in his anxious hand'.⁷¹

Roth is to Benjamin what in the English language Kipling is to Orwell. Doomed to success, able to make a forceful point concisely, without having to cite (much less think by recourse to) the theoretical crutches of others: Roth's texts exuded a maddening ease, and could not but exert an influence on his contemporaries Benjamin was simply denied.

That situation is all but reversed today. Muddled thought, clumsy prose, and the restraint of a glutton when faced with the most ragged of theories: such ingredients make for the perennially grateful candidate at the university seminar, the learned monograph, the feuilleton feature.⁷² All the better that Benjamin's texts led quiet lives of desperation, and needed rescuing by academia, editorialising, and institutionalisation. All the better that that suitcase holding these texts was so *nearly* vanquished in the Pyrenees.

Roth held no such enigma: he must remain a cipher. His texts defied and defeated editorialising of the barest minimum, even by their very own author, much less another. *Panopticon* contains neither introduction nor references to prior publication. Its presence in *The Arcades Project* would have, both trivially and fatally, made for a different book: the very shock Benjamin's textual montage so eminently desired to provoke, would have ricocheted on itself.⁷³

Notes

I thank Harry Mallgrave and August Sarnitz for comments and help on details. I also wish to record a much older debt to Ritchie Robertson who provided one-on-one tutorials on Kafka, and then supervised my undergraduate thesis on Kafka and philosophy. Robertson saw a beginning, where I barely glimpsed the fullness of his learning, on Austro-German literature, and 'The Jewish Question' within.

1. Joseph Roth, *Panoptikum: Gestalten und Kulissen* (Munich: Knorr und Hirth, 1930; repr. Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1976), 90. All translations in this paper are my own, unless otherwise noted.
2. Roth's journalistic output comprises several thousand pages, some of them now collected in Joseph Roth, *Das Journalistische Werk* (hereafter cited as JW), 3 vols., ed. Klaus Westermann (Cologne: Kippenheuer & Witsch, 1989–1991). Roth's urbane journalism belongs in the Viennese tradition of Alfred Polgar and

- Adolf Loos. Texts like Roth's 1929 'Architektur' (JW vol. 2, 115–116), 1930 review of Werner Hegemann's *Steinernes Berlin* (JW vol. 3, 228–230), or 'Die sanierte Stadt' (JW vol. 2, 3–4) are indiscernible from a Loos text.
3. Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982). All references are to this edition (under the work's customary English title *The Arcades Project*) and by customary section and paragraph numbers, except for the work's introduction.
 4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, who arrived at the final text of his 1953 *Philosophical Investigations* in just this manner, concludes: 'Thus this book is really only an album.' See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, translated by Elizabeth Anscombe as *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953, reissued 1986), p. vii.
 5. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 54, italics added.
 6. *Ibid.*, 57.
 7. Roth, 'Das Warenhaus und das Denkmal', *Frankfurter Zeitung* 12 January 1928 (JW vol. 2, 810), Cf. Roth, 'Das ganz große Warenhaus', *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* 8 Sept 1929 (JW vol. 3, 81–84). Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, F4,2.
 8. Roth, *Panopticon*, 97.
 9. Cf. Roth, JW vol. 2, 256–258. Cf. JW vol. 2, 130–131 on 'the unconscious in film', and JW vol. 2, 61–62 on the contrasting aesthetics of German and American posters advertising films.
 10. Roth, 'Zwei Filmsensationen', *Frankfurter Zeitung* 12 March 1924 (JW vol. 2, 90). By contrast, Roth lauds Chaplin's and Lindner's sense of pacing in their works (JW vol. 2, 258).
 11. Benjamin, 1933 essay 'Erfahrung und Armut', reprinted in Benjamin, *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977).
 12. The relevant passage is excerpted in Vittorio Lampugnani et al. (ed.), *Von der Stadt der Aufklärung zur Metropole des industriellen Zeitalters. Anthologie zum Städtebau*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann Verlag, 2008), Volume 1, 354–360. Benjamin discusses Hugo's book (specifically its take on the Paris Stock Exchange) in *The Arcades Project* F6a,1.
 13. This is explored in, and used to great effect by, Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
 14. Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1928).
 15. For instance, in *The Arcades Project*, section F8,2.
 16. On the text's photographic argument and manipulations, see Jean Louis Cohen, 'Introduction', in Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008); on its textual argument, and the transition to album(hood), see Stefan Koller, *The Birth of Ethics from the Spirit of Tectonics*, TU Delft PhD Thesis, 2015, chap. 6.
 17. That is, in Romanic as opposed to Gothic architecture. Benjamin opens chapter F in *The Arcades Project* with a similarly basic contrast, that of arched to trabeated vaults (F1,1).
 18. Gottfried Semper, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Manfred and Hans Semper (Berlin: W. Spemann, 1884), 461. For discussion and an alternative translation, see Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper. Architect of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 357.
 19. Alina Payne, 'Living Stones, Crying Walls: The Dangers of Enlivenment in Architecture from Renaissance *putti* to Warburg's *Nachleben*', in: Caroline van Eck et al. (eds.), *The Secret Lives of Artworks. Exploring the Boundaries between Art and Life* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2014) 308–339.
 20. Joseph Roth, *Juden auf Wanderschaft* (Berlin: Die Schmiede, 1927; reprinted Cologne: Kippenheuer & Witsch, 1985), 54.
 21. Johann Caspar Lavater, *Von der Physiognomik* (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben, 1772). Chap. 3, italics (mostly) mine.
 22. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, F5,2.
 23. Lavater, *Physiognomik*, chap. 4. The interjection seemingly recalls a quip from Bishop Butler used to great effect in John Locke's chapter on personal identity in his 1690 *Essay Concerning Humane*

- Understanding. However, there is no evidence that Lavater read Butler or Locke.
24. Ibid.
 25. Daniela Bohde, *Kunstgeschichte als physiognomische Wissenschaft. Kritik einer Denkfigur der 1920er bis 1940er Jahre* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), 59.
 26. For Schinkel's use of 'character', see especially the concluding pages of his 'Gedanken und Bemerkungen über Kunst im Allgemeinen', posthumously published as part of his 1863 *Nachlass*; reprinted in Marcel Reich-Ranicki (ed.), *Die Deutsche Literatur. Der Kanon. Essays. Band 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 2006) 597–623.
 27. Bohde, *Kunstgeschichte*, 62.
 28. This stance survives to the present day in Roger Scruton's aesthetics of architecture and music. Our only way to understand these nonfigurative arts, for Scruton, is to attribute to them, metaphorically and in a mode of quasi-pretense, human mental states. This alone, he says, accounts for these arts' representational excess over their material presence as sound and body. For a critical assessment, see Robert Grant, 'Music, Metaphor, and Society: Some thoughts on Scruton', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 71* (2012), 177–207.
 29. Alina Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 56.
 30. For a modern history of that idea, see Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Roger Scruton's review of the book is in sympathy with its main concern (cf. n28) but exasperated by its methodology. See Roger Scruton, 'Palpitating Stones', *London Review of Books* 19.7 (1997), 13.
 31. Stefan Diebitz, 'Daniela Bohde: Kunstgeschichte als physiognomische Wissenschaft. Kritik einer Denkfigur der 1920er bis 1940 Jahre, Akademie Verlag 2012'. Accessed 22 June 2015. http://www.portalkunstgeschichte.de/meldung/daniela_bohde_kunstgeschichte_als_physiognomische_wissenschaft_kritik_einer_denkfigur_der_1920er_bis_1940_jahre_akademie_verlag_2012-5404.html.
 32. Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten* (Munich: Friedrich Bruckmann, 1860, 1863), 2 vols.
 33. Carl Boetticher, *Die Tektonik der Hellenen. Erster Band, Erstes Buch: Einleitung und Dorika* (Potsdam: Ferdinand Riegel, 1852), frontispiece.
 34. For this reading of Boetticher's analysis on trabeated architecture, and for that analysis's shortcomings compared to Hübsch's and Semper's, see my *Birth of Ethics from the Spirit of Tectonics*, chap. 8.
 35. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 45 and F1,1.
 36. Detlef Mertins, 'Walter Benjamin and the Tectonic Unconscious: Using Architecture as Optical Instrument', in Alex Coles (ed.), *The Optic of Walter Benjamin* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999), 196–221.
 37. See Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 48–49.
 38. Mertins, 'Tectonic Unconscious', 207.
 39. Ibid., 214. I invite readers to compare this paragraph, and its (about to be quoted) attendant quote from Benjamin, to *Footprint's* Call for Papers for 'Constellation of Awakening': 'With regard to the architectural theory Benjamin engaged directly with the tectonic tradition, especially the work of Boetticher. He posited the tectonic unconscious and the deployment of optical instruments as crucial for understanding the development which architecture carried from the luxus capitalist forms of commodity.' Observe also the Call's references to 'expressive character' and Benjamin's 'physiognomic' method. Accessed 21 June 2015. <https://www.h-net.org/announce/show.cgi?ID=223137>.
 40. Walter Benjamin, 'Kleine Geschichte der Photographie', reprinted in *Aufsätze, Essays, Vorträge. Band II.2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 368–385, excerpt translated by Mertins, 'Tectonic Unconscious', 214.
 41. Roth, 'Körperliche Erziehung der Frau', *Frankfurter Zeitung* 26 March 1925 (JW vol. 2, 370).
 42. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, F2,9.
 43. Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (Vol. 1, *Entstehung der industriellen Disziplin aus Trennung und Enteignung*), orig. 1972, re-issued

- in 1993 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp:), 19–20n4.
44. Heine's (much longer) original is reprinted in Lampugnani, *Von der Stadt der Aufklärung*, vol. 2, 714–718.
 45. In some philosophical systems, this very distinction of the biological and the cultural is misplaced of course. Gibson, for one, regards the distinction a major source of confusion in visual studies. For the point's careful application to architecture, see Andrej Radman, *Gibsonism: Ecologies of Architecture* (TU Delft Doctoral Thesis, 2012).
 46. Roth, 'Wahlkampf in Berlin', *Frankfurter Zeitung* 29 April 1924 (JW vol. 2, 169).
 47. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, F4a,2 to F4a,4 and F5a,7 and F8,2.
 48. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, F3,5 on the 'magnificent urban views opened up by new constructions in iron'. See further Mertins, 'Tectonic Unconscious', 206 and 212.
 49. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 53 and L1,5.
 50. Georges Teyssot, 'Traumhaus. L'intérieur comme innervation du collectif' (in *Spielraum: Walter Benjamin et l'architecture*, ed. Libero Andreotti, Paris: Éditions de La Villette, 2011, 21–49); revised and translated as 'The Dream House', in: Teyssot, *A Topology of Everyday Objects* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 85–86. My paper's present section quotes the standard English translation of *The Arcades Project* that Teyssot explicitly relies on. For a more literal translation of key passages from Benjamin's contested 'Konvolute 1' on the interior (*Arcades Project* I1,1 to I8,3), see now: Cornelia Klinger, 'Interior Spaces and Other Playgrounds of Inwardness', in August Sarnitz and Inge Scholz-Strasser (eds.), *Private Utopia. Cultural Setting of the Interior in the 19th and 20th Century* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 89–90, 90n3, 92n6. Klinger's discussion of those passages' relation to architecture came to my notice too late.
 51. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, A12,4.
 52. *Ibid.*, Q2a,7.
 53. *Ibid.*, L1a,2.
 54. Cf. Teyssot, 'Dream House', 104.
 55. *Ibid.*, 117.
 56. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, K1a,7.
 57. Cf. Teyssot, 'Dream House', 97.
 58. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 59.
 59. *Ibid.*, K1,5.
 60. See Benjamin's 1939–40 essay 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', reprinted in *Kleine Prosa. Baudelaire-Übertragungen*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972).
 61. Alexander Kluge, *Die Lücke, die der Teufel läßt*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 890–891, with 891n13.
 62. See Harry Francis Mallgrave, 'The fragility of history', in Henrik Karge (ed.), *Gottfried Semper. Dresden und Europa* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2004), 338. Among other failings, Benjamin (F3,7) inherits Boetticher's limited understanding of tectonics as a term restricted to wooden (or quasi-wooden) construction. Contrast Semper on tectonics, as discussed in chap. 8 of my *Birth of Ethics*.
 63. Adolf Hildebrand, *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (Strassburg: Heitz & Mündel, 1893) – a key text for later studies, such as Wilhelm Worringer's. Limitations of place prevented a fuller consideration of these texts.
 64. A point of historiographical distortion inherited by those who take Benjamin's attestations at face value, like Jean-Louis Cohen, *The Future of Architecture Since 1889* (London: Phaidon, 2012), 23 ff.
 65. Jean-Michel Palmier, *Le chiffonier, l'Ange et le Petit Bossu. Esthétique et politique chez Walter Benjamin* (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 2006); translated by Florent Perrier as *Walter Benjamin: Lumpensammler, Engel, and bucklicht Männlein* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), 929n14.
 66. Palmier, *Walter Benjamin: Lumpensammler*, 929n14 and 926.
 67. *Ibid.*, 961. One example (*ibid.*, 929n14) is Benjamin's private reflections in his diary on Roth's report on Moscow (later reprinted in *Panopticon*); see Benjamin, *Fragmente vermischten Inhalts. Autobiographische Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 310ff.
 68. Palmier, *Walter Benjamin: Lumpensammler*, 573n365.
 69. Stéphane Symons, *Walter Benjamin: Presence of*

Mind, Failure to Comprehend (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2013), 151.

70. Especially Roth's texts on the modern department store (n7), with their mention of the glasshouse, commodity fetish, human appetite, vertigo, dream, its failed attempt at hubris. Or this: *The Arcades Project* claims that the cultural core of early nineteenth century France (the Empire period) was born 'in the undignified company of small scale shop owners', of *Krämer*: in a 'würdelos[e] Krämergesellschaft' (Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, F5,2). *Panopticon* (my opening quote, n1): the phantasmagoria lurking behind modern industrial districts was born from 'the sad modesty of small scale shopkeepers', of *Krämer*.
71. Erica Bell, 'An elegy of love and tears, shame and foreboding' [review of Joseph Roth, *Wandering Jews*, translation by Michael Hofmann, Norton & Company 2001]. Accessed 25 June 2015. http://www.amazon.com/review/R3V68AQ8SR4JD9/ref=cm_cr_dp_title?ie=UTF8&ASIN=039332270X
72. Aply satirised in Roth (JW vol. 3, 229).

Biography

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Without Pictorial Detour: Benjamin, Mies and the Architectural Image

Lutz Robbers

'Radical knowledge' of architecture: Giedion and Linfert

In 1929 Benjamin sends a letter to the architectural historian and chief advocate of the modernist movement in architecture Sigfried Giedion. Previously, Giedion had sent Benjamin a complimentary copy of his freshly published *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (1928) in which he argues that nineteenth century utilitarian constructions such as the Pont Transbordeur in Marseille were unconsciously created manifestations of new architecture which no longer could be understood through its material and formal properties but rather as a dematerialised, dynamic field of 'floating relations and interpenetrations'.¹ These engineering structures are presented by Giedion as a 'prehistory' of a new architectural space which, according to him, would eventually manifest itself in Le Corbusier's designs from the 1920s. It was up to the architect's genius to plant the 'kernel' (*keimhaft*) of the new conception of space to be 'awakened' in buildings like the Cité Frugès in Pessac.

In his letter Benjamin acknowledges that he was 'electrified' after reading only a few passages of Giedion's work. Not merely did *Bauen in Frankreich* literally 'spark' an interest in the subject of architecture as it was put forward by Giedion; it was the book itself, by exerting 'the most immediate' impact, which had set Benjamin in an animated state he wanted to render operative: 'I deliberately write to you while I can still control the movement it

[the book] incites.'² The book appears to mirror the very same dynamic, relational properties of the new architecture allowing for the anthropological-materialist modes of experience Benjamin was interested in. Like dreams, deliria, or images, Giedion's illustrated book – and modernist architecture for that matter – embodied a 'radical knowledge' allowing a mode of retroactive historical thinking to become palpable which 'enlightened tradition through the present.'³

The realisation that a book like *Bauen in Frankreich* spelled out an innovative historical method by connecting the 'unconsciously' erected iron constructions with the 1920s architectural avant-garde and simultaneously acting as a shock-inducing agent capable of shaking up the dormant modern subject can be regarded as a methodological blueprint for Benjamin's later writings, especially *The Arcades Project*.⁴ Benjamin was straightforward about the credit that was due to Giedion as well as to Gotthold Meyer's work *Eisenbauten*: in 1929 he called them 'prolegomena to any future historical materialist history of architecture'.⁵ The illustrated book, through both its argument and its animating, bodily effect, now functioned – like the architecture it refers to – as an awakening machine to render active 'a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been'.⁶

Later, in the text fragments Benjamin assembles from 1935 onwards for *The Arcades Project*, Giedion

figures prominently in convolute N – ‘On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress’, the very section in which Benjamin outlines the objectives of his work, namely to establish modes of awakening as a historical method in order to dissolve “mythology” into the space of history’.⁷ Montage was predestined to help overcome the central problem of historical materialism: the idea of progress. Through the analysis of ‘the small individual moment’ one was to discover the ‘crystal of the total event’ and replace progress with actualisation.⁸ Benjamin cites Giedion twice; first, he presents the latter’s method for ‘writing’ architectural history as the model for his own undertaking:

just as Giedion teaches us to read off the basic features of today’s architecture in the buildings erected around 1850, we, in turn, would recognise today’s life, today’s forms, in the life and in the apparently secondary, lost forms of an epoch.⁹

Secondly, Benjamin regards the photographic images printed in *Bauen in Frankreich* taken from ‘within’ the ‘air-flooded’ iron construction such as the Eiffel Tower or the Pont Transbordeur not only as representative of the ‘basic aesthetic experience of today’s building’ hitherto reserved for workers and engineers but, what is more, as a model for a philosopher, ‘autonomous and free of vertigo’. [fig. 1]

Benjamin then introduces the infamous definition of the ‘image’ in order to substantiate the new historical method. Rejecting the metaphor of light as the medium for illuminating the present through the past – or vice versa – it is the image ‘wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill.’¹⁰ The ‘electric’ charge Benjamin received when first reading *Bauen in Frankreich* suggest that Giedion’s book operated like such an image, forming flash-like constellations of simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. Without trying to enter into the debate about what ‘dialectical images’

in fact are, it is safe to say that Benjamin presents an ‘image-based epistemology’, as Sigrig Weigel puts it.¹¹ Yet, Benjamin never dissociates the epistemic charge of the image from the question of language. He emphasises that the knowledge generated through the image has a locus which is language. The very first entry of convolute N makes clear that the image is always accompanied by a text, ‘the long roll of thunder that follows’.¹² Knowledge only becomes manifest when expressed in language. Benjamin pushes the idea of a coupling of image and language even further by arguing that it is ‘the image that is read’ that carries the ‘imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded’.¹³

If we assume that the radical knowledge Benjamin discovered in or through Giedion’s *Bauen in Frankreich* exemplified his epistemology – based on the link between image and language – we can ask how images of and texts on architecture are read. Could it be that the architectural image has a distinctive role in his theory of knowledge? Judging from a review Benjamin writes in 1933 of an essay entitled *Die Grundlagen der Architekturzeichnung* by art historian and fellow critic at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* Carl Linfert such an assumption appears plausible.¹⁴

Benjamin’s discovery in 1931 of illustrations of eighteenth century French architectural drawings in Linfert’s essay struck a chord with him. Again Benjamin is awestruck. In a letter he writes in the same year he tells Linfert about being thrilled by the subject – which, he admits, had been foreign to him. ‘Even before I started reading the text’, Benjamin writes, ‘I was confronted with the thinnest, most exciting air emanating from the illustrations.’¹⁵ Linfert’s writing on architectural drawings appears to have sparked a sense of congeniality that led to a vivid exchange of letters and at least one meeting. In his review entitled *Strenge Kunstwissenschaft* Benjamin expresses his enthusiasm about the

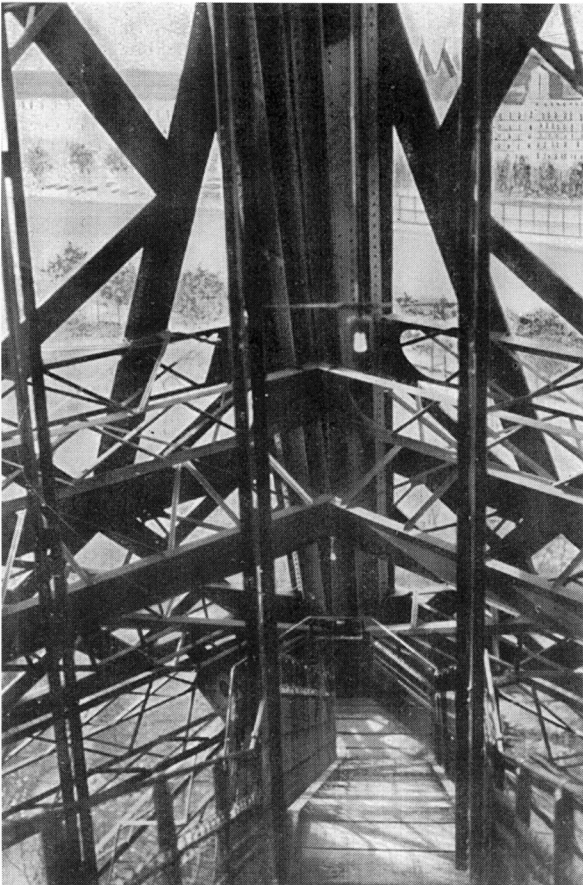


Abb. 2. EIFFELTUM (1889)
Pfeilerinneres

An Stelle eines massiven Turmes ein offenes Gerüst auf geringe Dimension kondensiert. In ununterbrochen wechselnden Verscheidungen dringt die Landschaft ein.

attention Linfert devotes to the 'marginal case' (*Grenzfall*) of the architectural drawing.¹⁶ The operative, non-reproducing character of the image and its immediate agency are stressed in the review:

As regards the images themselves, one cannot say that they *re-produce* architecture. They *produce* it in the first place, a production which less often benefits the reality of architectural planning than it does dreams. One sees, to take a few examples, Babel's heraldic, ostentatious portals, the fairy-tale castles which Delajoue has conjured into a shell, Meissonier's knickknack architecture, Boullée's conception of a library that looks like a train station, and Juvara's ideal views that look like glances into the warehouse of a building dealer: a completely new and untouched world of images, which Baudelaire would have ranked higher than all painting.¹⁷ [fig. 2]

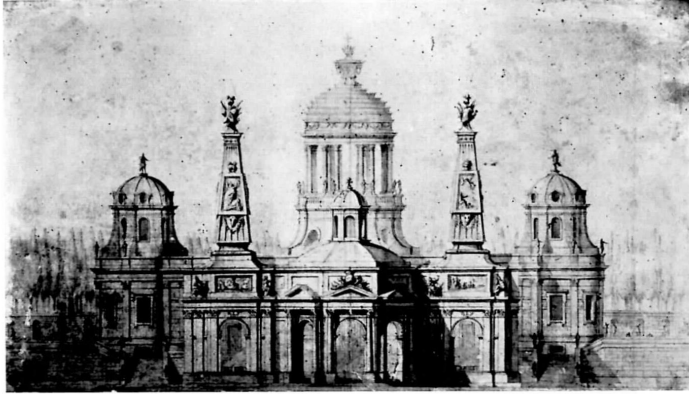
Architectural drawings, 'the peculiar imaginary world of architecture', are different from painterly representations of buildings and cities.¹⁸ The defining characteristic of the architectural drawing is that 'it does not take a pictorial detour' (*keinen Bildumweg zu kennen*).

In his *Grundlagen der Architekturzeichnung* Linfert argues that architectural drawings do not necessarily have to be regarded as preliminary acts that precede the realisation of architecture. A drawing is not 'a mere calculated plan or proposal' but it contains 'idiosyncrasies of the graphic comprehension of architecture in general and hence allusions to the incalculable unity of the planned space, which the finished building conceals once again'.¹⁹ Linfert is not interested in drawings that prepare the finished architectural object but rather in often fantastic and dream-like ideal designs of the pre-revolutionary period by Delajoue, Delafosse, Ledoux, and Piranesi. These *Idealentwürfe* are liberated from the strict conception of painterly images, namely from their dependence on a unified

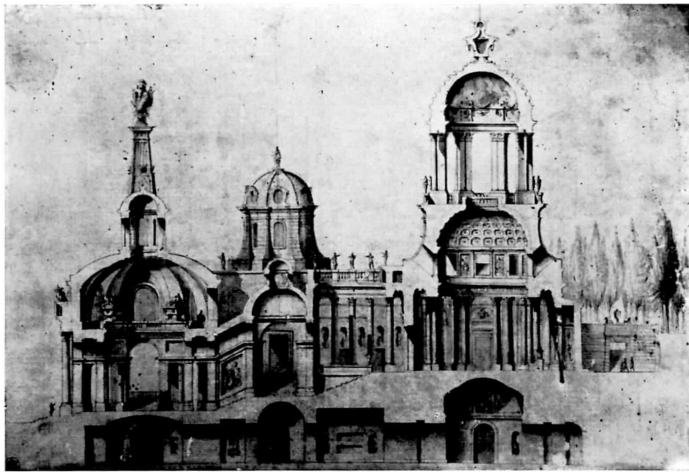
and homogeneous 'painterly-pictorial sight' (*malerisch-bildmässigen Anblick*) which, according to Linfert, is based on the strict laws of linear perspective.²⁰ Architectural drawings perform 'a visual circling around the building (*visuelles Kreisen um das Bauwerk*) which is only changing in perspective and as a representational image, not architecturally'.²¹ Drawing architecture, the design process itself, is also a visual process of making images, but in contrast to painterly images, it is indifferent to the viewer and his/her defined point of view in front of the pictorial space. Architectural apperception (*Architekturanschauung*), Linfert claims, escapes the analysing, rational gaze, just like architectural drawings escape the representational regime. Instead, these drawings are always 'pre-construed' (*vorgedeutet*) or 'pre-drawn' (*vorgezeichnet*). They do not mirror as *Abbilder* (objective pictures) an established image of the real but are rather constructive and projective, they anticipate the object to be built.

The gain of pictorial quality hence necessarily leads to loss in architectural quality. While architecture and the painterly images have in common the capacity to give an 'overview' of the 'whole', architectural images have the unique capacity to 'test' (*überprüfen*) this whole in the form of a peculiar 'image-entity' (*Vorstellungsgebilde*). Architectural space is hence comprehensible as a whole, but for that it requires an eye that does not look but a productive and embodied vision that 'apprehends' structures (*Strukturen durchspüren*), a 'building eye' (*bauenden Auge*) rather than a 'picture-forming eye' (*bildendes Auge*).²² For Linfert architectural drawings are hybrid entities, he himself uses the term hermaphrodite (*Zwitter*), they are interstices and borderline cases that negotiate two incongruous conceptions of space: pictorial space on the one hand and architectural space on the other.²³ It is important to note that Linfert does not conceive this hybrid quality of architectural drawings as a static

TAFEL 24



a) Juvara, Kirchenentwurf. Berlin, Kunstbibliothek



b) Juvara, Kirchenentwurf. Berlin, Kunstbibliothek



c) Juvara (?), Prospekt. Berlin, Kunstbibliothek

balance of the two tendencies; rather he sees the images as part of a dynamic design process, in which media of representation constantly intervene and work against – and sometimes even jeopardise – what he calls ‘the purely architectural’.

Both Giedion’s and Linfert’s works on architecture produce in Benjamin the same excitement, a flash-like moment of realisation he would later theorise in *The Arcades Project*. While Giedion demonstrates how the new method of historical knowledge becomes actualised or ‘awakened’ in the present, it is Linfert who, through his discussion of architectural drawings, outlines a coherent alternative definition of the image. Benjamin’s image-based epistemology rests on the very premises Linfert identifies in the eighteenth century drawings: images exist beyond their representational function – which is the basis for constituting both the delirium of an autonomous, acting subject and the existence of concrete, innate yet comprehensible objects at the disposal of the subject. The architectural image becomes the paradigm for redefining what an image is because it not only defies the clear separation between visual, mental and material image but, what is more, it is the manifestation of a de-subjectivising vision and a bodily perception. Existing independently of the subject, the architectural image gains its own operative agency within the process of conveying and constructing what remains the inexplicable ‘architectural’. We find a similar enigmatic core in Benjamin’s ‘dialectical image’, the purpose of which, beyond providing retroactive instances of historical awakening, is to produce constellations between modern technology and the archaic pre-linguistic symbols.

G as dispositif

Although Benjamin’s astonished reactions to the works of Giedion and Linfert might suggest otherwise, his encounter with architectural images was not unpremeditated. During the first part of the 1920s, Benjamin belonged the extended circle of

artists, architecture writers and intellectuals who to a degree were associated with the short-lived journal *G – Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*.²⁴ The documented evidence of his involvement is the translation of an article by Tristan Tzara entitled ‘*Die Photographie von der Kehrseite*’ (Photography from the Verso) which Benjamin contributes to the third issue of *G* appearing in June of 1924. However, the precise degree of his involvement remains unclear. Benjamin himself belittles his involvement in a letter he writes to Gershom Scholem in September of the same year: ‘Currently I am not able to send you an issue of the new journal *G*, for whose first [*sic*] issue, in an act of weakness rather than courtesy vis-à-vis the publisher (Hans Richter), I have translated with reverent dash a *blague* of Tristan Tzara.’²⁵ Benjamin had probably met Richter in 1918–1919 when both lived in the Zurich. And even after the *G* episode they appeared to have stayed in contact. Supposedly, Richter was the first to whom Benjamin sent a draft of ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility’.²⁶

Yet, upon closer inspection, his involvement in *G* appears to be much more than a mere ‘act of weakness’. The journal’s objective, namely to give visibility to new the gamut of objects and practices that modern technologies had introduced yet still remained unaccounted for by the dominant systems of representation and signification in place, seem rather congruent with Benjamin’s own preoccupations. What makes it difficult to classify *G* is the fact that it lacked a clear ideological affiliation. The *G*-group, as it was later called, was a loose association of people coming from heterogeneous, sometimes divergent backgrounds: Hans Richter himself, the driving force behind the project, was a former Dadaist who ventured into his pioneering works of abstract film; Raoul Hausmann was a technophile Dadaist; Theo van Doesburg one of the protagonists from *De Stijl*, El Lissitzky a Soviet Constructivist; Werner Graeff a recent Bauhaus graduate, Mies van der Rohe an architect mostly

known for his rather conventional residential architecture for a wealthy Berlin clientele. Their common denominator was not the invocation of a shared dogma or narrative but the intuition of the need for an alternative aesthetics to accommodate collective experience and an affirmative reception of technology.

As heterogeneous as the *G* affiliates was the range of subjects treated in the journal: iron and glass constructions, car design, fashion, city planning, painting, photography, and cinema all belonged to 'the means of our time' that Mies van der Rohe speaks of in his article in the first issue.²⁷ *G* comprehended itself as also being such a 'means', a medium that consciously refuses to simply serve as a neutral vehicle of representation and that instead sets out to reshape the boundaries of what is visible, thinkable, buildable. It is this epistemic dimension that distinguishes *G* from many other contemporary avant-garde journals which often served as printed outlet for propagating the ideology of a particular group or current. As Richter put it: *G* was created for those 'already equipped with all the modern apparatuses of instinct, reception and transmission, which assure [their] connection with life'.²⁸ The journal was one of those apparatuses, just like the other media treated in the pages of *G*, that could achieve this reconnection to a life made of flux, intensities and interconnections and that could open up to new forms of visibility and signification.²⁹

This type is alive

One of the central preoccupations of the *G* project was the creation of new life by means of technology. 'He who makes the connections, who deepens and organises the means of *Gestaltung* creates new life and abundance', Richter and Graeff write in conclusion to their programmatic statement in the first issue of *G*. Architecture, film, fashion, urbanism, industrial buildings, car design – and the journal itself for that matter – were manifestations of this 'new life' created by artists, architects

and designers capable of making the connections and of organising the media.³⁰ But Richter even extended this idea of animism further to the journal itself. In the editorial statement of *G* number four, two years after the publication of the famous third issue, he wants to reassure his readership that the spirit that had originally animated the *G* project was still present. 'THIS TYPE IS ALIVE!' (*DIESER TYP LEBT!*) Richter proclaims in capital letters.³¹ The expression '*Typ*' is a deliberately ambivalent choice of words referring simultaneously to the journal, the typographic sign, and, in a colloquial sense, to a human being with a particular character. On a visual level, Richter intersperses his text with two large, identical letters 'G'. [fig. 3] The living 'type', this intuitive yet ultimately inscrutable material presence resembles an animate totem rather than a letter taken from the alphabet, the smallest unit of a potentially meaningful linguistic sign. This 'type', Richter argues, combines in itself the objective of the entire *G* movement:

It is our task to make us comprehensible to it [the 'type', i.e. *G*] as well as to comprehend it – then we will all see more clearly and will learn to work more methodically. The intuition and knowledge of a collective [*gemeinschaftliche*] task and a shared elementary experience [*gemeinsame Grunderlebnis*] will produce a spiritual connection [...].³²

The letter 'G' is hence not merely a signifier used by the subject to communicate a message. For Richter, the 'type' is a living entity that demands from the subject that he make himself understood. This 'living type' already encapsulates collective knowledge and meaning and it is the vocation of *G* to establish new connections not through but with the 'type's' material and animate presence.

To better understand this scepticism vis-à-vis the idea of language, both linguistic and visual, it is helpful to call Walter Benjamin's language philosophical thinking to mind. Around the time



Zweifellos haben wir das Interesse unserer Freunde ebenso auf eine lange Probe gestellt, als auch den Widersachern genügend Zeit gegeben, uns für beerdigt zu halten.

Die Dinge, die uns wichtig waren, haben inzwischen nichts von ihrer Wichtigkeit verloren. Es ist heute so dringend nötig, sich um sie zu bemühen, wie vor anderthalb Jahren, als wir durch die Umstände gezwungen waren, das Erscheinen von „G“ vorerst einzustellen. Wenn aber auch inzwischen keine weiteren Nummern erschienen sind, so hat die Zeitschrift als solche nicht geschlafen. Wir haben an ihrem Plan weiter gearbeitet, oder besser: um ihn gekämpft.

„G“ erscheint wieder, weil wir es brauchen. Wir brauchen eine Kampfzeitschrift, in der wir um die Gestalt und Eindeutigkeit dessen kämpfen, was wir in unserer lebenden Generation geschaffen haben, schaffen und zu schaffen imstande sind. Wie breit oder wie eng die Basis der Zeitschrift sein wird, hängt davon ab, auf einer wie breiten oder wie engen Front, in wieviel oder wie wenig Gebieten sich heute ein neuer Typ geistig durchsetzt.

DIESER TYP LEBT!

Es ist unsere Aufgabe — ebenso uns ihm verständlich zu machen, wie ihn zu begreifen — so werden wir alle klarer sehen und planmäßiger arbeiten lernen. Aus dem Ahnen und Wissen um eine gemeinschaftliche Aufgabe und ein gemeinsames Grunderlebnis wird die geistige Berührung entstehen, die für jeden Einzelnen von uns ebensoviel bedeutet wie für die Gestalt der Sache selbst. In einer Atmosphäre gleichen Sinnes zu leben ist um so unentbehrlicher, je mehr uns von dem trennt, was uns umgibt.



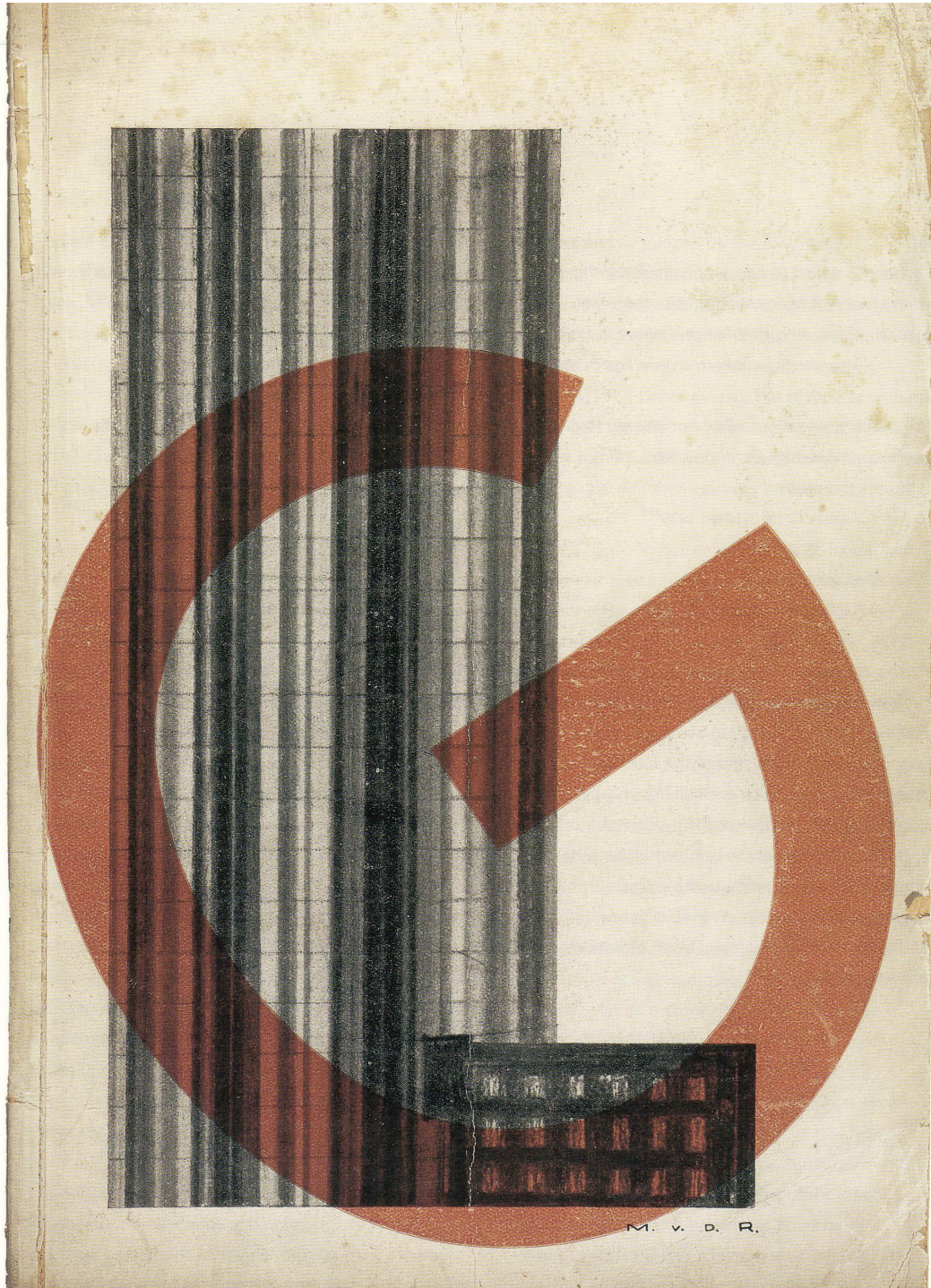


Fig. 4: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, cover, *G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*, no. 3. (1924).

Benjamin makes the acquaintance of the Dadaist Richter and during the period of his affiliation with *G* he had begun to reflect on the nature and function of the sign and language. These reflections can very well serve as prolegomena for his later writings of the 1930s. In 'Über die Malerei oder Zeichen und Mal' (1917) Benjamin reflects about painting and makes a distinction between sign and mark: while the former is 'printed' onto a support, which for the most part is inanimate like 'buildings, trees', the latter 'emerges' on what is alive (e.g. a scar or a birthmark).³³ Contrary to the imposed and concluding sign the mark is associated with the emancipatory potential of life in the sense that it is the embodied manifestation of actualising events. The mark cannot be dissociated from the living body *and* can be understood, as Gilles Deleuze put it with reference to the wound, as a 'pure virtuality on the plane of immanence that leads us into a life'.³⁴ *G*, no matter whether the single alphabetic letter, the name of journal, or the emblem of an artistic project, is a medium, not in the sense of a vehicle that contains and conveys pre-inscribed meaning but in the sense of a mark that connects with life. As such, the mark disconnects from linear, progressive history and instead, as a 'medium', it can produce a 'temporal magic' capable of overcoming the division between past and present – an idea similar to Benjamin's later concept of the image that acts as an agent of historical knowledge by forming constellations between the what-has-been and the now. In his habilitation work on the German *Trauerspiel* (begun in 1923–24) Benjamin explores language elements which, once 'emancipated' from meaning-generating structures, can be 'exploited allegorically' and hence become invested with a different meaning. Tellingly, Benjamin argues here that it was the 'fragmentative, dissociative principle of the allegorical approach' that caused the capitalisation of the first letter in nouns in German. The capitalisation is for Benjamin evidence of a language that no longer serves as 'mere communication' but that itself becomes a 'new-born object'.³⁵ The 'type'

is alive, it turns into this new object awakened to life which at the same time forms a constellation with the original 'script'.

At length, Benjamin refers to the Romantic physicist and philosopher Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776–1810) who had tried to 're-discover, or else to find the primeval or natural script (*Ur- oder Naturschrift*) by means of electricity'.³⁶ In other words, it is modern technology that can render visible and give access to an *ur*-state of nature that lies submerged in human language – an idea which seems completely congruent with the programmatic basis of *G*. In Ritter's writings Benjamin finds confirmation of his belief that the world is 'literally created by the word', and that 'the plastic arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, etc. belong pre-eminently among such script, and developments [*Nachschrift*] and derivations [*Abschrift*] of it'.³⁷ And even the image itself is first and foremost a '*Schriftbild*' or 'scripture-image'.³⁸ In its allegorical use the image is not a mirror of the real but 'a signature, only the monogram of essence, not the essence itself in a mask'.³⁹

The idea that architecture and images can be both considered as 'scripts', ideograms, or marks is maybe most plausibly demonstrated in the famous cover drawing Mies produces for *G*'s third issue. [fig. 4] The red letter 'G' is pasted onto the schematic, flat elevation drawing of a dark skyscraper dwarfing the black silhouette of an additional structure which the viewer can barely discern as a traditional building. The drawing is highly reminiscent of an elevation study Mies produced for the Glass Skyscraper project (1922). Yet what does Mies's cover suggest with the tilted, semi-transparent, striking red letter that takes the scale of the drawn skyscraper if not the idea of architecture as script or mark? The letter depicts the linguistic sign of the title of the journal and simultaneously functions as a mark emerging from both the corpus of the white page and the depicted architectural bodies.

All habitual codes of signification seem reversed: the supposedly transparent glass high-rise, devoid of all volume and three-dimensionality, appears as a dark, flat and opaque rectangular grid whose monochrome rhythm resembles one of Richter's abstract film sequences more than a traditional architectural drawing. By contrast, the letter 'G' is transparent and takes the scale of a building. Because it is tilted the 'G' oscillates between its signifying function and its acting as animated form or image in a montage field.

'Give meaning back to the words. [...] We want to give meaning again to things', Mies notes in response to reading texts by the philosopher of religion Romano Guardini.⁴⁰ This desire to renew the capacity of language to connect with life had certainly been with Mies at least since the early 1920s given the fact that he had been associated with some of the members of Berlin Dada whose principle preoccupation was the focus on language's incapacity to signify. Moreover, having read Henri Bergson, Mies certainly was aware of the central theme of the former's thinking: the contradiction between the continuous flow of life and the fixation of form. In his copy of *Creative Evolution*, just one paragraph before Mies's only annotation, Bergson stresses the inherent contradiction between words and the living, creative spirit:

The word turns against the idea. The letter kills the spirit. And our most ardent enthusiasm, as soon as it is externalised into action, is so naturally congealed onto the cold calculation of interest or vanity, the one takes so easily the shape of the other, that we might confuse them together [...] if we did not know that the dead retain for a time the features of the living.⁴¹

G, the letter, the journal and the entire project of *Gestaltung*, is about ending this dichotomy between word and idea and regaining the ancient ability to 'name' living phenomena. It opens up to the dimension of pre-linguistic collective *physis* and the

'shared elementary experience' that Richter refers to. The experiments with sequential scroll drawings and eventually with abstract films Richter and the Swedish artist Viking Eggeling had been involved in since the late 1910s intend to re-discover a 'universal language' made up of contrasting elementary elements. These elements (Richter, because he feared 'formalism', avoided calling the lines and squares forms) were neither meant as symbolic nor mimetic references to the real, nor were they meant as abstractions. Their 'universal language' did not function as the vehicle for textual, verbal, or visual information. Rather, what films like Richter's *Rhythmus 21* and Eggeling's *Diagonal Symphonie* – and the journal *G* for that matter – 'showed' were emblematic manifestations of a 'whole' that can only be grasped as a process in duration. The films do not 'show' anything except for a play of light relationships in time.⁴²

The spectator does not see symbols or representations of objects but indices of his or her experience of the 'process as such', as Richter emphasises. And because this process happens devoid of 'all material comparisons and memories' and is liberated from the limitations of 'the world of words' it becomes 'elementary-magical'.⁴³

Richter and Eggeling's 'universal language' shows certain parallels with Benjamin's foray into the philosophy of language. In his essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' (1916) Benjamin expands the concept of language to 'every expression of human mental life'. No longer limited to a linguistic dimension, one can discern for instance a language of technology, of music, of sculpture, and of justice.⁴⁴ In addition, Benjamin rejects the idea of language as simply an instrumental vehicle for the transmission of textual or verbal information. He argues that language 'is by no means the expression of everything that we could – theoretically – express *through* it, but is the immediate expression of everything which

communicates *itself* in it [*der unmittelbare Ausdruck dessen, was sich in ihr mitteilt*].⁴⁵ What Benjamin calls 'mental being' (*geistige Wesen*) hence resides *in* language. Rather than serving as a vehicle for the transport of information or meaning, language in fact communicates 'the mental being corresponding to it.'⁴⁶ The subject is no longer in the role of the active agent who 'names' the passive, inanimate world. Instead, what precedes the subject's utterance is the 'call' (*Anruf*) coming from thing or object.

Mies's cover design for *G* number three, and for that matter, his architectural language can be understood in a similar way. Architectural object and linguistic sign seem ambivalent and abstracted in such a way that all references to reality, whether past or future, and all efforts at symbolic attribution seem futile. The visual interpenetration of the letter *G* and the high-rise render the former corporeal and architectonic while the latter takes on the immediate and archaic character of a rune or hieroglyph. By superimposing the sign/mark with a building, Mies's cover design for *G* transposes the fundamental idea of *G* into the realm of architecture. He proposes an architectural image that is at once '*Schriftbild*' (script-image) and '*Bildraum*' (image-space), where meaning 'flashes up' in moments of recognisability.

Ghostly traces and masks

Reading the fundamental premises of the *G* project through the lens of Benjamin's reflections on language, sign and the image allows us to approach Mies's architectural images, his drawings and montages, in ways different from conventional architectural images. The pithy definition of an architecture as an animate, moving entity ('Alive. Changing. New.')⁴⁷ that he proposes in *G* 1923 appears to be in line with conceptual orientation of the journal. His collaborators on the first issue, Richter, Theo van Doesburg, Raoul Hausmann and El Lissitzky, all in one way or another offer 'cinematic' propositions for new elementary practices,

sustaining their arguments with illustrations showing filmstrips, image series, abstract sequential compositions and montaged storyboards. It is all the more surprising to discover Mies's *Bürohaus* charcoal drawing accompanying his article. [fig. 5] The image captures the imposing cube-like structure at an angle stressing the parallel horizontal slabs of the cantilevered floors as vanishing lines. Mies presents the viewer with an emphatic perspective drawing of a more or less recognisable urban scene taken from the point of view of a pedestrian. At first sight, Mies's 'still' image appears in stark contrast to the abstract, animated illustration of his peers seemingly reinforcing the very anachronistic visual regime *G* set out to overcome. And it is surprising that Mies continues to draw in perspective while his colleagues at *G* like Richter, Lissitzky, van Doesburg and Hausmann all experimented with ways to overcome this visual regime.

Yet, upon closer inspection Mies's images turn out to be riddled with ambiguities. Although the *Bürohaus* seems to constitute the image space's perspectival order, it at the same time appears to be detached from it, floating inside the Berlin streetscape. The building presents itself as a rational, utilitarian structure, it concurrently strikes the viewer with its ghostly apparition. The scene exhibits a strong contrast between new and old, between the radiant light grey and detailed office building and the coarse black silhouettes of traditional Berlin *Gründerzeit* buildings. Whether we are witnessing a daytime or night-time scene is not clear. One can discern one light source concealed from view behind the old Berlin façades on the left. From here the large front side facing the viewer is bathed in light, creating a stark contrast between the radiant office building and the cityscape which seems to sink into indistinct darkness. What is peculiar is that the street side also fades into darkness suggesting that the surfaces of the flat horizontal slabs are not light-absorbing but light-reflecting.

In addition, the ambiguous status of the *Bürohaus* becomes evident once we compare the drawing of the luminous white building from the charcoal drawing with a photograph of the model Mies exhibited at the *Internationale Architekturausstellung* at Weimar in 1923. While the drawing shows an open structure whose ribbon windows allow for a high degree of transparency, the photographed model appears like a solid and dark block whose glossy surface throws back the flash of the camera.

Mies proposes a similar play of ambiguous difference with the four large-scale photomontages he produces for the Friedrichstraße skyscraper project. Again the images are scenes taken from the point of view of a pedestrian creating an emphatic perspective with a shining diaphanous edifice inserted into the bustling urban historical fabric. And, in order to further enhance the play of contrasts and ambiguities, Mies manipulates the photographic basis by darkening the detailed façades.

It is peculiar that Mies chooses as basis for his montage a perspectival photographic view of the animated Friedrichstraße yet the pedestrians discernible in the street lack recognisable features. They appear like fleeting shadows: semi-translucent, ghost-like apparitions that supernaturally blend into their environment. [fig. 6] The blurred figures are ethereal traces of human presence rather than the established visual evidence that would assist the viewer in identifying and classifying the urban scene. One is reminded of photographs from the nineteenth century when long exposure times often blurred animated human bodies, at times rendering them invisible.

Benjamin identifies decreased exposure time as the technical aspect that caused a fundamental caesura in the history of photography. In his 'Little History of Photography' he distinguishes between two different temporalities: an earlier period of the *Bild*, or 'original picture', and a later period of

the clearly recognisable and reproducible *Abbild* (copy).⁴⁸ In the first decades of photography light still had to 'struggle out of darkness'. The magic aura of these early images was banished when optical and photochemical advancements allowed events to be recorded 'as faithfully as any mirror'.⁴⁹ At the same time the aura was 'simulated' through the practice of retouching, toning or artificially highlighting the photographic image.

One could very well accuse Mies of trying to simulate this lost aura. Yet while gum prints, penumbral tones and artificial highlights were habitually used to cover up, as Benjamin argues, 'the impotence of [a] generation in the face of technical progress', Mies's manipulated photomontages produce the opposite effect: his intention seems precisely to render technology visible again (in the form of the glass high-rise) and to evoke the potential for a renewed congruency between modern subject and technology, the same congruency which, Benjamin argues, had existed during the early period of photography but has been irretrievably lost.⁵⁰

But if the aura has vanished once and for all from the medium photography, and if Mies's intention was not to resurrect a false aura, what to make of the ghostly figures in Mies's photomontages? What I would like to argue is that Mies's images contain the very critical impulse Benjamin recognises in the deserted Paris street views taken by Eugène Atget at the turn of the century. Atget's 'unremarkable, forgotten, cast adrift' urban spaces, cleared of human countenance and devoid of 'great sights and so-called landmarks', unsettle the viewer and prepare the ground for a 'salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings'.⁵¹ By banishing all signs of human presence from his images (which for Benjamin were the last vestiges of an aura present in early portrait photographs) Atget allows for an unprecedented encounter with an urban world of everyday objects.

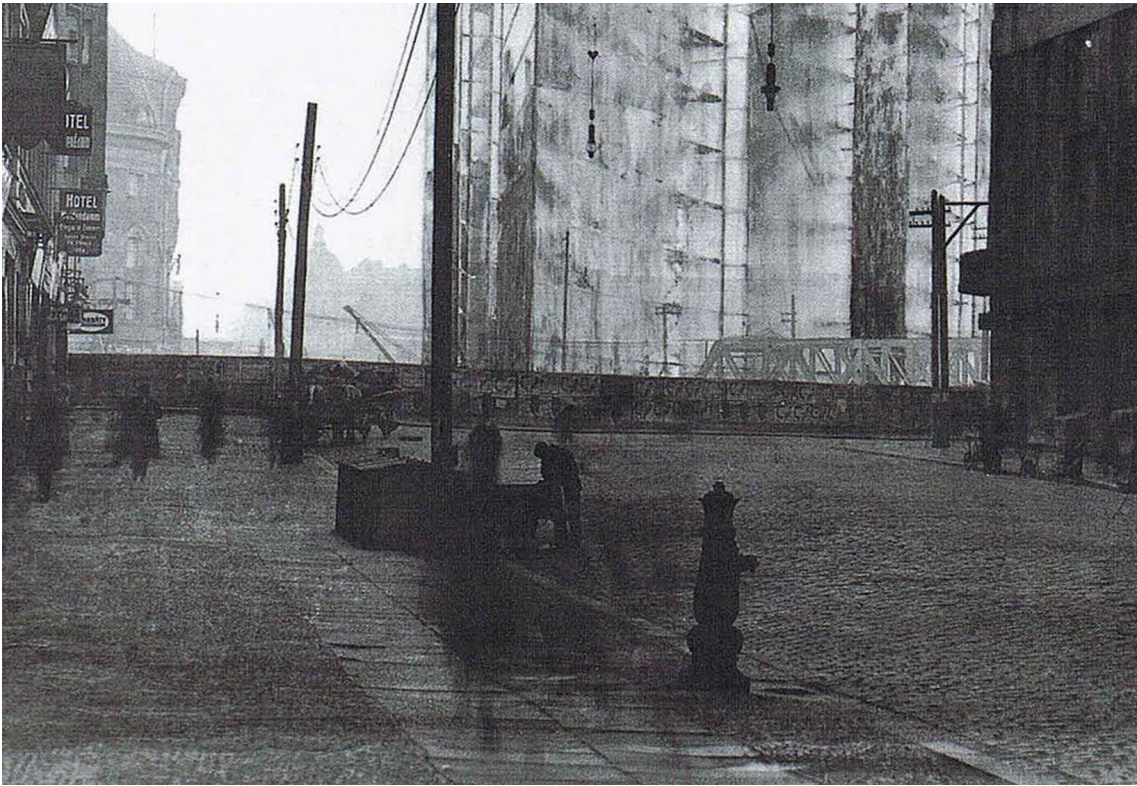


Fig. 6: Detail from Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 'Wabe'. Competition 'Hochhaus am Bahnhof Friedrichstraße', 1922. Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung, Berlin.

The political significance of this hitherto overlooked object world becoming visible in mechanically reproduced images is that it demands from the viewer an entirely new perception. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' Benjamin argues that Atget's images, rather than demanding a contemplative gaze, 'unsettle the viewer; he feels challenged to find a particular way to approach them'.⁵² But because mechanically produced images still have a shocking effect on the viewer, a 'free play to the politically educated eye' is not yet possible.⁵³ The viewer still needs assistance, which according to Benjamin, is provided by the captions:

Picture magazines begin to put up signposts for him – whether these are right or wrong is irrelevant. For the first time, captions become obligatory. And it is clear that they have a character altogether different from the titles of paintings. The directives given by captions to those looking at images in illustrated magazines soon even become more precise and commanding in films, where the way each single image is understood appears prescribed by the sequence of all the preceding images.⁵⁴

Could it be that Mies's new architecture, just like mechanically reproduced images, requires 'captions', i.e. comprehensible texts, objects and spaces? At least Hans Richter, with whom Mies published the first three issues of *G* in 1923 and 1924, was keenly aware of the possible misreading of architectural representations. In 1925 Richter publishes an article entitled '*Der neue Baumeister*' (The New Master-Builder) in which he demonstrates his intimate familiarity with Mies's understanding of architecture. In the caption for the famous Brick Country House plan Richter warns the reader to abstain from reading the plan in a conventional way as a technical drawing: 'This plan is legible through the senses, it is not a mathematical abstraction'.⁵⁵

In fact, Mies might have well been aware of Benjamin's ideas since its central tenets are present in the pages of *G*, especially via Benjamin's own contribution, the aforementioned translation of '*Die Photographie von der Kehrseite*' by Tristan Tzara in which the Dadaist develops the idea that the mechanically reproduced image reveals a hitherto overlooked object world.⁵⁶ In fact, because architecture is always both image and built object this new condition poses a double challenge to Mies: not only can the renderings of the Friedrichstraße high-rise, the office building or the Adam department store, pasted inside photographic urban views, be considered as avatars of the new technological condition, but also Mies's architecture becomes in turn the subject of the camera's gaze. At the same time, his architecture itself functions like a mechanically reproduced image, in the sense that it changes the status of the object and requires the viewer/user to alter the way he or she perceives the object.

Still, the insertion of blurred human silhouettes remains peculiar. One is reminded of works by the Futurist photographer and filmmaker Anton Giulio Bragaglia who during the 1910s experimented with long exposure photographs of human bodies in motion. [fig. 7] His work was a response to both still photography and film: the former merely gave 'the reproduction of the immobile and static truth', whereas the latter failed to represent, he argued, 'the shape of movement'.⁵⁷ Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographic motion studies presented no solution either because they 'shattered the action' by rationalising movement as successive instances in space. 'We are not interested in the precise reconstruction of movement', Bragaglia writes, 'which has already been broken up and analysed. We are interested in the area of movement which produces sensation, the memory which still palpitates in our awareness'.⁵⁸



Fig. 7: Anton Giulio Bragaglia, Change of Position, 1911. Gelatin silver print. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Bragaglia instead proposed what he called *fotodinamismo*: the continuous inscription of the moving body's light emanations on the photosensitive surface. What we see, the trajectory of time, exposes what lies between two shots, the space of the interval rendered invisible by the cinematographic apparatus. Bragaglia captures 'pure movement', informal and immaterial experiences that allowed access to a transcendental 'interior essence of things'.⁵⁹ He thereby proposes an alternative to the positivist view of reality based on the existence of solid forms, quantifiable data, and fixed images. With *fotodinamismo* Bragaglia responds to Bergson's famous criticism of the cinematographic character of science and proposes an alternative conception of cinema. His blurred images evoke a type of knowledge that does not reduce the body in movement to a series of instant views but registers the traces of the 'fluid continuity of the real'.⁶⁰

Interestingly, it is Benjamin who in 1928 writes an article on the occasion of Bragaglia's visit to Berlin in which he stresses the latter's reluctance to slice up reality and quantify time. Benjamin quotes Bragaglia's own critique of Erwin Piscator's use of film on stage, which he regards as a 'one-way-street, but a beautiful one'. He sees the difference between Piscator's and his own work in the relationship between text and filmic image: 'he disintegrates his texts with technical means [...; he] transects them, while I try to construct a transparent superstructure above the unblemished text'.⁶¹ In Bragaglia's Futurist theatre it is not the projection of film but the use of moving rubber masks that brings the stage alive. The mask allows the actor to remain 'isolated from his empirical I' and to become elevated into a 'higher space of effect' (*höhere Wirkungsraum*).⁶² The trajectory of light inscribed by Bragaglia's moving bodies on the photosensitive surface functions like the masks in his later theatre productions: in both cases the body seen by the spectator is merely, as Bragaglia puts it, 'the instrument of the

invisible body',⁶³ which itself remains protected from the dissecting empirical gaze.⁶⁴

Mies's blurred figures – just like his ethereal skyscraper image – function like Bragaglia's masks. The human body is present yet remains 'unblemished' by the empirical eye. It is visible yet unavailable to the analytical gaze. Therefore, to call Mies's images photomontages, an expression which denotes the avant-garde practice of assembling fragments of cut-up texts and images, might be misleading. His intervention in the imaging process leaves the picture intact and instead superimposes onto it an oneiric veil. The blurred figures are hence not simulations of a lost aura, but, like Bragaglia's rubber masks, provide a threshold into an alternative form of evidence that has existed all along. Their trajectories are not factual but potential. They do not capture but 'subtend' movement.⁶⁵

Shocking images

The same applies for Mies's architectural images. They are not utopian projections of future buildings but harbingers of a new architecture to come. In the late 1920s Mies was still convinced that 'we can only talk of a new building art when new life forms have been formed'.⁶⁶ Architecture could anticipate and prepare yet never itself construct these new life forms. What architecture should however aspire to is to address, as Mies writes in 1928 with regard to exhibition design and during the planning phase of the Barcelona Pavilion, 'the intensification of life' in order to prompt 'a revolution of thought'.⁶⁷ After all, the design process of the Pavilion appeared to have been guided by shock-inducing encounters with his own drawing similar to the epistemic shocks Benjamin refers to: 'One evening as I was working late on the building I made a sketch of a freestanding wall, and I got a shock. I knew that it was a new principle'.⁶⁸ Surely Mies's astonishment was not solely caused by his own invention of a new architectural element: the freestanding wall had

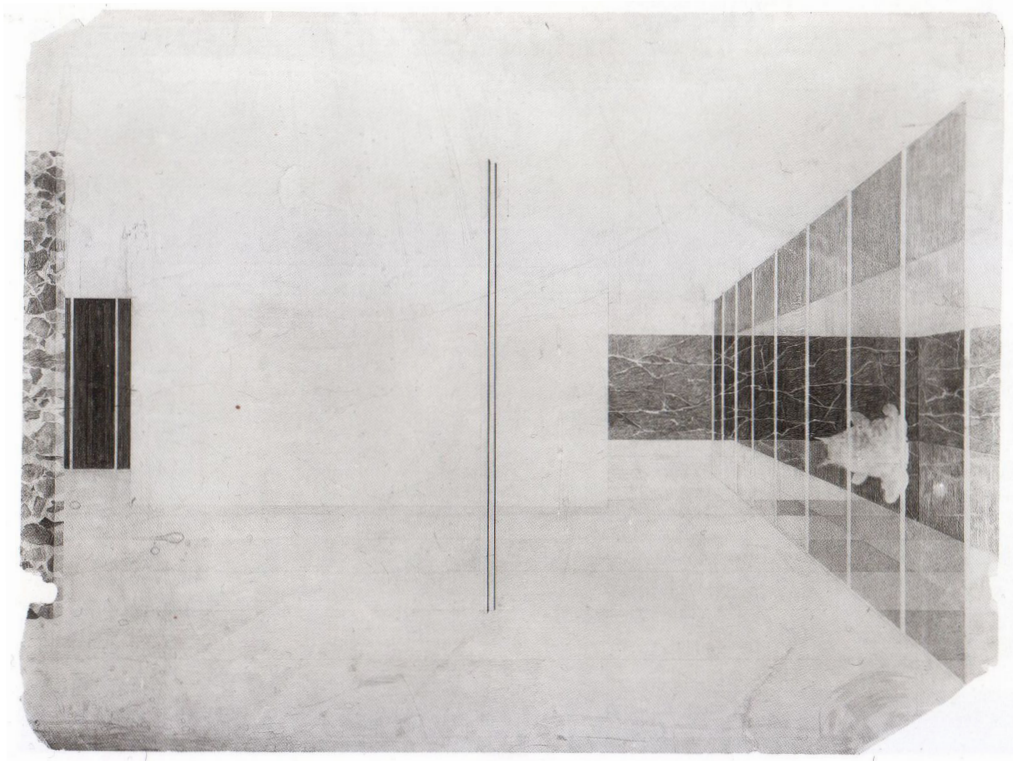


Fig. 8: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, German Pavilion, International Exposition, Barcelona. Interior perspective. 1928–1929. Collection Mies van der Rohe Archive, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

already figured in his drawings since the 1924 Brick Country House. Rather one might argue that his astonishment was triggered by the realisation that the image he drew had come alive by voiding all representational, geometric or diagrammatic expectations, by refusing to take the pictorial detour.

Mies's famous interior perspective of the Barcelona Pavilion (1928–29) can be regarded as an exemplary meditation on the architectural image's agency. [fig. 8] In contrast to the traditional understanding of architectural perspectives which anticipate or project a precise vision of an architectural reality to be built, Mies's perspective renders this reality visible yet at the same time impossible. Certainly, Mies alludes to an emphatic perspectival space by producing pronounced vanishing lines along the sequence of aligned glass windows that converge in a single vanishing point. Yet upon closer inspection, the drawing turns out to be ambiguous. There exists not a single but multiple viewing positions rendering impossible what perspective set out to construct by geometric means: a stable and coherent subjectivity and, concomitantly, a linear, homogenous space. This representational instability is further heightened by the contrast between figurative and abstract elements within the scene, between the sumptuous venation of the marble partitions and the sober whiteness of partition wall, floor and ceiling. What adds to the ambiguity of the scene is the absurd presentation of the centrally placed elements of the picture: the cruciform, chrome-clad column and onyx wall. While the former is depicted as two thin parallel lines free of all corporeality and in complete indifference to the pictorial scene, the latter forfeits its colourful opulence and appears as a rectangular white void. At first sight, a viewer of the drawing might perceive it as a radiating white light wall that in plan stands perpendicular to the onyx partition.

If perspective claims to be an accurate, true-to-life representation or anticipation of the real, as

Erwin Panofsky famously argued, in the case of Mies's drawing the viewer is confronted with an image that alludes to yet withholds a stable position for the subject and that alters the appearance of the objective world at will.⁶⁹ As we have already seen with the example of the various appearances of the *Bürohaus*, Mies presents an objective world that moves, alters its appearance, awakens to life. The images, including the different visual regimes that sustain their presence, do not reproduce a reality, they rather function like masks that protect the life-world against the arresting gaze of the modern subject. We are hence confronted with a montage of contradicting architectural representations that cannot be taken at face value. The purpose of this montage is not so much the transformation of a static subject and homogenous space into an ambulant subject wandering through a cinematic space. The lesson of cinema Mies might have learned through his collaboration with Eggeling and Richter during the early 1920s is that the cinematographic image cannot be read, analysed or explained through the terms established by the visual regime of the still image – even in the form of a notation. Just as Richter had realised that film is simply a 'play of light relations' and that the abstract squares in his *Rhythm* films were not objective or symbolic forms but 'auxiliary means' (*Hilfsmittel*) that instead of reproducing the real produce new life, Mies arrived at the 'shocking' realisation that in order to remain operative – or 'intellectually alive' (*geistig beweglich*) as Richter put it in the same article – architectural drawings must display their resemblance with pictorial modes of representation as masks.⁷⁰ By not simply evoking the presence of what is absent (as in the case of any representation of reality) the drawing performs the fundamental mimetic gesture. As Benjamin writes in the draft notes to the second version of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', in the most ancient forms of imitation like dance and language, the mime had only his body to work with: 'the mime presents his subject

as a semblance [*Der Nachmachende macht seine Sache scheinbar*]. One could also say, he plays his subject.⁷¹ The shock Mies felt when drawing the freestanding wall might have to do with the sudden awareness of being confronted with an architectural image that takes no pictorial detour in the sense of representing an architectural space through the imposition of a codified visual script via the medium of drawing. The emancipatory shock might have been caused by the realisation of having created a striking semblance of a conventional pictorial space. For Benjamin the most ancient practices of mimesis are the 'ur-phenomenon of all artistic activity'.⁷² The shock Mies felt when drawing the wall might have had to do with the physical cognition of reconnecting viewer, architect and architecture with what Benjamin called the archaic symbol world.

The entire G project was less about giving precepts for the future or satisfying existing needs and more about creating 'new inclinations and needs' and 'new life', as Richter and Graeff emphasise in the first issue.⁷³ The glass high-rise, the concrete office building and the exhibition pavilions are supposed to unsettle the viewer, to coerce him to come to terms with a completely new architecture. Following Benjamin's argument, the contrast between the ruins of space (both urban and perspectival space) and the veiled appearances of his buildings do not form a dialectical opposition between old and new but rather between what-has-been and *Jetztzeit*. As such constellations his images function as harbingers of the new life forms still inaccessible to the empirical eye, images (in the Benjaminian sense) that form new constellations to reconnect technology with archaic symbols. A contingent world of movements, flows and currents situated outside the epistemological margins the exact sciences opens up, a world where body and technology once again can innervate. At once blinding and captivating, dreamlike and phantasmagoric, his images visualise, in an overlap of novelty and repetition, a temporal constellation that places

the modern subject beyond the limits of the positivist, exact sciences and prepares that subject for 'an inner leap into the ur-zone of Gestaltung'.⁷⁴

Notes

1. Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2000). Published in English as *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete*, trans. Duncan Berry (Santa Monica: Getty Centre for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995). For a discussion of the connection between Giedion and Benjamin see Heinz Brüggemann, *Architekturen des Augenblicks: Raum-Bilder und Bild-Räume einer urbanen Moderne in Literatur, Kunst und Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Hannover: Offizin, 2002), 360–396.
2. Walter Benjamin, letter to Sigfried Giedion, 15 February 1929. In Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz, vol. 3 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), 443. Walter Benjamin, 'Bücher, die lebendig geblieben sind', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Hella Tiedemann-Bartels, vol. 3 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), 170.
3. Benjamin, letter to Giedion, 443.
4. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), N2,6.
5. Benjamin, 'Bücher, die lebendig geblieben sind', 170.
6. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, K1,2.
7. *Ibid.*, N1,9.
8. *Ibid.*, N2,6.
9. *Ibid.*, N1,11.
10. *Ibid.*, N2a,3.
11. Sigrid Weigel, 'The Flash of Knowledge and the Temporality of Images: Walter Benjamin's Image-Based Epistemology and Its Preconditions in Visual Arts and Media History', *Critical Inquiry*, no. 41 (2015): 344–66.
12. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, N1,1.
13. *Ibid.*, N3,1.
14. Carl Linfert, 'Die Grundlagen der Architektur-zeichnung.

- Mit einem Versuch über französische Architekturzeichnungen des 18. Jahrhunderts', in *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1931), 133–246.
15. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 4, 261. 'Noch ehe ich an den Text ging, schlug mir aus den Bildtafeln die dünnste, anregenste Luft entgegen.'
 16. Walter Benjamin, 'Strenge Kunstwissenschaft: Zum ersten Bande der "Kunstwissenschaftlichen Forschungen"', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, 367. Translated by Rodney Livingstone as 'The Rigorous Study of Art: On the First Volume of the Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen', in *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, vol. 2, ed. Michael W. Jennings and Marcus Bullock (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 669.
 17. Benjamin, 'Rigorous Study of Art', 669.
 18. *Ibid.*, 670.
 19. Linfert, 'Die Grundlagen der Architekturzeichnung', 134.
 20. *Ibid.*, 141.
 21. *Ibid.*, 135.
 22. *Ibid.*, 143.
 23. *Ibid.*, 153.
 24. Hans Richter and Werner Graeff, who were central figures of the *G* project, would later assemble lists of those involved in the journal. Both included the name of Walter Benjamin. Hans Richter, *Köpfe und Hinterköpfe* (Zurich: Arche, 1967), 69. Werner Graeff, 'Über die sogenannte "G-Gruppe"', *werkundzeit*, no. 11 (1962): 5.
 25. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 2, 484. Tristan Tzara, 'La photographie à l'envers', (1922), translated by Benjamin as 'Die Photographie von der Kehrseite', *G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*, no. 3 (1924).
 26. See Eckard Köhn, "'Nichts gegen die Illustrierte!' Benjamin, der Berliner Konstruktivismus und das avantgardistische Objekt", in *Schrift Bilder Denken*, ed. Detlev Schöttker (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), 68.
 27. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 'Bürohaus', *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, no. 1 (1923): 3.
 28. Hans Richter, 'G', *G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*, no. 3 (1924): 3. 'DEN Zeitgenossen, der am Wachstum des großen Körpers, zu dem er gehört (der Menschheit) Interesse und Vergnügen hat, der nicht an Hemmungen dem Leben gegenüber leidet und der schon mit all den modernen Instinkt-Empfangs- und Absendungsapparaten ausgerüstet ist, die ihm Verbindung mit dem Leben sichern.'
 29. Edward Dimendberg, 'Towards an Elemental Cinema: Film Aesthetics and Practice in G', in *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923–1926*, ed. Michael W. Jennings and Detlev Mertins (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010).
 30. Hans Richter and Werner Graeff, 'Ewige Wahrheiten', *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, no. 1 (1923): 1.
 31. Hans Richter, 'G', 3.
 32. *Ibid.*, 3.
 33. Walter Benjamin, 'Über die Malerei oder Zeichen und Mal', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, 605. Translated as Walter Benjamin, 'Painting, or Signs and Marks', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 85. Benjamin elaborates at length the relation between the mark and the word in painting. He also introduces the question of the 'mark in space' (*Das Mal im Raum*) arguing that the 'realm of the mark also occurs in in spatial structures (*räumlichen Gebilden*), just as the sign in a certain function of the line can without doubt acquire architectonic (and hence also spatial) significance. [...] Above all, they appear as monuments to the dead or grave-stones (*Toten- und Grabmale*), but these are marks in the exact meaning of the word only if they have not been given and architectonic and sculptural shape.' Benjamin, 'On Painting or Signs and Marks', 86.
 34. Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (New York: Zone, 2002), 31.
 35. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 2003), 207–208.
 36. Ritter quoted in Benjamin, *Origin of Tragic Drama*, 214.
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. *Ibid.* The English version translates 'Schriftbild' with 'form of writing' which omits the connotation with 'Bild' that was certainly intended by Benjamin.

39. Ibid.
40. Mies van der Rohe, 'Notebook (1927/28)' in Fritz Neumeyer, *The Artless Word: Mies van der Rohe on the Building Art*, trans. Marc Jarzombek (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 289. The notes Mies takes in 1927–28 are inspired by his reading of Guardini's *Vom heiligen Zeichen*. Interestingly, Mies underlined the following passage in the 1925 edition he owned: 'Words are names. And to speak is the high art of relating to the names of things; with the essence of things and the essence of one's own soul in its divinely ordained harmony... But language with its names is no longer a numinous communication with the essence of things, no longer an encounter between object and soul.'
41. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (Mineola: Dover, 1998), 127–128.
42. Hans Richter, 'Demonstration des Materials', *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, no. 1 (1923): 2–3.
43. Hans Richter, 'Prinzipielles Zur Bewegungskunst', *De Stijl*, IV, no. 7 (1921): 109.
44. Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 62.
45. Walter Benjamin, 'Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser and Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 2.1. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 141. Benjamin, 'On Language as Such', 63. For a discussion of Benjamin's article see Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Color of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), 16.
46. Benjamin, 'On Language as Such', 63.
47. Mies van der Rohe, 'Bürohaus', 3.
48. Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 519.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 518, 519.
52. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Third Version)', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 258.
53. Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', 519.
54. Benjamin, 'Work of Art', 258.
55. Hans Richter, 'Der neue Baumeister', *Qualität* 4, no. 1/2 (1925): 7. 'Dieser Grundriss ist sinnlich lesbar, ist keine mathematische Abstraktion [...].'
56. A section of Benjamin's translation for the third issue of *G* would later reappear in 'Little History of Photography': 'When everything that called itself art was stricken with palsy, the photographer switched on his thousand-candle-power lamp and gradually the light-sensitive paper absorbed the darkness of a few everyday objects. He had discovered what could be done by a pure and sensitive flash of light – a light that was more important than all the constellations arranged for the eye's pleasure.' Tristan Tzara, 'Die Photographie von der Kehrseite', 30, in Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', 523.
57. Bragaglia cited in Millicent Marcus, 'Anton Giulio Bragaglia's Thaïs; Or, The Death of the Diva + the Rise of the Cenoplastica = The Birth of Futurist Cinema', *South Central Review*, 13, no. 2/3 (1996): 66.
58. Bragaglia cited in Caroline Tisdall, 'Bragaglia's Futurist Photodynamism', *Studio International*, no. 7 (1975): 13.
59. Bragaglia cited in Marcus, 'Anton Giulio Bragaglia's Thaïs', 66.
60. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 302.
61. Bragaglia quoted in Walter Benjamin, 'Bragaglia in Berlin', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, 523.
62. Ibid., 523.
63. Bragaglia cited in Marta Braun, 'Anton Giulio Bragaglia und die Fotografie des Unsichtbaren', in *Im Reich der Phantome: Fotografie des Unsichtbaren* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997), 114.
64. This use of masks to protect the body from the gaze is also prevalent in the work of the modern dancer Mary Wigman, who had been a close acquaintance of Mies since they first met in early 1910s in Dresden-Hellerau. Wigman used her costumes to mask her body and her gender and to instead be perceived as 'a dynamic configuration of energy in space'. See Valerie Preston-Dunlop, 'Notes on Bodies in Dada', in *Dada: The Coordinates of Cultural Politics*, ed. Stephen C. Foster (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 173.

65. See Marie Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 174.
66. Mies's 'Notebook' cited in Neumeyer, *Artless Word*, 269. Interestingly, Siegfried Kracauer who visited the Werkbund Ausstellung as a critic of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, takes up Mies's terminology when he writes that modern architecture contains the 'germs' of 'new life-forms'. See Siegfried Kracauer, 'Werkbundaussstellung: "Die Wohnung." Die Eröffnung', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 24, 1927.
67. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 'Zum Thema: Ausstellungen', *Die Form* 3, no. 4 (1928): 121.
68. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, '6 Students Talk with Mies', *Master Builder* 2, no. 3 (1952): 28.
69. Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
70. Richter, 'Demonstration des Materials', 3.
71. Benjamin, 'Work of Art', 127.
72. Ibid.
73. Richter and Graeff, 'Ewige Wahrheiten', 1.
74. Siegfried Ebeling, *Der Raum als Membran* (Dessau: C. Dünhaupt Verlag, 1926), 20.

Biography

Lutz Robbers holds a PhD in the History and Theory of Architecture from Princeton University. He has taught at the RWTH Aachen, the Bauhaus-University Weimar, Columbia University and Princeton and has held research positions at the IKKM Weimar, the London School of Economics' 'Cities Programme' and the German Forum of Art History in Paris. He serves as managing editor of the journal *Candide – Journal for Architectural Knowledge*.

The Architecture of a Lifetime: Structures of Remembrance and Invention in Walter Benjamin and Aldo Rossi

Jolien Paeleman

Introduction

For present-day architectural criticism, the influential writings and projects of the Italian architect Aldo Rossi (Milan, 1931–1997) constitute a rich subject of study. This may be due to their resistance to easy pinpointing, despite the fact that Rossi himself explained his design theories on numerous occasions.¹ Among the architect's most important writings is *A Scientific Autobiography*, a book which has proven difficult to label as either an architectural treatise or a memoir.² In this collection of thoughts on architecture and on life in general, the reader learns of Rossi's affinities with other architects, artists, writers and thinkers, often expressed through quotes. The importance of literature and philosophy for the architect's theory and practice has regularly been emphasised in studies on Rossi.³ It has been pointed out that Rossi's frequent use of citations essentially 'strives against the illusion that it would be possible to build the future without the past.'⁴ This 'striving' quality is clearly present when Rossi quotes Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's writings played a crucial role in Rossi's ideology on the city and architecture, as can be gleaned from the preface Rossi writes to an anthology of his texts:

Until a few years ago, I hadn't read Walter Benjamin, and nothing but his pages seem better to explain what I haven't made clear in these pages. 'I, however, am distorted by similarity by all that surrounds me here' could be written at the beginning and the ending of this book.⁵

A relatively small number of scholars have hitherto focused on Benjaminian concepts in Rossi's work. The above fragment is also quoted by Victoriano Sainz Gutiérrez, who highlights a number of striking affinities between Rossi and Benjamin: a political ideology shared by both, their similar evolution towards montage-technical thinking, and the city as the focal point in the reasoning of both.⁶ Cameron McEwan retraces the origin of analogical thought in Rossi's work. In this recent study, he develops a strong link between Rossi's concept of the analogous city and one of Benjamin's 'dialectical images', a relationship which will be addressed in one of the following chapters.⁷

'I, however, am distorted by similarity by all that surrounds me here' is an excerpt Rossi quotes from *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*, Benjamin's posthumously issued memoirs.⁸ The same citation recurs regularly in the architect's writings; often with the two subsequent sentences from Benjamin's text added. Despite this fragment being nearly the only direct reference Rossi makes to Benjamin, there has been no in-depth study of the meaning of this excerpt for Rossi's writings; nor has there been any research conducted on the 'pages' Rossi refers to and what they might have contributed to his architecture practice. Since Rossi quotes Benjamin almost exclusively from *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, we can argue that reading Benjamin's memoir in parallel with Rossi's writings will give us a clearer view of the role Benjamin has in Rossi's thinking. Therefore

I propose a close reading of *Berlin Childhood*, in an attempt to lay bare similarities with the architect's autobiographical writings, and subsequently examine its analogies with Rossi's architecture. 'One cannot use the life to interpret the work. But one can use the work to interpret the life', Susan Sontag writes in a famous essay on Benjamin.⁹ In this way, the present undertaking can be seen as an elaboration on what has been termed by Brian Elliott the Benjaminian 'consideration of architecture as a crucial medium and repository for the intersection of personal and shared cultural memory', while the 'personal' here is to be understood not just as the manifestation of a city's inhabitant, but also as the presence of an architect who expresses himself through his work.¹⁰

When Rossi states that Benjamin's words could have opened and closed one of his own books, he refers to a film he made two years earlier for the architecture triennial in Milan. *Ornamento e delitto* is a montage of fragments from Italian films which alternate with footage of archaeological sites and shots of the outskirts of Milan. At the beginning and at the end of this film, someone writes an Italian translation of the same sentences from Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood* on a wall, in capital letters:

I, however, am distorted by similarity by all that surrounds me here. Thus, like a mollusc in its shell, I had my abode in the nineteenth century, which now lies hollow before me like an empty shell. I hold it to my ear.¹¹

In a study that examines the film, Belgin Turan Özkaya interprets this act as a 'return to streets' of a philosopher who has written extensively on everyday urban life.¹² It is an interesting observation which, as I attempt to show in the following, not only relates to a dilapidated wall somewhere in Milan, but might account for every new wall Aldo Rossi adds to urban reality.

A self portrait in 'lifeless' things

Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert was published for the first time in 1950, ten years after Walter Benjamin's death.¹³ The memoir is a collection of short textual 'vignettes' each centred on a specific theme, put together according to the montage principle Benjamin had developed earlier in *One-Way Street*.¹⁴ In this seminal text, short prose pieces follow each other in a 'systematic non-system, as if situated along a city street in which individual *Denkbilder* become the figurative shops, signs, buildings, and urban sites at which readers may interrupt their strolls like leisurely flâneurs on a promenade.¹⁵ According to Benjamin, these *Denkbilder* or thought-images constitute 'individual expeditions into the depths of memory'.¹⁶ In 'A Berlin Chronicle', a text which may be seen as a preparatory 'draft' for *Berlin Childhood*, we read the following:

Reminiscences, even extensive ones, do not always amount to an autobiography. And these quite certainly do not, even for the Berlin years that I am exclusively concerned with here. For autobiography has to do with time, with sequence and what makes up the continuous flow of life. Here, I am talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities. For even if months and years appear here, it is in the form they have at the moment of recollection.¹⁷

In applying the montage principle in literature, Benjamin aims for spatiality in his writings: here, time is subdivided as a space may be, it is 'chopped up' in fragments.¹⁸ We will reconsider this principle, which lends Benjamin's writings their characteristic form, in relation to Rossi's design theory and practice. But even beyond the structural level of Benjamin's memory project, space remains of great importance. From 'A Berlin Chronicle' we learn that for a long time, Benjamin had been thinking of a way to situate his life graphically on a map,¹⁹ while Sontag writes that 'Benjamin, the translator of Proust, wrote fragments of an opus that could

be called *À la recherche des espaces perdus*.²⁰ Hermann Schwepenhäuser has characterised *Berlin Childhood* as a 'topographical self-portrait', an 'abbreviated biography', where every vignette concentrates life in one point.²¹ This point, we learn from the previous citation from 'A Berlin Chronicle', is the 'form' wherein 'months and years appear at the moment of recollection'. Benjamin continues:

This strange form – it may be called fleeting or eternal – is in neither case the stuff that life is made of. And this is shown not so much by the role that my own life plays here, as by that of the people closest to me in Berlin – whoever and whenever they may have been. The atmosphere of the city that is here evoked allots them only a brief, shadowy existence. They steal along its walls like beggars, appear wraith-like at windows, to vanish again, sniff at thresholds like a genius loci, and even if they fill whole quarters with their names, it is as a dead man fills his gravestone.²²

The life of individuals is subordinated to the lifeless form we encounter in Benjamin's memory project. According to Sontag, this faithfulness to things is a quintessential feature of his melancholic nature. The 'deep transactions' between the melancholic and the world 'always take place with things', and they are 'sincere', they 'reveal meaning'. This disposition of Benjamin's, Sontag writes, originates from his obsession with death:

Precisely because the melancholy character is haunted by death, it is melancholics who best know how to read the world. Or, rather, it is the world which yields itself to the melancholic's scrutiny, as it does to no one else's. The more lifeless things are, the more potent and ingenious can be the mind which contemplates them.²³

It can be argued that this characterisation equally suits Aldo Rossi. Death frequently recurs in his writings and as with Benjamin, it always takes on a specific 'form'.²⁴ Because it is visualised and

incorporated in the 'lifeless thing', death carries within itself a hidden life energy. At the beginning of *A Scientific Autobiography*, Rossi refers to the memoirs of the German physicist Max Planck, from whom Rossi lends the title *Wissenschaftliche Selbstbiographie* for his own writings. Planck's first acquaintance with the law of the conservation of energy was a shocking one, with which he was presented through a story told by his school teacher: a mason lifts up a stone block on top of a roof; the force that was needed for the elevation is stored up in the block for years, until one day it slides from the roof and hits the head of a passerby, causing his death. Hence Planck, Rossi writes, links his autobiographical investigation with death, which is 'in some sense a continuation of energy':

Actually, the principle of the conservation of energy is mingled in every artist or technician with the search for happiness and death. In architecture this search is also undoubtedly bound up with the material and with energy.²⁵

Rossi follows Planck's footsteps by equating his autobiography with an 'investigation of death', and, not unlike the child he once was, relates himself to the 'dead things' he observes. In this way Rossi writes of a find on an American beach: an empty shell, which calls to his mind verses by the sixth-century BCE Greek poet Alcaeus. In turn, it is these verses, which Rossi read at the lyceum, that brought him to architecture:

'O seashell / daughter of stone and the whitening sea / you astonish the minds of children.' The lines go approximately like this, and in them are contained the problem of form, of material, of imagination – that is, of astonishment.²⁶

Alcaeus's shell appeared to young Rossi as a 'coalescence' of the sea, which seemed empowered to construct 'a geometrical and mysterious form, made up of every memory and expectation'.²⁷

Is this the same initial enchantment of youth, which Rossi not only re-encounters in a shell on a deserted beach, but also experiences in one of Benjamin's *Denkbilder* from *Berlin Childhood*? 'Thus, like a mollusc in its shell, I had my abode in the nineteenth century, which now lies hollow before me like an empty shell. I hold it to my ear.'²⁸ Benjamin's hollowed-out shell deserted by all life, a 'coalescence' of the nineteenth century in which the child lived like a mollusc, is held to the ear to catch the echoes from the past. Here, the empty shell is Benjamin's strange form, 'which may be called fleeting or eternal'.²⁹

The statue and the nursery rhyme

The child in *Berlin Childhood* tries to comprehend the world in a true sense: there is an urge to conquer things, along with the words that name those things. The vignette that features Benjamin's thought-image of the shell and the mollusc is titled 'The Mummerehlen':

There is an old nursery rhyme that tells of Muhme Rehlen. Because the word Muhme meant nothing to me, this creature became for me a spirit: the Mummerehlen. The misunderstanding disarranged the world for me. But in a good way: it lit up paths to the world's interior.³⁰

Benjamin gives another example of such a misunderstanding: the day after the child had overheard a conversation about a copper engraving ('Kupferstich'), a concept unknown to him, he stuck his head out from underneath a chair, to enact what he had understood as a 'head-stickout' ('Kopferstich'): 'If, in this way, I distorted both myself and the world, I did only what I had to do to gain a foothold in life.'³¹ In the above quotation 'distorted' is the translation of 'entstellte', while 'disarranged' from the previous excerpt stands for 'verstellte'. Comprehending the world brought along the 'disarrangement' ('Verstellung') of things, but also a 'distortion' ('Entstellung') of the child that longed to

understand these things. Benjamin continues:

Early on, I learned to disguise myself in words, which really were clouds. The gift of perceiving similarities is, in fact, nothing but a weak remnant of the old compulsion to become similar and behave mimetically. In me, however, this compulsion acted through words. Not those that made me similar to models of good breeding, but those that made me similar to dwelling places, furniture, clothes.³²

The 'disguise in words' seems to be inspired by the creature Benjamin brought to life by misunderstanding the nursery rhyme: 'Mummerehlen' brings to mind the verb *sich mummen* (to disguise oneself). The compulsion to disguise himself and thereby 'resemble things' is so strong that young Benjamin has a hard time looking only like himself: for example, in the photographer's studio. His mother takes him there, together with his younger brother, to be dressed up as mountaineers and put in front of a camera, backed by a 'clumsily painted' Alpine valley. While the picture that Benjamin will comment on years later is being taken, the child takes in the immediate surroundings: a potted palm tree, footstools, easels, the sombrero and the walking stick that he holds in his hands. However, it is a world not exclusively consisting of objects:

Over to the side, near the curtained doorway, my mother stands motionless in her tight bodice. As though attending to a tailor's dummy, she scrutinises my velvet suit, which for its part is laden with braid and other trimming and looks like something out of a fashion magazine. I, however, am distorted by similarity by all that surrounds me here. Thus, like a mollusc in its shell, I had my abode in the nineteenth century, which now lies hollow before me like an empty shell. I hold it to my ear.³³

The room is filled with objects which distract the child so much that he fears he might turn into a thing himself. Indeed, the child's mother, herself

'distorted' by her tight bodice, only pays attention to her son's clothes, as if he were a mannequin in a shop window. But however painful it might be, this dual process of the world's disarrangement and the individual's 'distortion' remains the only way for the child to get to the core of things. When recalling how he could lose himself while painting with watercolours, distortion even seems a precondition for happiness: 'The colours I mixed would colour me. Even before I applied them to the drawing, I found myself disguised by them.'³⁴ At the end of 'The Mummerehlen' Benjamin relates this happiness to the story of the old Chinese painter, who invites his friends to look at the last painting he made. It depicts a park landscape with a path that leads to a hut. Then the spectators notice that the painter is no longer in their midst, and all of a sudden, he is there, inside the painting. Astonished, his friends look on as the old man follows the path down to the hut, stops in front of the door, turns to them and smiles, and eventually disappears through the narrow doorway. Maybe it was because of this story that the young Benjamin favoured the porcelain tableware above all other things in the household that he could 'resemble':

A mottled crust overspread those vases, bowls, plates, and boxes, which, to be sure, were merely cheap export articles. I was nonetheless captivated by them [...]. I would resemble the porcelain which I had entered in a cloud of colors.³⁵

Disappearing into the own 'work' – an interpretation of reality taken in by the child – is a *mise en abyme* which recurs often in *Berlin Childhood*.³⁶ In a study on the significance of Benjamin's notion of mimesis for architecture, Neil Leach also mentions Benjamin's story of the Chinese painter. According to Leach, the process of mentally 'entering' an object is much overlooked and relatively under-theorised by Benjamin-scholars.³⁷ In modern architecture, Benjamin's 'mimetic faculty' is nonetheless a very useful concept to explore 'the

potential of the aesthetic expression offering access to a more empathetic engagement with the world', which could lead the way towards a 'mimetic' architecture, practiced by architects who thus overcome 'the subject/object divide of an alienated world'.³⁸ Leach notes that this potential remained unexplored by Benjamin himself.³⁹ From the following, we might argue that Aldo Rossi has rediscovered it and put it to use in his architectural practice. The above citations, one of which contains Rossi's fetishised excerpt, show a striking resemblance to fragments from *A Scientific Autobiography*. As in Benjamin's memoir, things are examined through 'assimilation', and by disappearing inside of them:

I always had a strong interest in objects, instruments, apparatus, tools. Without intending to I used to linger for hours in the large kitchen at S., on Lake Como, drawing the coffeepots, the pans, the bottles. I particularly loved the strange shapes of the coffeepots enamelled blue, green, red; they were miniatures of the fantastic architectures that I would encounter later. Today I still love to draw these large coffeepots, which I think of as structures that can be entered.⁴⁰

However, to gain a better understanding of what he calls architecture's 'inside/outside aspect', Rossi must leave the kitchen to visit another place from his childhood. This is the *San Carlone*, a seventeenth century statue of Saint Carlo Borromeo in Arona near Lake Maggiore, reaching thirty three metres in height. Like the Statue of Liberty, visitors can ascend to the inside of the head; here the lake can be viewed through the eyes of the saint. Looking back, Rossi understands why the structure attracted him so much: in it, 'the limits that distinguish the domains of architecture, the machine, and instruments were dissolved in marvellous invention', not unlike the Trojan horse or the stationary locomotive to which he compares San Carlone.⁴¹ Here the law of conservation of energy is again at stake: the stationary object contains a latent power which is set free in the child's imagination when

the object, with him in it, is set in motion or rather becomes 'distorted'.

In his analysis of *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, Olav Severijnen writes: 'The obsession with which things are observed in *Berlin Childhood* is coupled with the child's expectation that these things will look back at him. The child still possesses the auratic perceptiveness that makes things answer his gaze, a disposition which adults have lost.'⁴² Likewise, in *A Scientific Autobiography*, it seems as though things 'look back' at the author. Rossi's experience of San Carlone epitomises this Benjaminian gaze. The statue's latent powers can be admired from the outside, but one can also quite literally take its place by climbing up behind its eyes, to look down at the spectators below.

Archaeologist of an analogical city

Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood* and Rossi's *A Scientific Autobiography* both constitute a 'systematic non-system' of places and objects that evoke distinct time fragments of a worn out past. In these lifeless things from the past, a latent power is stored which the imagination – the memory of the child's gaze – is able to set free. The thought-image of the shell that revolved around the mollusc and deformed it, in fact represents a collection of 'shells': a treasure-trove of precious objects. According to Benjamin, it is the task of the 'historian of the own past' to excavate these objects and re-assemble them in a new order:

the memory is not an instrument for the reconnaissance of what is past but rather its medium. It is the medium of that which has been lived out just as the soil is the medium in which old cities lie buried. Whoever seeks to gaze more closely at one's own buried past must proceed like a man who excavates. Above all, he must not shy away from coming back time and again to one and the same object – scatter it just as one scatters earth, root it up just as one roots up the soil [...]. Indeed, the images which are extracted from all

earlier constellations stand as valuables in the frugal chambers of our later insight – like torsos in the collector's gallery.⁴³

Excavating this 'memory-ground' means to lay bare its structure, which is a palimpsest of memories.⁴⁴ The archaeologist digs for objects while keeping an inventory of the ground layers which rest upon the object. Object and layers of earth together constitute a 'composite image' which evokes an entire world of memory. As we have seen in 'The Mummerehlen', one 'object' – in this case a distorted nursery rhyme – represents many 'layers' or 'moments' in the author's life.⁴⁵

The above citation displays Benjamin's concept of historical materialism.⁴⁶ In contrast with traditional historiography which has a strong sense of purpose – each occurrence seems to participate in a 'great history of civilisation' – the new paradigm subscribed by Benjamin urges the historian to renounce all tendencies to view events in the light of either growth or decline. The 'historical continuum' of classical historiography shows a 'false context' in which things are embedded; the materialist historian is charged with the task to break these fragments from their bedding and transpose them onto the present.⁴⁷ Frisby writes, 'Benjamin's task is nothing less than that of releasing the enormous energy of history that lies bonded in the "Once upon a time" of classical historical narrative',⁴⁸ and he cites Benjamin from *One-Way Street*:

The past for (the historical materialist) becomes the subject of a construction whose locus is not empty time, but the particular epoch, the particular life, the particular work. He breaks the epoch away from its reified historical continuity, and the life from the epoch, and the work from the life's work. But the result of his construction is that in the work the life's work, in the life's work the epoch, and in the epoch the course of history are suspended and preserved.⁴⁹

The fragment, the thing that is broken out of its context, must gain minute attention. Such concentration on the isolated object, as Benjamin concludes in the above citation, again leads to a *mise en abyme*. The past dwells in small but abysmal things.

Both Benjamin and Rossi aim not to relive the past, but to grasp it, in order to gain insight into the present. According to Elliott, 'recollecting childhood for Benjamin means attempting to find the meaning of one's present situation in light of a promise implicitly expressed in former years.'⁵⁰ Or, as Benjamin writes in *The Arcades Project*, 'the true method of making things contemporaneous is to conceive of them [...] within our space.'⁵¹ From this point on, the archaeologist becomes a *collector* who brings his valuables together in a new order. The torsos are gathered in a new sculpture gallery, put together in the spirit of an assemblage: a composition in which the contours of the parts remain clearly defined. This creation of a new order, which promises the 'own life's historian' a far-reaching insight into reality, is equally at stake in Rossi's inquiries:

Now I seem to see all things I have observed arranged like tools in a neat row; they are aligned as in a botanical chart, or a catalogue, or a dictionary. But this catalogue, lying somewhere between imagination and memory, is not neutral; it always reappears in several objects and constitutes their deformation and, in some way, their evolution.⁵²

Rossi's catalogue shows great affinity with Benjamin's gallery of torsos. The collection is not 'neutral', as certain fragments are preferred above others. This recalls the hierarchy strived for by Benjamin, when he writes that he who excavates memory's soil must not fear to frequently come upon the same objects. Repeated descriptions of the same things, with even the most futile variations always taken into account, lend them an immeasurable depth.⁵³

In one of his notebooks, Rossi writes that he sometimes looks at Milan 'with the eye of an archaeologist', something which occurs to him in other cities too: mostly in those cities where 'life is at its most feverish', like New York or Tokyo. When he observes these places, he feels the need to 'reconstruct' them in a single glance.⁵⁴ Like Benjamin, Rossi has the predisposition to see reality as a series of stills in 'lifeless' forms. Here, as with Benjamin, the archaeologist's gaze unmask the 'false continuum' of history and of everyday reality:

In this way architecture measures itself with history. Not according to some historical supposition or according to tradition [...] but because it constructs itself upon a general and universal experience of things that surround man. [...] And this is why invention, when considered separately from this growing of architecture upon itself, is always sterile, abstract, inconsistent.⁵⁵

In his work, Rossi takes position against this 'sterile' way of inventing architecture, which he believes 'merely serves commercial goals'. This resistance to the inconsistency of modern architecture is demonstrated in *The Analogous City*. It is a collage of fragments from natural and urban landscapes, fragments that have subsisted or disappeared, architectural concepts that have been expressed in buildings or have remained ink on paper, together with some of Rossi's own designs and cherished objects, shown in plan projection or in perspective.⁵⁶ In his influential study *The Architecture of the City*, which was published ten years earlier, Rossi stated that the architect is only able to understand the city by its parts: he needs to analyse its building types and then design according to the knowledge developed from such a study. *The Analogous City* is a concretisation of Rossi's idea of 'the city by parts': it is not a scheme that proposes one clear urbanistic message, but a difficult whole in which the contours of things remain clearly visible. Typological

and morphological analogies between the fragments ensure that this fictional city is nevertheless easily considered as an 'imaginable reality'.⁵⁷ Rossi firmly believes in 'the capacity of imagination as a concrete thing'; as he emphasises in the text that accompanies the exhibition panel: 'description and knowledge should give rise to a further stage: the capacity of the imagination born from the concrete.'⁵⁸

Cameron McEwan has developed an interesting analysis of Rossi's analogous city, building upon Benjamin's notion of the 'destructive character'.⁵⁹ The latter should not be taken as a proponent of *tabula rasa*, but rather as analogous to the 'Angel of history' from another famous Benjamin text, whose eyes are fixed on the ruins of the past from which fleeting time carries him away, into the future at his back.⁶⁰ McEwan notes that 'destruction and construction are equivalent with the process of de-montage and re-montage, which is the destructive character of Rossi's architectural production'.⁶¹ Rossi's 'analogical' city proposes an alternative to the existing city with recourse to some of its most valued 'ruins'. The purpose of *La città analoga* is to formulate a 'counter project within the capitalist city, square in plan, opposing the logic of flows'.⁶² Manfredo Tafuri in turn has singled out Rossi's composition as a 'critical act' both upon socio-economical society and upon architectural utopianism,⁶³ disconnecting utopia from the 'visionary/realism dilemma' to which it is historically attached.⁶⁴

Observation and invention, description and imagination: they always meet midway in Rossi's analogical thinking process. But it is not just analogy between objects – resulting from the knowledge of typological laws in urban forms – that characterises the encounter. Analogies of 'distortion' which, as we have seen, emerge between the artist and his objects, the ability to find 'similarities' between oneself and things, enable the artist to think of them anew, to 'deform' them:

In looking at a ruin, especially in the city, I noticed that the contours of things became clouded and confusing. In the exaggerated silence of an urban summer, I grasped the deformation, not only of ourselves, but of objects and things as well. Perhaps there was a certain bewilderment in looking at things which only became more obscure the more precise they were. Out of this bewilderment, I thought, one could attempt to make a project: a house, for example.⁶⁵

Perhaps it is this simultaneous diffusion of object and subject, this clearing away of boundaries between the rationalism of architectural typology and the passion of a life's account, which makes Rossi stand out among most of his contemporaries. Perhaps this is what ultimately characterises his architecture, which therefore continues to resist historical categorisation.⁶⁶

Architecture recaptured

For me, the architectural work is now identified with these things: there is a street in Seville made up of superimposed balconies, elevated bridges, stairs, noise, and silence, and it seems to recur in all my drawings. Here the search has ended; its object is the architecture it has rediscovered.⁶⁷

In a letter to Adorno, Benjamin describes the prose piece 'Loggias', which will later become part of *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, as 'the most accurate portrait [...] of myself and of my own making'.⁶⁸ The loggia is a semi-enclosed balcony space which looks down on the inner courtyard of a typical Berlin apartment block of that era. It functions as a kind of threshold; it refers both to 'the particularity of a socially coded living space – that of the established Berlin bourgeoisie – and a demarcated viewing space from which to observe the theatre of the city from a distance'.⁶⁹ This 'loge' recurs frequently in *Berlin Childhood* due to its crucial role in Benjamin's early education, as Benjamin writes: 'nothing has fortified my own memory so profoundly as gazing

into courtyards, one of whose dark loggias, shaded by blinds in the summer, was for me the cradle in which the city laid its new citizen.⁷⁰ In this cradle, the child is reborn as a city dweller; here 'subject and object, family and city, "I" and "non-I" touch upon and influence each other.'⁷¹ Thus, Benjamin's loggia can be seen as an introduction to the city, while the inner courtyard that is examined from the loggia might be regarded as a prototype of the Parisian arcades that will later play an decisive role in Benjamin's writings. The sounds that enter the house through the loggia are the sounds that accompany the child in his sleep and shape his dreams. But the loggia is also the 'moulding' for observations and daydreams that become memories, and from which later insights are developed:

Here, spring called up the first shoots of green before the gray façade of a house in back; and when, later in the year, a dusty canopy of leaves brushed up against the wall of the house a thousand times a day, the rustling of the branches initiated me into a knowledge to which I was not yet equal. For everything in the courtyard became a sign or hint to me. Many were the messages embedded in the skirmishing of the green roller blinds drawn up high, and many the ominous dispatches that I prudently left unopened in the rattling of the roll-up shutters that came thundering down at dusk.⁷²

In the courtyard and its adjoining loggia, 'time comes to a halt, piles up, grows old'.⁷³ Here, chronological time is transformed into an eternal present which Benjamin terms *Jetztzeit*.⁷⁴ This mythical time is concretised in the simultaneity of the beginning and ending of things, which Benjamin evokes in images: the tree in the middle of the courtyard (spring and autumn); the blinds that are drawn and let down again (morning and evening). However, these images contain sounds – the leaves rustle and the shutters rattle – and thus the loggia is the shell Benjamin holds to the ear in 'The Mummerehlen'.

The edition of *Berlin Childhood* from which I quote contains a photograph of a courtyard in Berlin from around 1900. It features an elongated enclosed outdoor space which makes it look more like a street, with loggias looking out onto it. *A Scientific Autobiography* includes a photograph of a *corral* in Seville, the Spanish counterpart of the Berlin *Hof*. It is one of Rossi's most important 'rediscovered architectures', which he relates back to the courtyards of his youth. These are the Milanese *corti*, which Rossi described as 'a form of life' consisting of 'the intimacies endured there, the bonds, the intolerances':

In my bourgeois childhood, I felt excluded by these houses, and I entered the courtyard with curiosity and fear. Later, the scientific bend of my research estranged me from what was most important, namely the imagination of which such relations are made. This imagination rose up again in me in the corrals of Seville, in those larger and older corrals, in those very narrow ones with intersecting stairs and balconies, in the green cast-iron columns from the turn of the century – buildings still rich in imagination from the life of an urban proletariat.⁷⁵

Rossi often makes use of the building type with courtyard. In an early, never built design for a residential complex on the outskirts of Milan, the courtyard space constitutes the project's conceptual basis.⁷⁶ One of Rossi's last building projects, an office block in Berlin, was also designed with courtyards as focal points; here, four *Höfe*, each differing in dimension and shape, are linked to each other. In describing the project Rossi refers to Benjamin; though instead of the Berlin courtyards he mentions the Parisian arcades: in this project, the emphasis is clearly on the courtyards' functioning as passageways.⁷⁷

Though not a residential building, the ultimate architectural translation of Benjamin's courtyard is Rossi's design for the extension of the cemetery San Cataldo in Modena. The project won a national competition in 1971, and it marked a

breakthrough in Rossi's architecture practice. In *A Scientific Autobiography*, Rossi often refers to the project; through it, he writes, his thinking on architecture 'expanded', from then on it seemed to him that he was 'better able to grasp a more distant time'.⁷⁸ Geert Bekaert emphasises the strong link in Rossi's Modena cemetery between 'the place for life and the place for death'; here, the dead are 'a living notion', Rossi's architecture is erected to 'make them present as a reality'.⁷⁹ Rossi relocates Modena's dead in this new reality, moreover, he offers them their own city, as this cemetery was conceived with the Roman *castrum* in mind, with its walls, its gates, its *cardo* and *decumanus*. The project's most enigmatic feature is a flesh-coloured cubic building, its walls pierced by seven rows of square 'window' openings. This structure serves as an ossuary containing the bones of the war dead and the remains of the dead from the ancient burial ground. In one of his notebooks, Rossi describes it as an 'unfinished house'. It lacks a roof and has no floors, there are no glass panes in its 'windows'. To Rossi, nothing else comes this close to a true definition of architecture.⁸⁰ It is a monument which at the same time is 'simply' a structure that serves its function as a storing place for deceased bodies. But as we have seen, architecture is also Alcaeus's shell that captivates the child, and likewise, it must be Benjamin's shell which still contains the echoes of a life that has withdrawn from it. Such is the reason why Rossi also describes his 'house of the dead' as 'a space for the memories of the living' or as a 'civil architecture'.⁸¹ The dead, enclosed in niches on the inside of the house's walls, can be visited by means of a steel construction of stairs and galleries. Or should these in fact be loggias? Perhaps this unfinished house could also be thought of as a courtyard lined with loggias, a space which is inside and outside at the same time, in whose walls the sounds of reality enter from the top. A courtyard where 'time comes to a halt', like the courtyard from Benjamin's memoir.

'Nothing but Walter Benjamin's pages can explain what hasn't been described here', Rossi wrote in an introduction to one of his books.⁸² Perhaps there is no better way to express what has not already been said about Rossi's San Cataldo cemetery, than in these words from *Berlin Childhood around 1900*:

In the years since I was a child, the loggias have changed less than other places. This is not the only reason they stay with me. It is much more on account of the solace that lies in their uninhabitability for one who himself no longer has a proper abode. They mark the outer limit of the Berliner's lodging. Berlin – the city god itself – begins in them. The god remains such a presence there that nothing transitory can hold its ground beside him. In his safekeeping, space and time come into their own and find each other. Both of them lie at his feet here. The child who was once their confederate, however, dwells in his loggia, encompassed by this group, as in a mausoleum long intended just for him.⁸³

Notes

This paper is based on the author's thesis, submitted in September 2014 to obtain a Masters degree of Literary Studies at KU Leuven. I thank my study advisor Prof. Dr. Bart Keunen (Ghent University) for his support. In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Victoriano Sainz Gutiérrez (University of Seville) and Prof. Dr. Belgin Turan Özkaya (Middle East Technical University of Ankara) for their inspiring research work and for taking a keen interest in my study.

1. Aldo Rossi has left behind an impressive quantity of written work. For years he was the editor of the influential magazine *Casabella continuità*. His urban case studies and polemical writings were also published in other journals. The better part of these articles, originally collected in 1975, was recently reissued in: Aldo Rossi, *Scritti scelti sull'architettura e la città 1956–1972* (Macerata: Quodlibet Abitare, 2012). Rossi's most famous theoretical work, *L'architettura della città*

- from 1966, was translated by Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman as *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982).
2. S. Umberto Barbieri, 'Dierbare architectuur – nawoord', afterword to the Dutch translation of *A Scientific Autobiography: Aldo Rossi, Wetenschappelijke autobiografie* (Nijmegen: Sun, 1994), 157. The book's first edition appeared in English: Rossi, Aldo. *A Scientific Autobiography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981)
 3. For example the studies published in Annalisa Trentin (ed.), *La lezione di Aldo Rossi* (Bologna: Bnomia University Press, 2008). Another valuable study: Klaske Havik, *Urban Literacy: A Scriptive Approach to the Experience, Use, and Imagination of Place* (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2014). This author examines the common grounds of architecture and literature in many writers and architects; she notices a 'prescriptive' approach in the way Rossi makes use of literary concepts in his architecture.
 4. Giovanni Poletti, *L'Autobiografia scientifica di Aldo Rossi: Un'indagine tra scrittura e progetto di architettura* (Milan/ Turin: Bruno Mondadori, 2011), 4.
 5. Rossi, *Scritti scelti sull'architettura*. Author's translation.
 6. Victoriano Sainz Gutiérrez, 'Las distancias invisibles. Aldo Rossi y Walter Benjamin', *Thémata. Revista de Filosofía* 41 (2009): 372–399.
 7. Cameron McEwan, *The Architecture of Analogy: An Inquiry into Aldo Rossi's Theory of the City, the Discipline, the Type, and the Analogue*, PhD dissertation, University of Dundee, 2014.
 8. Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), from the German *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1950).
 9. Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 111.
 10. Brian Elliott, *Benjamin for Architects* (London: Routledge, 2011), 1.
 11. Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, 132. The German original is as follows: 'Ich aber bin entstellt vor Ähnlichkeit mit allem, was hier um mich ist. Ich hauste so wie ein Weichtier in der Muschel haust im neunzehnten Jahrhundert, das nun hohl wie eine leere Muschel vor mir liegt. Ich halte sie ans Ohr.' From: Benjamin, *Berliner Kindheit*.
 12. Belgin Turan Özkaya, 'Visuality and architectural history' in *Rethinking Architectural Historiography*, ed. Dana Arnold et al. (London: Routledge, 2006), 186–187. For another recent study of this film, see: Luka Skansi, 'Ornamento e delitto: un film di Aldo Rossi, Gianni Braghieri e Franco Raggi', in *La lezione di Aldo Rossi*, ed. Annalisa Trentin (Bologna: Bnomia University Press, 2008), 260–265.
 13. Benjamin began writing it in the summer of 1932 in the Tuscan seaside village Poveromo. Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, vii.
 14. Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Verso, 1997), from the German *Einbahnstrasse* (Berlin: Ernst Rowohlt Verlag, 1928).
 15. Gerhard Richter, *Thought-Images. Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 45–46.
 16. Cited in Howard Eiland, translator's foreword in Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, xii.
 17. Walter Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle', in *One-Way Street*, 316.
 18. In 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', Benjamin quotes Marcel Proust from a study on Charles Baudelaire: 'Time is peculiarly chopped up in Baudelaire (...).' Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, (London: Fontana Press, 1992), 177.
 19. Benjamin, 'Berlin Chronicle', 295.
 20. Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn*, 116.
 21. Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 'Physiognomie eines Physiognomikers' in *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamins*, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 159. Cited in: Olav Severijnen, *Individuum est ineffabile. De modernistische autobiografie tussen Goethe en Leiris* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), 179. Author's translation.
 22. Benjamin, 'Berlin Chronicle', 316.
 23. Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn*, 119–120.

24. I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Victoriano Sainz for drawing my attention to this. Victoriano Sainz Gutiérrez, e-mail message to author, 23 April, 2014.
25. Rossi, *Scientific Autobiography*, 1.
26. *Ibid.*, 25.
27. *Ibid.*, 25.
28. Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, 132.
29. Benjamin, 'Berlin Chronicle', 316.
30. Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, 130–131.
31. *Ibid.*, 131.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, 132.
34. *Ibid.*, 134.
35. *Ibid.*, 134–135.
36. The notion of the 'mise en abyme' in Benjamin is discussed in: Severijnen, *Individuum est ineffabile*, 203.
37. Neil Leach, 'Mimesis' in *Walter Benjamin and Architecture*, ed. Gevork Hartoonian (London: Routledge, 2010), 131.
38. *Ibid.*, 132.
39. Its potential for aesthetics has been acknowledged by Adorno, see: Leach, 'Mimesis', 132.
40. Rossi, *Scientific Autobiography*, 2. The still lives drawn by Rossi are also known as 'paesaggi domestici' (domestic landscapes), as he coined them.
41. Rossi, *Scientific Autobiography*, 2–3.
42. Severijnen, *Individuum est ineffabile*, 198. Author's translation.
43. This fragment from Benjamin's text 'Ausgraben und Erinnern' is quoted by David Frisby in his study *Fragments of Modernity. Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), 223. It exists in another version in 'A Berlin Chronicle', where the first sentence is: 'Language shows clearly that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its *theatre*', in: Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 314. 'Theatre' is the translation of 'Schauplatz'. Benjamin's first acquaintance with the theatre took place in the 'loggia' (see the last paragraph of this paper).
44. According to an observation from the translator's foreword in Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, xii–xiii.
45. However, in *Berlin Childhood* this 'layering' is mostly applied to places ('Tiergarten', 'Markthalle', 'Hiding Places') or furniture and appliances ('The Desk', 'Cabinets', 'The Sewing Box').
46. Benjamin developed this theory in one of his last texts, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' (1940). In this study I have mainly drawn from Frisby's insights in a section of his *Fragments of Modernity*, 187–265.
47. *Ibid.*, 216.
48. *Ibid.*, 218.
49. *Ibid.*, 217–218.
50. Elliott, *Benjamin for Architects*, 12. Benjamin's idea of history's 'promise' is beautifully analysed in: Peter Szondi, 'Hope in the Past' in Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, 1–33.
51. *Ibid.*, 225.
52. Rossi, *Scientific Autobiography*, 23.
53. Six months before Rossi died, Arduino Cantafora, an architect friend, published an article on Rossi in *Casabella* with the title 'Poche e profonde cose' ('A few and profound things'), which captures Rossi's artistry in a few words. Arduino Cantafora, 'Poche e profonde cose', *Casabella* 654 (1998): 7.
54. Aldo Rossi, 'Architettura. 20 ottobre '88 / 27 febb '89' in *I quaderni azzurri 1968–1992*, ed. Francesco Dal Co (Milan/ Los Angeles: Electa/ The Getty Research Institute, 1999), notebook n. 38.
55. Aldo Rossi, '2 luglio 1972/ 30 ottobre 1972', in *I quaderni azzurri 1968–1992*, notebook n. 13. Author's translation.
56. 'The analogous city' resulted from a collaboration between Rossi and three fellow architects: Eraldo Consolascio, Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart. It was conceived for the 1976 Venice architecture biennale.
57. Havik, *Urban Literacy*, 181. According to Havik, Rossi's panel perfectly illustrates how historical reality and the imagination of a future world are brought together in one image.
58. Aldo Rossi: 'The Analogous City: panel', text accompanying the exhibition panel, in *Forum International*, 13, (December 1976): 5–6. Also cited in Havik, *Urban Literacy*, 168.

59. Walter Benjamin, 'The Destructive Character (1931)', in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 301–303.
60. Walter Benjamin, 'Agesilaus Santander', in *Selected Writings. Vol. 2*, ed. Michael Jennings, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press, 2005), 714–16.
61. McEwan, 'Architecture of Analogy', 142.
62. *Ibid.*, 144.
63. Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1987), 15.
64. This process is analyzed in the work of Benjamin, Lefebvre and Tafuri in: Frank Cunningham, 'Triangulating Utopia: Benjamin, Lefebvre, Tafuri', *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, 14:3 (2010): 268–277. While the article reminds us of Tafuri's negative views of architectural utopia (he dismisses utopia's redemptive value because of its inscription within capitalist logic) and presents Benjamin's 'dialectics of awakening' as a less hostile stance towards utopia, it can be argued that Rossi's utopianism shows more affinity with Benjamin's views than with Tafuri's.
65. Rossi, *Scientific Autobiography*, 23.
66. For instance, the label of 'postmodern architecture' as is commonly used when attempts are made to designate Rossi's oeuvre could prove problematic if it simply covers the idea of architecture as 'historical pastiche'. While it certainly can be said that the latter concept recollects time fragments from history, similar in Rossi's case to Benjamin's thought-image of the collector, it is important to bear in mind the preliminary figure of the archaeologist who 'proceeds according to plan'. One might note that in Rossi's case, this 'plan' is laid out in *A Scientific Autobiography*, which guides us across significant 'architectures' in the author's life that 'distorted' him as he entered them. These historic architectures are never simply imitated in Rossi's own architecture, but are always brought to the present in a process of 'assimilation' that is in line with Benjamin's concept of mimesis.
67. Aldo Rossi, *Scientific Autobiography*, 19.
68. Cited in Severijnen, *Individuum est ineffabile*, 179.
69. Gerhard Richter, *Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography* (Wayne University Press, Detroit, 2000), 215.
70. Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, 38.
71. Severijnen, *Individuum est ineffabile*, 180. Author's translation.
72. Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, 39–40.
73. Severijnen, *Individuum est ineffabile*, 180. Author's translation.
74. *Ibid.*, 207–208. Severijnen also reminds us that the imagined time in *Berlin Childhood* is viewed by Bernd Witte as 'Bilder der Endzeit' ('Images of End Time').
75. Rossi, *Scientific Autobiography*, 19.
76. This is the design for the living quarter 'San Rocco' in Monza, from 1966. A large model of San Rocco was one of Rossi's cherished objects and hung on one of his studio walls for years. For a description: Alberto Ferlenga (ed.), *Aldo Rossi: Tutte le opere* (Milan: Electa, 1999), 40.
77. Rossi's design for this building block was erected in Berlin's Schützenstrasse between 1992 and 1998. See Ferlenga, *Aldo Rossi*, 402–407 and Marco Brandolisio et. al., *Aldo Rossi: Disegni 1990–1997* (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 1999), 90–97.
78. Rossi, *Scientific Autobiography*, 15.
79. Geert Bekaert, 'The analogue of a proletarian architecture. Notes for an article on Aldo Rossi', in *Rooted in the Real*, ed. Christophe Van Gerrewey (Ghent: WZW Editions and Productions, 2011), 327.
80. Aldo Rossi, 'Architettura – Il cimitero di Modena – 5 agosto 1971–10 ottobre 1971' in *I quaderni azzurri 1968–1992*, no. 9. This can be viewed as a reference to Adolf Loos's famous statement 'Das ist architektur.' See Adolf Loos, 'Architektur', in *Der Sturm*, 15 Dec. 1910.
81. Aldo Rossi, 'L'azzurro del cielo', *Controspazio* 10 (1972): 4–9. English translation: 'The blue of the sky' in *Oppositions* 5 (1976): 31–34.
82. Rossi, *Scritti scelti sull'architettura e la città 1956–1972*, XIII. Author's translation.
83. Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, 42.

Biography

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Benjamin and Koolhaas: History's Afterlife

Frances Hsu

Paris

Walter Benjamin called Paris the capital of the nineteenth century. In his eponymous expository exposé, written between 1935 and 1939, he outlines a project to uncover the reality of the recent past, the pre-history of modernity, through the excavation of the ideologies, i.e., dreamworlds, embodied in material and cultural artefacts of the nineteenth century. He used images to create a history that would illuminate the contemporaneous workings of capital that had created the dreamlands of the city. The *loci* for the production of dreamworlds were the arcades – pedestrian passages, situated between two masonry structures, that were lined on both sides with cafés, shops and other amusements and typically enclosed by an iron and glass roof. Over three hundred arcades were once scattered throughout the urban fabric of Paris. This building type flourished before they were destroyed by Haussman's boulevards. When Benjamin arrived in Paris, the arcades were places haunted by ghosts of the past. *The Arcades Project* identified in the arcades a commodity-filled dream state – phantasmagoria, which operated through the mechanisms of displays, advertising, newspapers, lighting and other newly developing technologies to create desire while masking the underpinnings of consumer manipulation. To prompt a new awareness and collective awakening from the dream of the nineteenth century his book's unmasking of the social and psychological deceptions perpetrated by architecture '[led] the past to bring the present into a critical state'.¹

Benjamin intended his arcades project to be politically revolutionary. He worked on his opus while living dangerously under Fascism as a refugee in Paris, where, unable to secure an academic position, he wrote for newspapers under various German pseudonyms. He had solicited support from the Institute for Social Research that was re-established in New York in 1934 in association with Columbia University. His project was unfinished at the end of the 1930s. He had collected numerous artefacts, drawings, photographs, texts, letters and papers – images reflecting the life of poets, artists, writers, workers, engineers and others. He had also produced many loose, handwritten pages organised into folders that catalogued not only his early exposés but also literary and philosophical passages from nineteenth century sources and his observations, commentaries and reflections for a theory and method of addressing the past. *Das Passagen-Werk* and the first complete English translation *The Arcades Project* are divided into sections called *Konvolute*, the German word derived from the Latin term for bundles.² Labelled from A to Z and then lowercase a to r, the convolutes refer to Benjamin's folders, or folios, covering a broad range of subjects bearing titles such as 'Arcades, magasins de nouveautés, calicots'; 'Baudelaire'; 'Iron Construction'; 'Painting, Jugendstil, Novelty'; 'Saint-Simon, Railroads'; and 'The Seine, The Oldest Paris'.

Benjamin's unfinished research compiled in *The Arcades Project* has been subject to rigorous scrutiny of both its structure and its content across

disciplines, in architecture, literary criticism, sociology, aesthetics, cultural and media studies.³ This essay primarily addresses Convolute N, 'On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress', the section containing core statements of *The Arcades Project* where the term 'dialectical image' is theorised and Benjamin struggles with questions of social critique. For Susan Buck-Morss, whose book *Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* was one of the first works on Benjamin to reach a broad audience of American architects in the 1990s, Benjamin's dialectical images were conceived and perceived as dream images that had the power to reveal the myth of progress behind industrial production. It was 'a question of the dissolution of "mythology" into the space of history. That, of course, can happen only through the awakening of a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been.'⁴ In other words, the dialectical image was part of the commodity – a dream object that acts as a screen between consciousness (knowledge) and unconscious desire. (It was not until the time of his suicide in 1940 that the semi-Marxist Benjamin wrote, 'To articulate the past historically [...] means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.'⁵ He used Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* to invoke a theological image of the 'angel of history' blown backwards into the future by the storm of progress, the catastrophic detritus of history at his feet.

Manhattan

Rem Koolhaas sought to expose the irrational side of modern architecture. In *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* he called Manhattan the twentieth century's Rosetta Stone. His book refuted the modern movement's claims to functionalism, propriety, and objectivity, or *Sachlichkeit*, through the detection of programmatic fantasy – delirium – driving the development of the speculative, capitalist city based on optimisation of land use, cost, and building construction. He

invented the concept of Manhattanism in order to reformulate the principles of the modern movement for contemporary times – and prove that New York was an invention of the twentieth century.⁶

Koolhaas was rooted in an academic milieu. The Dutch architect remained in voluntary exile from 1968 to 1978, during his architecture studies in England and the US at schools from which significant architectural thinkers emerged.⁷ At Cornell University and the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies he researched the technology and infrastructure of places such as Coney Island and Radio City Music Hall as well as the building type of the developer-driven skyscraper – Rockefeller Centre, New York Athletic Club and the anonymous (unbranded) tall buildings that made up much of Manhattan's urban fabric.⁸ He was supported by the philanthropic Harkness Fellowship and taught courses at Columbia, UCLA, Delft, and the AA. During this time, neo-Marxist urban theory was an important part of academic architecture discourse at many schools. While he does not mention Benjamin in his writings, he may surely have had the opportunity to familiarise himself with the German philosopher's writings through his proximity to Manfredo Tafuri. Both the influential Italian philosopher and the young Dutch graduate student were Europeans at the Institute researching the history of Manhattan.⁹ Tafuri associated the historical avant-garde with dialectical thought.¹⁰ His identification of architecture as ideology and consequently the historian's obligation to play a demystifying role was greatly influenced by Benjamin's notion of history, merging Surrealism and Marxism with a language of images.

Delirious New York is structured like a series of Manhattan city blocks determined by the grid: chapters are similar in size and, with the exception of the first chapter and conclusion, are organised without hierarchy. In the prologue called 'Prehistory',

Koolhaas discovers that New York had developed a mythical past. For the advancement of the city it is necessary for him to 'mythologise its past and to rewrite a history that can serve its future'.¹¹ In the middle chapters, linear historical narratives are fragmented and viewed episodically. Within the chapters, passages are headed with titles such as 'end', 'theorem', 'alibis', and 'camouflage', terms that remain unexplained and imprecise both in the larger context of the book and the passages themselves. The last chapter, 'A Fictional Conclusion' shows the OMA projects that were exhibited concurrently with the book's first publication at The Sparkling Metropolis exhibition held at the Guggenheim Museum.

Delirious New York was well-promoted and reviewed in both the popular press and architecture publications.¹² Just before leaving New York, Koolhaas organised an exhibition on Wallace Harrison called 'Beyond Good or Bad'. His interest in the American architect's professional skills had been sparked by criticism of OMA's work as part of the deprofessionalisation of architecture. Koolhaas edited and wrote an introduction for the exhibition catalogue *Wallace Harrison: Fifty years of Architecture* (IAUS, 1980). Upon opening OMA and getting his first building commissions in 1980, Koolhaas continued to address the construction of the city. His writing was journalistic; he did not attempt to formalise his historical findings as realised in *Delirious New York*.¹³

History, revolution, awakening

The Arcades Project and *Delirious New York* both map the connections between images of the city captured in objects, sites and artefacts, and the social space of the images; both authors are intent on revealing the hegemonic ideological systems supporting canonical readings of history. Benjamin addresses the processes of constructing history. His work,

comparable, in method, to the process of splitting the atom – liberates the enormous energies of history that are bound up in the 'once upon a time' of classical historiography. The history that showed things 'as they really were' was the strongest narcotic of the century.¹⁴

He looks to alternative temporal models of psychoanalysis and Marxism to counter traditional notions of historiography which he calls 'historicism'. He writes, 'historical "understanding" is to be grasped, in principle, as an afterlife of that which is understood; and what has been recognised in the analysis of the "afterlife of works"'.¹⁵ He attempts to integrate his ideas about the twentieth century visual realm with their origin in the singular realities of the working class: 'Must the Marxist understanding of history bourgeois be acquired at the expense of the perceptibility of history? Or: in what way is it possible to conjoin a heightened graphicness (*Anschaulichkeit*) to the realisation of the Marxist method?'¹⁶ Yet while he wishes to see historical artefacts as products of individual action and collective human consciousness, Benjamin questions the orthodoxy of the Marxist, linear, nineteenth century view of history: 'It may be considered one of the methodological objectives of this work to demonstrate a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress [...]. Its founding concept is not progress but actualisation.'¹⁷ And, 'so must every presentation of history begin with awakening; in fact, it should treat of nothing else. This one, accordingly, deals with awakening from the nineteenth century.'¹⁸

The method employs images whose meaning is determined by the conflation between the time of the viewing in the present and the time of the image:

For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time [...]. Every present day is determined by the images

that are synchronic with it: each “now” is the now of a particular recognisability [...]. It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.¹⁹

Benjamin sees the dilemma of his problematic concept of history in modern times based on images that are both temporal and ‘eternal’. The image is ‘dialectics at a standstill’ – it ‘coagulates into stasis’, both recording a particular historical event and having the potential to transmute the past and coalesce with the present.²⁰ According to Rolf Tiedemann, editor of *The Arcades Project*, in his misreadings of Marxist theory Benjamin rationalises the paradox of double meaning by conceiving the image as a ‘historical constellation’ of the collective subconscious past – a kind of psychoanalytical Surrealist Marxism removed from the Marxian idea of history as successive, inevitable stages in the development of a society.²¹

For Koolhaas, production itself has no meaning (in *Delirious New York* he writes about architecture created through design collaboration but not the labour of building) and visual representations prevail over the reality of their historical origin. Architecture is an intellectual practice in which elements from the past can be reassembled to create a new ‘image’ or meaning through a personal interpretative process. Consequently, meaning in the city remains individual and subjective: ‘Since the world of nations is made by men, it is inside their minds that its principles should be sought’; and ‘Why do we have a mind if not to get our way?’²² Koolhaas had learned to view architecture as a set of given images, elements, models that could be reassembled at will in his studies with O. M. Ungers at Cornell. Ungers’s research into morphology was influenced by the analogy of architecture to language. The city was an assemblage of given artefacts that were in a constant state of typological transformation,

a kind of grammar where models and images were like letters or pieces of writing. The content of the models and images, their meanings, were expressed in literary terms as metaphors, symbols and allegories:

Thinking and designing in images, metaphors, models, analogies, symbols and allegories is nothing more than a transition from purely pragmatic approaches and a more creative mode of thinking. These are part of a morphological concept understood as the study of formations and transformations, whether of thoughts, facts, objects or conditions as they present themselves to sentient experiences.²³

Delirious New York identifies typological and programmatic transformations in the history of Manhattan. Koolhaas’s goal in so doing is to address the problem of architectural meaning discussed in the debate on postmodernism in Anglo-American architecture culture.²⁴ The significance of Manhattan does not lie in the inventive use of its historical styles. He opposes the uses of history by those he perceives as his adversaries: on one hand, the contextualism of Colin Rowe and the historicism of Leon Krier are superficial references to history; on the other, historians’ canonical view of the modern movement’s refusal of history is one-sided. Koolhaas wants to restore the social, cultural and symbolic values to the modern architecture of Manhattan by viewing it through the lenses of narrative, symbol and type. The forms and programmes of the modern city are ‘a repertoire of shapes and activities that await a possible meaning.’²⁵ His work is a ‘delirium of interpretation’ that ‘ties the loose ends left by the rationalism of the Enlightenment finally together.’²⁶ Manhattan is an archive, ‘a catalogue of models and precedents: all the desirable elements that exist scattered through the Old World finally assembled in a single place.’²⁷ *Delirious New York* is ‘conceptual recycling’, that would ‘destroy [...] the definitive catalogue, to short-circuit all existing categorisations, to make a fresh start – as

if the world can be reshuffled like a pack of cards whose original sequence is a disappointment.¹²⁸

Surrealism, image

When Benjamin and Koolhaas apply psychoanalytic vocabulary to objects they refer to Surrealism's use of chance encounters, or dialectical juxtapositions, to ally the everyday life of the past with the unconscious. The visual practices of Surrealism conceived images as complex emblems of imagination and awareness. Benjamin used a dialectical interpretation of images to disrupt the established understanding of historical progress. In his essay 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', written in 1929, while he was working on *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin uses the term 'profane illumination' to describe the unexpected and transfiguring dialectical nature of images and artefacts.²⁹ Not only does he relocate the historical image to the present through the Surrealist notion of experience connected to images. He also values the aspect of Surrealism that reads into artefacts a mythical and magical dimension representing a larger collective. His is a cultural rather than sociological or empirical (Marxian) way of interpreting urban space. His rhetoric on the revolutionary energy of the image includes the visibility of technology:

Only a thoughtless observer can deny that correspondences come into play between the world of modern technology and the archaic symbol-world of mythology [...]. Only, it takes form not in the aura of novelty but in the aura of the habitual. In memory, childhood, and dream. Awakening.³⁰

Benjamin recognises the Surrealist content of images in the twentieth century when he associates his concept of the dialectical image with the temporal moment:

On the dialectical image. In it lies time. Already with Hegel, time enters into dialectic. But the Hegelian

dialectic knows time solely as the properly historical, if not psychological, time of thinking. The time differential (*Zeitdifferential*) in which alone the dialectical image is real is still unknown to him [...]. All in all, the temporal momentum (*das Zeitmoment*) in the dialectical image can be determined only through confrontation with another concept. This concept is the 'now of recognisability' (*Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit*).³¹

The historian should construct a new history by creating dialectical image fragments from the wreckage of bourgeois history:

Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them [...].³²

The first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event.³³

In their analysis of architectural artefacts, Benjamin and Koolhaas are examples of the use of Surrealist montage as a device to rescue critique. The arcades were a place where the new is intermingled with the old. Montage is the presence of the past in the present, the relationship of the 'now' to the 'what-has-been' in material and cultural objects. Through montage, phenomena 'are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them [...] from the discredit and neglect into which they have fallen, [...] their enshrinement as heritage'.³⁴ One dialectical image might be found in the ancient figures found in turn of the century iron construction. These images are symbols of desire in which the ancient figures appeal to a 'prehistory' associated with a classless society while preserving the innovation of the

system of production. In other words, the image is a representation that expresses the unconscious. The materials for montage could be found in images of the outmoded – the ‘refuse’ of history reflecting accelerated time, falling quickly out of fashion and losing newness to seem paradoxically archaic; debris of industrial-capitalist society. The outmoded includes ‘the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them’.³⁵ The method of montage is a multi-step process that moves from unconsciousness to the conscious perception of the unconscious, followed by the ‘lightning flash’ of recognition, or awakening:

First dialectical stage: the arcade changes from a place of splendor to a place of decay.

Second dialectical stage: the arcade changes from an unconscious experience to something consciously penetrated.

Not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been. Structure of what-has-been at this stage. Knowledge of what has been as a becoming aware, one that has the structure of awakening.

Not-yet-conscious knowledge on the part of the collective.

All insight to be grasped according to the schema of awakening. And shouldn’t the “not-yet-conscious knowledge” have the structure of dream?³⁶

The Arcades Project, originally subtitled *Eine dialektische Feerie* (A Dialectical Fairyland) juxtaposes fragmented quotes from various sources with the author’s own commentary. It both describes and is structured around the montage principle. ‘To write history, Benjamin says, means to quote history. But the concept of quotation implies that any given

historical object must be ripped out of its context.’³⁷ His aim was ‘to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks.’³⁸ Reflection and critique go hand in hand: ‘To grasp the construction of history as such. In the structure of commentary. Refuse of History.’³⁹

Delirious New York is composed almost entirely of dialectical pairs – opposites, odd couples and alter egos – on the level of literary devices, buildings, symbols and movements. These are the constituent parts of the ‘Capital of Perpetual Crisis’. Skyscrapers are described as a form that resolves the contradiction between flexible program and architectural permanence: ‘both architecture and hyper-efficient machines, both modern and eternal [...] resolving forever the conflict between form and function [...] creating a city where permanent monoliths celebrate metropolitan instability.’⁴⁰ The fifth chapter positions Koolhaas as the point of convergence between Salvador Dali and Le Corbusier. *Delirious New York* is part of the discourse on the postmodern dialectical city founded on oppositional values and aimed at merging the real and the ideal, fact and fiction, the metaphorical and the literal.⁴¹ It is part of the development of postmodern architectural thought directly related to the proliferation of images in the rapid development of the architectural press. The book depicts Manhattan as an amalgam of historical dream images, created by architects, artists, developers, visionaries, philosophers and journalists set in unexpected combinations. The city is a palimpsest of media made possible by technology in the age of art’s mechanical reproduction.

Koolhaas framed his work as the unveiling of the unconscious of Manhattan. The discovery of Manhattan as the unconscious, irrational side of the Modern Movement would breathe life into modern architecture and rescue it from the suffocation of literal structure. His book describes the process by which images are made critical through Salvador Dali’s process of paranoid interpretation that

related Auguste Millet's 1857 painting *L'Angelus* to Dali's own preoccupations. He associates the delirious process described in Dali's diagram to Le Corbusier's reinforced-concrete construction, describing the transformative moment when calcified images begin to liquefy and a stream of new associations flows forth:

Diagram of the inner workings of the Paranoid-Critical Method: limp, improvable conjectures generated through the deliberate simulation of paranoiac thought processes, supported (made critical) by the 'crutches' of Cartesian rationality.⁴²

Dali's diagram of the Paranoid-Critical Method at work doubles as diagram of reinforced-concrete construction: a mouse-gray liquid with the substance of vomit, held up by steel reinforcements calculated according to the strictest Newtonian physics; infinitely malleable at first, then suddenly hard as a rock.⁴³

Paris and Manhattan are conceived as cities of postponed consciousness where meanings can be grasped only after the fact. Just as *Delirious New York* is demonstration and proof of Koolhaas's operation for reinserting historical images into the present, so *The Arcades Project* is both illustration and description of Benjamin's method of awakening. Koolhaas turns to Dali's paranoid method that consciously exploited the unconscious. Benjamin uses 'cunning' and 'tricks' to 'awaken' readers:

We construct an awakening theoretically – that is, we imitate, in the realm of language, the trick that is decisive physiologically in awakening, for awakening operates with cunning. Only with cunning, not without it, can we work free of the realm of dream.⁴⁴

Illumination, retroaction

In his Surrealism essay, Benjamin conceptualised the irrationality of awakening as a kind of profane illumination in contrast to mystical or 'messianic' religious experience. Throughout his writings the

dialectical image was a mental concept, a wish image whose power to reveal the myth of progress behind industrial production was dependent upon the mind's eye, the ability of the author to transfigure the image. The arcades were part of an intellectual reflection on the newly-arrived twentieth century and springboard for his own imagination. For Koolhaas, the affectation of paranoid delirium was the key to valorising his ambition to theorise and place the vernacular architecture of Manhattan in the framework of the modernist avant-garde. Calling Dali's paranoid method the 'conscious exploitation of the unconscious', he derived his own operative method, called retroaction, for exposing the irrational side of modern architecture by viewing it from multiple dialectical perspectives. The method enabled him to use Manhattan's modern architecture, during the 1970s, as a 'natural' archive of historical artefacts.

Manhattan must have seemed surreal to the European architecture student who had dreamt of New York as a child, observed it from afar, and upon his arrival saw things that a native-born American might not notice. *Delirious New York* is in part an examination of Manhattan after the war when the majority of the Surrealists arrived.⁴⁵ It is as if Koolhaas experienced and recorded the 'interpretive delirium [which] begins only when man, ill-prepared, is taken by a sudden fear in the forest of symbols.'⁴⁶ Benjamin had himself solicited support from the Institute for Social Research that had been re-established in 1934 in association with Columbia University. His work lies implicitly within the parameters of Koolhaas's work, part of the dream world of urban space and images of mass culture, whose critical value, like that of *The Arcades Project*, lay in its ability to look forwards and backwards at the same time, to view past and the present in a dialectic relationship.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H.

- Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 2000), N7a,S. Originally published as *Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981).
2. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*.
 3. Accounts of Benjamin's thinking include: Ackbar Abbas, 'On Fascination: Walter Benjamin's Images', *New German Critique*, no. 48 (Autumn 1989), 43–62; Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (New York: Free Press, 1979); Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Michael Jennings, 'Re: Richard Sieburth on Walter Benjamin', *Assemblage*, no. 7 (Oct. 1988), 118–120; Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin, An Aesthetic of Redemption* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Richard Wolin, 'Experience and Materialism in Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*', in G. Smith et al., *Benjamin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Rolf Tiedemann, 'Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the *Passagen-Werk*' introduction to Benjamin, *Arcades Project*.
 4. Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing*.
 5. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255.
 6. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
 7. Koolhaas returned to the Netherlands to open the OMA office in Rotterdam with Madelon Vriesendorp and Elia and Zoe Zenghelis after the publication of *Delirious New York*.
 8. Many buildings from the 1920s and 30s were still standing in 1972 when Koolhaas visited the city.
 9. Frances Hsu, 'The Operative Criticism of Rem Koolhaas', *ReBuilding: Proceedings of the ACSA Annual Meeting* (2010): 379–384. Tafuri was a controversial figure known for addressing the 'eclipse of history', 'crisis of the object' and the death of modern architecture. *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), was published in 1973, the year he was invited to teach at the Institute. Koolhaas found Tafuri intimidating. Though Koolhaas tells the story of his avoidance of and antagonism towards Tafuri and distrust of Marxism, their paths surely crossed at the Institute even though there are no records of personal intercourse that would provide some clues to their exchanges. One could speculate on the basis of suggestive details from intellectual life at the Institute involving many including Rosalind Krauss who wrote on Surrealism, Kenneth Frampton, et al. My argument for Tafuri's importance to Koolhaas is based on their common concerns with Manhattan, art, myth and history and comparison of their ideologically distinct essays both published in the same journal: Manfredo Tafuri, 'L'Architecture dans le boudoir', *Oppositions*, 3 (1974); Rem Koolhaas, 'Architect's Ball, 1931', *Oppositions* 3, (1974).
 10. Tafuri, Manfredo, *Theories and History of Architecture*, trans. Giorgio Verrecchia (New York: Harper & Row, [1968] 1980); Tafuri in 'L'Architecture dans le boudoir' *Oppositions*, 3 (1974) presented the binary oppositions of theory and practice, architectural project and utopia; and proposed a critical method based on the juxtaposition of comment and criticism. While at the Institute, Tafuri criticised the activity in New York centred around the IAUS, including the 'jokes' of Koolhaas. (The 'formal terrorism of Eisenman, the polysemia of Graves, the rigorism of Meier, the linguistic cruelty of Agrest and Gandelsonas, the ingenious aphorisms of Robert Stern, the meta-physical games of Machado and Silvetti, the "jokes" of Koolhaas' – all were neuroses stemming from the inability to build'. Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere & The Labyrinth*, trans. Pellegrino d'Acierno and Robert Connolly (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 299.
 11. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 13.
 12. See *The Village Voice*, Nov. 6 1978; Peter Blake, *New York Magazine*; Pascal Dupont, *Les Nouvelles*

- Litteraires*; Richard Ingersoll, *Concrete*, February 14, 1979; Reyner Banham, *New Society*, April 12, 1979; Paul Goldberger, *New York Review of Books*, June 14, 1979; Patrick Pinnell, *Skyline*, March 1979.
13. Rem Koolhaas and Wakefield, 'Arthur Erickson vs. the All-Stars: The Battle of Bunker Hill', *Trace* 1, no. 3 (1981): 9–15. Rem Koolhaas, 'A Foundation of Amnesia', *Design Quarterly* 125 (1984): 5–13. Rem Koolhaas, 'L'Architecture, pour qui? pour quoi?', *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 4, no. 238 (1985): 71. Rem Koolhaas, 'De wereld is rijp voor de architect als visionair' (Maaskant Prize lecture, 1986).
 14. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, N3,4.
 15. *Ibid.*, N2,3.
 16. *Ibid.*, N2,6.
 17. *Ibid.*, N2,2.
 18. *Ibid.*, N4,3.
 19. *Ibid.*, N3,1.
 20. *Ibid.*, N3,1. 'In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural [*bildlich*]. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical – that is, not archaic images. The image that is read – which is to say, the image in the now of its recognisability – bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.' *Ibid.*, 10. Modernity 'occurs through the ambiguity peculiar to the social relations and products of this epoch. Ambiguity is the appearance of dialectics in images, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, dream image. Such an image is afforded by the commodity per se: as fetish. Such an image is presented by the arcades, which are house no less than street. Such an image is the prostitute-seller and sold in one.'
 21. Tiedemann, 'Dialectics at a Standstill', 942–43.
 22. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 9.
 23. Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Morphologie, City Metaphors* (Cologne: Walter König, 1982). (Catalogue to the exhibition 'Man Transforms' held at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York, October 1976).
 24. Broadly speaking, there were two camps, which, despite their differences, focused primarily on stylistic issues. A distinction existed between those who believed architecture could transmit meaning exterior to itself and those for whom architecture was a self-referential language. The former group opposed the modern aesthetic of corporate architecture and looked back to classical, vernacular and popular models. The latter, intending to retrieve the profession from political interests, severed modern architecture from its social and symbolic meanings to develop an autonomous language of essentially formalist typologies and morphologies that were structuralist in spirit (the neorationalists).
 25. Bernard Tschumi, 'On Delirious New York: A Critique of Critiques, Review', *International Architect*, no. 3, vol. 1, (1980): 68–69.
 26. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 243.
 27. *Ibid.*, *Delirious New York*, 7.
 28. *Ibid.*, *Delirious New York*, 238, 241.
 29. Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', trans. Edmond Jephcott, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 1, ed. Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). For an in-depth discussion of the nuances between Benjamin's *One Way Street* and the Surrealism essay focusing on the revolutionary potential found by Benjamin in Surrealism's literary works see Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley, University of California Press 1993.) Cohen addresses the discussion of 'the subject's more equivocal contact with contemporary reality', the experience of shock in Benjamin's late work 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (1939) where the concept 'comes to its full-blown expression.'
 30. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, N2a,1.
 31. *Ibid.*, Q°,21.
 32. *Ibid.*, N1a,8.
 33. *Ibid.*, N2,6.
 34. *Ibid.*, N9,4.
 35. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, trans. Peter Demetz (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 181.

36. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 907.
37. *Ibid.*, N11,3.
38. *Ibid.*, N1,10.
39. *Ibid.*, N2,6.
40. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 296.
41. *Complexity and Contradiction* is based on the oppositions of pure / hybrid, distorted / straightforward, ambiguous / articulated, etc. *Collage City* is the sum of two received representations, the traditional urbanism made up of open spaces 'carved out of a solid mass' and its opposite, Le Corbusier's *ville verte* of isolated buildings standing free in 'natural' space. Both then contrast with the representation of the ideal city. The book is predicated on the polarities of figure/ground, object/void, inside/outside, ancient/modern, sacred/profane. Literal and phenomenal transparency were opposed in the 'Transparency' essays by Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky ('Transparency', *Perspecta* 8, 1963 and 13/14, 1971) Also see Aldo Rossi, *La città analoga*.
42. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 236.
43. *Ibid.*, 248.
44. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 907.
45. Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). 'When the majority of the Surrealists arrived in New York after the war, they found America alien and as a whole a "land without myth". Looking for icons and symbols to give meaning to their environment, they found nothing in the city that would fit into the modes of thinking that they had brought with them from Paris and elsewhere. New York lacked precisely that which gave resonance to the places from which they had come. Those sculptural and architectural icons that fulfilled the need for unifying symbols, the streets, buildings and squares resonant with the ever-present past, had few counterparts in the urban environments of the new world.'
46. Andre Breton, *L'Amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937).

Biography

Frances Hsu teaches courses in architectural history, theory and criticism as well as advanced graduate research studios in housing and urbanism at Aalto University. She has taught at the Georgia Institute of Technology and Mississippi State University, and worked at the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, Ben van Berkel and Peter Eisenman. Her essays addressing the influence of French theory on architectural postmodernism with a focus on the work of Rem Koolhaas appear most recently in *A Critical History of Modern Architecture 1960–2010*, *Spielraum*, *Walter Benjamin et l'Architecture*, *JAE*, *Clog*, and *The Cambridge Architectural Journal* (forthcoming). She received a B.S. Architecture from the University of Virginia, a Master of Architecture from Harvard University, and her Ph.D. from the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture at the ETH in Zurich.

Benjamin's Dialectical Image and the Textuality of the Built Landscape

Ross Lipton

Introduction

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin describes the architectural expression of nineteenth century Paris as a dialectical manifestation of backwards-looking historicism and the dawn of modern industrial production (in the form of cast iron and mass produced plate glass).¹ Yet in the same text, Benjamin refers to the dialectical image as occurring within the medium of written language. In this paper, I will first discuss the textuality of the dialectical image as it emerges from Benjamin's discussion of allegorical and symbolic images in his *Trauerspiel* study and the 'wish symbol' in *The Arcades Project*.² I will then discuss the 'textual reductionism' implicit in Benjamin's theory of the dialectical image, in which the dense pluralities of urban space are reduced to a finite script to be pieced together through Benjamin's constructivist method of historical observation. The textuality of the dialectical image will be elaborated on by discussing it in relation to the practice of translation. This discussion will be further contextualised by discussing a cadre of German/Austrian planners and architects who attempted to translate architectural idioms between cultural identities in Kemalist Era Turkey. The article concludes with a short recapitulation on the dialectical image as both an object of scrutiny and a method of observation, one which also takes into consideration the specific historicity of the observer.

The built landscape and the image

The modernist movement in architecture and urban planning has left us with a bevy of discourses that shape the built landscape into a monolithic symbol, a narrative in which structures and the voids between form a unity of purpose. Ebenezer Howard's Garden City of To-Morrow, Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City, Daniel Burnham's Colombia Exposition and City Beautiful, and Le Corbusier's *La Ville Radieuse* are all overarching systems of civic, structural and aesthetic organisation that regiment space through their various ideological presuppositions.³ These schemes represent a utopian yearning for stasis, equilibrium and most importantly 'imageability'. Implicit in these discourses on the city and the structures within it is the attempt to bind the variegated strands of perception and interpretation through the emergence of a new symbolic and visual language. Each utopian salvation narrative enunciates its own symbolic vision of the peaceable kingdom.

Much of the discussion around image in architecture and urban planning is firmly entrenched within the realm of the symbolic. For example, the landscape of Le Corbusier's unbuilt *Ville Radieuse*, as defined by the clean geometric surfaces of the 'Cartesian skyscrapers' separated by vast swathes of green space, symbolises the human subject's return to a golden age of optical simplicity.⁴ In urban planner Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, urban space is described as capable of being suspended

into a series of interconnected images that the city-goer creates in his or her mind. The 'legibility' of a cityscape, thus, becomes a particular place's ability to be 'recognised and organised' into 'a coherent pattern'.⁵ This ability of urban space to be replicated through the pneumatic scaffolding of its inhabitants is what Lynch refers to as its 'imageability'.⁶ A 'workable image' must be reified into a legible symbol to be visually comprehended by those wayfinding through the convulsive terrains of urban space. Thus, in this context, urban space requires an equilibrium, a stability in which the flux of becoming is arrested so that it may be observed carefully within the tranquil fullness of time.⁷ For example, the 'image' of Le Corbusier's cruciform 'high-rises in a park' with its programmatic attempt to abolish 'randomness' through an annulment of human interaction is inherently 'undialectical', partly due to its imposition of an ideological agenda onto the contingencies of the built environment.

Walter Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image rests on a dialogical model in which the essence of 'imageability' is not contained in the image itself but in the relationship between the viewer and the object. In this way, the dialectical image is a method of seeing rather than an inert sign. Moses Maimonides discusses the Hebrew word *zelem* as image: 'let us make men in our *zelem*'.⁸ In contradistinction to the word *to'ar* that denotes external appearance, *zelem* implies a being's intrinsic sense of unity and purposiveness in the Aristotelian sense: 'the essence of a thing whereby the thing is what it is; the reality of a thing in so far as it is that particular being.'⁹ The Jewish taboo against graven images derives from the immateriality of the divine soul, which would thus be degraded by attempts to depict specific features. Yet, as Maimonides claims, idols are categorised as graven images because they are worshipped for the 'ideas they represent' instead of due to their physical appearance.¹⁰ In this way, the image is a dialogically interpreted sign that requires the observer to classify an object as representative

of something extrinsic to itself. The golden calf is a sacrilegious image not because of what it depicts (an animal) but what it is meant to signify (a deity).

W. J. T. Mitchell, in 'What is an Image', discusses this fraught relationship between the image as a symbol and a grammatical sign; Mitchell sees this tension as an illusion obscuring the difference between reality and its mimetic representation: 'the image is the sign that pretends not to be a sign, masquerading as (or, for the believer, actually achieving) natural immediacy and presence.'¹¹ The image inhabits the conceptual space between that of an indexical idea and a living organism that constantly alters in meaning and significance. The ambiguous nature of the image haunts Benjamin's writings from his early study on the Baroque allegorical emblem (as discussed below) to his discussion of the dialectical image in *The Arcades Project*, and complicates any attempt to characterise Benjamin's approach to the concept of image as either an object of knowledge or an optical method of perceiving reality. The paradoxical nature of the image also affects the way in which the built landscape is discussed as both a contingent space that only exists as a field of diverse, sporadic human interactions, and as an indexical unity of information that can be read as a script with a fixed meaning, coordinated through grammatical and syntactical structure. In terms of the latter, there is a threat of reductionism that informs any attempt to forge a systematic and transcendent framework that could universally apply to the fluctuating and culturally specific habits of human habitation (as discussed below). This attempt to abstract the complexity of an inhabited place into the conceptual space of an urban planner, and then to 'translate' its formal and aesthetic parameters across geographic/cultural boundaries, relies on a belief that there is a universal spatial/architectural language that could equally apply to every corner of the globe. This global modernising project of Western architectural and urban planning grounds itself on the notion

that the built landscape can be envisioned as a text that can be scrambled, translated and rephrased in order to fit the interests of the planner or architect as author. As we will discuss, the 'translatable' nature of space and its condensation into images is both formulated and contested within Benjamin's own writing.

Benjamin problematises the normative concept of the image as a discreet unit of signification by discussing the tensions between varying kinds of images. We will first trace this discussion by analysing Benjamin's binary pair of the allegory and the symbol as two contrasting forms of images before we discuss the implications within the dialectical image.

The allegorical image

In the *Trauerspiel* study, written in the form of a *Habilitationschrift* in 1925 for the University of Frankfurt, Benjamin describes a particular Baroque view of nature in which all nature is embedded with the dynamic fluidity of history as manifested through the ubiquity of ruination and decay within material reality. Influenced by Warburg's work on the *Nachleben* of images, Benjamin describes this baroque optic straddling various temporalities (between the contemporaneous moment of the Reformation and antiquity).¹² This baroque view emerged out of Calvinist Reformation theology. Calvinism changed the emphasis of salvation from that of good works to a narrative of predestination. Thus, the individual exists within a melancholic relationship to external reality, bereft of personal agency regarding redemption. This kind of dejected mode of reflection manifests itself through the baroque emblem.

As Benjamin defines it, *Melencolia*, visually depicted in the famous Dürer print of the same name, is a numbed emotional state, outwardly focused on 'the utensils of active life' with which one cannot enter into a creative or natural relationship,

since they solely exist as sterile, unused 'objects of contemplation.'¹³ In this moment, defined by the secularisation of human history, wrought by the doctrine of Calvinist predestination, the melancholic individual feels a lack of agency in their own fate, which can no longer be altered by their own volition. This sentiment induces an estranged relationship to the living world, which can then only be mediated through an 'enigmatic satisfaction' in contemplating the fragments of history. Benjamin writes:

Mourning is the state of mind in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of a mask, and derives an enigmatic satisfaction in contemplating it. Every feeling is bound to an a priori object, and the representation of this object is its phenomenology.¹⁴

In Benjamin's characterisation, melancholia is described as an emotional numbness that can increase 'the distance between the self and the surrounding world to the point of alienation from the body.'¹⁵ This chasm thereby creates a melancholic optic in which an object is viewed not in its normative state of use but only as a fragmentary image of enigmatic wisdom.

In Baroque poetics, the 'false totality' of the classical symbol crumbles into allegory. The symbolic image of nature as statically benevolent is altered into a world of ever-present ruination and catastrophe, 'by its very essence [...] not permitted to behold the lack of freedom, the imperfection, the collapse of the physical, beautiful, nature'.¹⁶ However, this ruin is not meant to signify a gradual descent but an integral part of the transformation between what Benjamin refers to as the relationship between 'material content and truth content'.¹⁷ It is this ability to read the imprint of history's progression into the material world (in terms of both nature and language) that defines the baroque allegorical image which does not adorn through ornament but through a process of stripping away.¹⁸ Unlike a symbol in which the truth content is revealed in

an instantaneous moment, the allegory, like a fossil that bears the marks of history, takes the form of a text in which the meaning constantly fluctuates depending on the historical situation of the reader. Thus, the allegorist's gaze transforms the natural world into a text; yet this text is not held in place through a fixed chain of meaning, but exists as a 'constellation of images' that are constantly altering their relationship to each other.¹⁹

From wish symbol to dialectical image

Benjamin's dialectical image, as derived from his early work on allegory, has as its foundation a 'breaking point of an image out of the continuum of history'.²⁰ For Benjamin, the spectacle of the Paris arcades engendered its own means of imageability. Benjamin ascribes the creation of the Paris arcades in the 1820s to both the boom of the textile trade, which resulted in large expansive stores devoted to goods, and the advent of iron construction.²¹ Rather than the old model of commerce in which individual producers sold their goods in small family-run stores along a dense street, a new form of public space was developed that was able to house a vast array of commodity goods within a unified superstructure. However radical a departure this new mode of production may have seemed compared with an older consumptive model, its structural manifestation in the form of arcades (*Passagen*) was adorned with similar fantastical 'wish-symbols' in that they evoked a sense of utopian longing for a lost world in which the built landscape folded gracefully into the natural world. For example, the fantastical arboreal qualities of the Paris arcades, with their signature use of iron buttresses reinforcing the vaulted glass ceilings that give vantage to the celestial heavens above, signify the growing distance between the modern consumer and the basic elements of nature: the trees and the starry cosmos. The aesthetic details of industrialised Europe mimicked the organic forms of the natural world while concurrently paving over it.

For Benjamin, the 'wish symbol' is intrinsically related to the phantasmagoria of commodification that was beginning to cast its dreamy spell during the construction of the Paris arcades. Thereby, the praxis of product commodification, as it alienated labour from the mode of production, created a framework through which the intrinsic 'use-value' of a product becomes eclipsed by its extrinsic market value. Yet, in order for this 'eclipse' to occur, aura, which Benjamin saw as lost to the age of mechanical reproducibility, must re-emerge under the 'phantasmagoric' guise of spectacle and commodity.

The phantasmagoric element of capitalism was first discussed by Marx in *Das Kapital* as 'commodity fetishism'.²² Lukàcs conceptualised the fetishising of commodity as *reification*: 'The finished article ceases to be the object of the work-process. The latter turns into the objective synthesis of rationalised special systems whose unity is determined by pure calculation and which must therefore seem to be arbitrarily connected with each other.'²³ Lukàcs would further explore the relationship between fetish, experience and perception in his 1922 essay 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', which Benjamin read in 1924.²⁴ He would later reinterpret the concept of 'reification', with its scientific connotations, as the concept of the 'phantasmagoric', which is the seemingly mystical force that transforms the individual into a consumer by imbuing objects with a 'use-value' that supersedes its functionality. This value is 'supernatural' because it is not intrinsic to the item, but rather it is extrinsically bestowed upon the item through commercial valuation. The material artefacts of Second Empire Paris are viewed by Benjamin as the living remains of modernity's primordial history (*Ur-Geschichte*).²⁵

For Benjamin, the critical scholar of history must always be vigilant of modernity's proclivity to mythologise its past. Like Odysseus being tied to the helm of his ship, the historian must not fall prey to the

siren song of historicism's narratives, evident in the 'vague philosophemes' of Aragon's articulation of a modern mythos. As he exclaims in the prologue to *Les Paysans de Paris*:

Admirable gardens of absurd beliefs, premonitions, obsessions, and deliria, in which unknown and changing gods loom up [...]. How beautiful you are in your sand castles, columns of smoke! New myths are born beneath each of our steps [...] I want to reflect on nothing but these spurned transformations. A mythology takes shape and comes undone.²⁶

Instead of celebrating the intoxicating effects of 're-enchantment' as aesthetically stamped upon the built landscape, Benjamin attempts to separate the mythological attributes of the 'wish symbol' from the material remains of history. This delineation can only occur through the 'awakening of a not-yet consciousness of what has been', a consciousness that is not intoxicated with the aroma of historicist fantasy.²⁷ In this way, the 'wish symbol' re-emerges as a dialectical image, bereft of its enchanting powers of manipulation. However, for this transformation to take place, the symbolic qualities of such an image must be destabilised from its overarching historicist narrative.

Much like in Freudian psychoanalysis, history is never entirely relegated to the 'no longer' of the past, but rather re-emerges through a series of repetitions. As Benjamin writes in *Convolute N*:

In the dialectical image, what has been within a particular epoch is always simultaneously, what has been from time immemorial. As such, however, it is manifest, on each occasion, only to a quite specific epoch [...]. It is at this moment that the historian takes up, with regard to the image, the task of dream interpretation.²⁸

These moments of resurfacing are reflected in the particular physiologies of nineteenth century Paris's

spectacle architecture which modelled its decorative forms on archaic wish-symbols of a Utopian '*Ur-Geschichte*'. These structures were made to resemble a primeval forest resplendent with mass manufactured plate glass and cast iron modern building materials that only came into being in the early nineteenth century.

The new industrial modes of production ushered in radically new spaces for consumption. This innate process comes to surface in the form of the arcades, adorned with fantastical symbols, depicting a primordial paradise, bereft of class-based disparity. Thereby, the functional nature of pre-fabricated building materials (plate glass and cast iron) was actively 'repressed' within the architectural design of these modern structures in order for the mythological enchantments to take hold of consumers.

Benjamin reads the historicist character of the nineteenth century streetscape as 'internally divided and differential', both rooted in 'the expressive fecundity of nineteenth-century society and the ideological function of proliferating cultural forms in a single ontological feature of historical time.'²⁹ Buildings within the 'profane' network of commodity production and distribution (movie theatres, train stations, apartment blocks, and department stores) attempted to conceal their functional use through the aesthetic grammar of sacred 'hierophantic' space. Benjamin interprets the aesthetic language of nineteenth century metropolitan spectacle as a form of mental scaffolding necessary to cover over the chasm between modern industry's quickened pace of innovation and humanity's ability to absorb each shock of the new. In addition, Benjamin examined the way in which this particular form of architectural expression affected humanity's ability to acclimate itself to these convulsive transformations.

This form of architectural masquerade was a response to the new functionality of mass produced

building materials, such as iron and plate glass. Design solutions were needed to mask the origins of these new scientific inventions from plain sight. In an annotation of a passage from Falke's *History of Modern Taste*, Benjamin attempted to further define the cause of the peculiar nineteenth century aesthetic language by reiterating the relationship between this epistemic rupture and its concrete manifestation in the *Biedermeier* aestheticism of the nineteenth century's built landscape:

This perplexity derived in part from the superabundance of technical processes and new materials that had suddenly become available. The effort to assimilate them more thoroughly led to mistakes and failures. On the other hand, these vain attempts are the most authentic proof that technological production, at the beginning, was in the grip of dreams.³⁰

According to Benjamin, the spectacular architecture of the nineteenth century, through its dependence on both technological production and the veiling of such innovations, is steeped in 'the collective dream' in which one epoch dreams its own future through a distorted or 'cunning' recollection of its recent past.

Iron, as one of the first prefabricated architectural materials, was, thus, repressed as a building material, merely used as a skeleton supporting the large body consisting of marble walls and plate-glass ceilings. As Benjamin writes: 'These builders model their pillars on Pompeian columns, their factories on houses, as later the first railway stations are to resemble chalets.'³¹ This quote is abutted by an uncited passage from Sigfried Giedion's *Bauen in Frankreich*, which reads, 'Construction fills the role of the unconscious.'³² This quote is taken out of context from Giedion's disparaging critique of the 'artistic drapery' of nineteenth century bourgeois architecture, in which the onslaught of technological progress is hidden under a veneer of backward-looking historicism. He writes, 'Outwardly, construction still boasts the old pathos; underneath,

concealed behind façades, the basis of our present existence is taking shape.'³³ Giedion saw the architectural frippery of Second Empire, *Jugendstil*, *Beaux Arts* and *Art Nouveau* design, as the mere product of 'individual dilettantism and pseudo-handicraft', which masked the importance of a building's function.³⁴ Giedion's discussion of modernist spatial unification is echoed in Benjamin's own description of the Paris arcades in *The Arcades Project*, as an 'optical illusion' in which street and residence forge an ambiguous liminal space between public space of leisure and commodified space, moulded by personal interest.³⁵

By inserting Giedion's quote into his text, Benjamin draws a relationship between the anti-quarian aesthetic tendencies of nineteenth century Europe and societal anxiety regarding the new technical domination of engineering over architecture. Due to this trepidation over the role of science within aesthetic production, the collective fantasies of a classless society relegated to prehistory 'mingled with the new to produce the utopia that has left its traces in thousands of configurations of life, from permanent buildings to fleeting fashions', which thus manifested and exhibited the dialectical image. As Benjamin writes,

It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather [dialectical] image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation [...] image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation to the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.³⁶

As evidenced in this quote, a dialectical image is a nexus of relations that emerges not in a single instant, as in the case of the 'wish symbol'. Rather, it becomes understood only in the fullness of time. The dialectical image is both an object of historical

circumspection and an optic through which normative historical narratives are critiqued.³⁷ This optic / object does not function as another link in the chain of cause and effect within historical consciousness, but as a means of beholding the instantaneous moment in which a historicist model of the past is brought into contestation by the critical observer. This awareness inspires an awakening from the long sleep of historicism. Thereby, the dreaming collective is capable of producing a particular set of images that allows for the 'historical epoch to elucidate its own contradictions and to redeem its own desires'.³⁸

The dialectical image as text

For Benjamin, the crucial moment of historical reflection is hermeneutically based in the 'reading' of the dialectical image, in which the innate contradictions and injustices of culture are imprinted like fossils. In this way, history is not teleologically determined, but a living possibility that must be constantly re-imagined. Therefore, the reading of the dialectical image exists within a duality of object and optic. The dialectical image, thus, is not just an abstract idea but a way of seeing both past and present simultaneously.

Benjamin's writings are replete with images that straddle the threshold between various temporalities. For example, in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, specific images from the built landscape of his childhood become, in his recollection, imbued with significant meaning. For example, the caryatids that supported the loggia above his family's balcony are described as slipping away from their post in order 'to sing a lullaby [...] a song containing little of what later awaited [...] sounding the theme through which the air of the courtyards has forever remained intoxicating'.³⁹ This recollected song returns to Benjamin's inner ear years later after he has left Berlin and is vacationing in the south of Italy with his lover, Asja. He recounts: 'It is precisely this air that sustains the images and allegories which preside

over my thinking, just as the caryatids, from the heights of their loggia, preside over the courtyards of Berlin's West End.'⁴⁰ In this passage, Benjamin draws a relationship between one's comprehensive experience (*Erfahrung*) and the built environment. It is in this way that topographical forms shape mental forms. One's perception is moulded by the structures that spatially orient one's life-world. Thus, these adornments from the vernacular neoclassical design of Berlin architecture, as re-imagined by Benjamin, unconsciously direct, in a Proustian manner, one's eyes to other 'images and allegories' that also stand on a liminal threshold between the mythic past, culled from one's own subjective experiences, and the convulsive present as crystallised in an instance of visual legibility.⁴¹ In the same way, the uneven paving stones in *Time Regained* are imbued with an atavistic charge due to Marcel's own past experiences upon the same pathway.⁴²

Benjamin's specific interest in the Paris arcades, with their aesthetic replication of organic forms, is part of a personal constellation of historic images. The *mémoire involontaire* within *À la Recherche* was primarily an 'elegiac' attempt to return to an early happiness as a form of philosophical 'ensnarement'.⁴³ For Benjamin, Proust's novel is not truly a work of the *mémoire involontaire*, as the memories were actively conjured up by the author himself; Benjamin asks, 'Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involontaire* much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory?'⁴⁴ Benjamin was distrustful of Proust's tendency for 'self-absorption' which projects his own loneliness into society's 'overlound and inconceivably hollow chatter', which emanates from 'the sound of society plunging down into the abyss of this loneliness'.⁴⁵ As Benjamin writes in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', architecture is a form of art that best undergoes aesthetic 'reception in a state of distraction' through 'tactile appropriation' as opposed to optical visualisation.⁴⁶ The built landscape is only truly experienced as a work of art

through 'habit', as a durational experience, rather than attentive observation.⁴⁷ Thus, the built landscape is a text not read by the eyes alone, but also by the body, as stored within a personalised archive of somatic sensations.

In contradistinction to Proust's elegiac eye, the dialectical image, in its relation to the built landscape, is both an optic and an object. However, this perception of the present is related to one's subjective habits of reception. Thus, Benjamin's early memories of the caryatid-bearing loggias in Berlin pre-focused his own perceptive capabilities to be aware of similar referential architectural symbols, such as the Paris arcades. These images are 'read' in the awareness of the 'now of legibility'; they subsequently become part of one's pool of unconscious images. The present must be examined in both an inward sense (as is the case with Benjamin's writing on the loggia) and an external sense (by placing the image of the loggia within a constellation of interpretations). Therefore, a form of personal unconsciousness precedes an act of consciousness.

However, this reflective faculty comes to awareness through one's perceptive capabilities, as informed by a historic consciousness, a consciousness that is both the effect of a particular cultural perspective as well as the gradual evaporation of national or linguistic borders. Hence it is important to reiterate that Benjamin's theory of the dialectical image is not a closed system of historical perception, but an encounter in which the totality of the text is never foreclosed by an authoritative reading.

The dialectical image and the threat of textual reductionism

Benjamin describes Paris as a 'linguistic cosmos', an alphabet, categorised through a linguistic system of '*lieux-dits*'.⁴⁸ These localities, for Benjamin, take the form of textual images read 'in the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded'.⁴⁹ As this

quote exemplifies, throughout *The Arcades Project* Benjamin makes frequent reference to the relationship between the dialectical image and the symbolic realm of language. However, there is a danger hovering over the ubiquitous nature of Benjamin's concept of legibility. To read a topography as a text can only occur as a result of a primary reduction of all the varieties of human habitation into a common totalising language, which is precisely what Benjamin was critical of in the symbolic monumentality of nineteenth century Paris. Similarly, to be able to read someone is to dismember their being into an aggregation of details, factors, dispositions, physiologies and pathologies. In other words, as much as reading a place is an act of re-membering, it is concurrently an act of *dis-membering*: a process of fragmentation by which the integral fabric of a *place* is transformed into the abstract dimensionality of *space*.

If we are to read Benjamin's later work on space and architecture with his earlier writings on language then we are confronted with a reductive language of acculturation, in which diverse localities (*lieux-dits* – *Ortschaften*) become texts to be arranged and rearranged under the shadow of ideological 'judgment' (*Urteil*).⁵⁰ In his early essay 'On Language', Benjamin accords the fallen nature of language as wrought by the reduction of primordial name-language into a closed system of signification, in which words are ascribed a specific use-value. Ultimately, the process of acculturation is the force that fragments the primordial unity, as harmonised by an ineffable 'magical community with things'. Thus the 'Adamite language-mind' becomes segmented into the 'fallen language' of fragmentary communiques.⁵¹ In the Garden of Eden, Eve's transgression introduces the concept of the binary into human history; that which is good only exists externally in relation to that which is evil. In this way, words lose their immanence. They become mere opposites in a chain of differentiating signifiers. Thus, when an examination of the built landscape

ventures into logocentric metaphors (when a place becomes 'legible'), the spectre of totalising ideologies emerges.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre warns about the danger of determining space as a system of linguistic patterns / codes in which 'representational space' becomes reduced to an abstract blueprint.⁵² Lefebvre argues that spatial practice cannot be read as a static discourse in which spatial dynamics are fixed into an indexical pattern of communication, but rather as an ongoing activity. Like a score in which the music cannot be said to truly exist until it transcends the two-dimensional abstract plane of notation paper and vibrates the acoustical space around the bodies of the listeners, 'The actions of social practice are expressible but not explicable through discourse; they are precariously acted, and not read.'⁵³ The metamorphosis of place into space allows for concrete, indexical identifiability in exchange for the precariousness and contingencies that imbue a place with its texture and atmosphere. Space is always socially mediated, which is to say that the social aspect of space imbues it with an irreducible contingency. An effort to regulate space by envisioning the city as, in Benjamin's words, a 'linguistic cosmos', reduces the vital activities within lived space into a fixed and legible code to be deciphered. In this sense, knowledge is masked through its own techniques of systematisation.

We are now left with an essential question regarding translatability: if Benjamin's dialectical image implies a decodable act of reading as if it were a text, what is the risk of textualising space and spatialising the textual? We shall now turn to this question.

Translation and the built landscape in Kemalist Era Turkey

If the supposed legibility of Benjamin's dialectical image is related to the act of reading a text, we

must now discuss this concept in relation to translation, since a translation is always at risk of being manipulated by the ideological dispositions of the translator. Similarly, by perceiving the built landscape as a script, this threat of textual reductionism could have a similar impact in the fields of architecture and urban planning. This interrogation will help us further examine the limitations of Benjamin's logocentric concept of the dialectical image as an architectural image that is 'read': if even a conservative translation often negates aspects of the original text, then what does a translation convey? What presumptions, conscious or unconscious, inform this conveyance?

In *Origin of Geometry*, Husserl claims that 'objective idealities' require the existence of universal language in order for an abstract concept to be passed down through history:

The Pythagorean Theorem, indeed all geometry, exists only in space [...]. It is identically the same in the original language of Euclid and in all translations, within each language it is the same [...]. For language itself, in all of its grammatical particularities, is made up of ideal objects.⁵⁴

A universal mathematics is thus predicated upon a universal language of the human community. The linguistically possible is cordoned off by the dictates of what can be rendered into an objective ideality. Such a transcendental notion of universal translation exists on the presupposition that everything expressible in language has its correlative in objective reality. Thus Husserl's understanding of translation is more of an epistemological theory on what can be known and, in turn, how this knowledge can be expressed in language, which leads to the conclusion that language is only capable of expressing knowledge.

While not concerned with translating mathematical truths, Benjamin, in his oft-quoted essay on

translation, focuses on the question of translating linguistic truth in terms of literary language, as he asks this question: 'What does a literary work say?' What does it communicate? Benjamin both answers and further complicates his question in the very same paragraph:

the translation tells very little to those who understand it, for its essential quality is not statement or the imparting of information. Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information – hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of a bad translation.⁵⁵

Benjamin concludes that a text's translatability is an intrinsic characteristic of the work itself.⁵⁶ Thus, according to this theory, certain works even demand the dispersal of their after-lives, such as myths, legends and sacred texts. By virtue of its 'translatability', the original text shares a 'vital connection' with its translation.

In contradistinction to Benjamin and Husserl, Derrida maintains that the act of translation requires the presumption of a false totality within any given language. For example, one must first come to a decisive conclusion on the parameters of the language itself before translation into another language if there is indeed a difference between a translation and a subjective re-telling of a text. Thus, even before an interlingual translation occurs between two distinct languages, an intralingual translation binds the text itself to the reader. Thus, in order to translate a word, one must first reduce the vast constellation of polyvalent meanings into an indexical unit as an epistemological object capable of replication and reiteration. Derrida discusses in his essay on the Tower of Babel how there is an innate impossibility in translating the word Babel as a proper name, as it both refers to the name of God and the name for the confusion that comes as an effect of humanity trying to construct a tower to the heavens. In this context, the emergence of a

single word in one language requires an essential act of totalisation. In order to come to a conclusive interpretation of a statement or utterance, one must both select and exclude a unified meaning to the word that one is translating as the process of linguistic transference cannot accommodate two disparate meanings. Much in the same way that 'business English' has proliferated into the common denominator of global communication, the reiteration of western architectural paradigms has reduced a 'multiplicity of idioms' into a 'structural order'. Through this process, the earth's surface is colonised by a specific chain of signifiers, an archive of what is 'sayable' while also demarcating the boundaries of what can be said. The translator becomes the technocrat of language, the one who striates the landscape, drawing the binary line between sense and non-sense.⁵⁷

This essential paradoxical tension within the task of translation, as both a reduction and proliferation of linguistic meaning, is elucidated in Esra Akcan's recent book *Architecture in Translation*, which analyzes the relationship between city planning and translation theory within the context of the birth of the Kemalist Republic in 1930s Turkey.⁵⁸ During this period, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his team of technocrats consciously attempted to forge a collective identity of ethos for the new republic through the construction of both architectural landmarks and collective urban housing that would align the new state with the history of western modernity, while also exhibiting the singularity of Turkey's place in the history and geopolitics of technological modernisation. Such a process requires both an inward 'intralingual' conveyance within the Turkish State itself (in which a multitude of ethnicities, aesthetic traditions and religious symbolism are translated into a unified, totalised and totalising language of depiction) and an extrinsic 'interlingual' translation (in which the Turkish state translates the functional and aesthetic values of Eurocentric technological modernity). This process was not meant to imbue

the Turkish nation with the aesthetic accoutrements of Eurocentric culture, but rather evokes the Anatolian foundations already implicit in the West's aesthetic depiction of the modern city as a hygienic space that favours open spaces, flat surfaces and efficient movement.

However, this cross-cultural dialogue is already constructed over a composite of ossified notions of national identity. This condensation of identity into public space is exemplified in the translation of the idea of the Garden City from Ebenezer Howard's concept of the anglophone socialistic Garden City and the Anatolian reiteration as an exclusive neighbourhood for the elite. Howard's original plan consisted of low density housing inhabited by a socially diverse population, surrounded by green-belt agricultural land.⁵⁹ However, this image of the Garden City is based on a Germanic reiteration by Theodor Frisch in his translation of Howard's doctrine, translated as *die Stadt der Zukunft*.⁶⁰ These *Gartenstädte*, while not being entirely self-sufficient, resembled the post war new towns that formed along the edges of cities after the Second World War. Frisch used the green-belt agricultural spaces from Howard's doctrine not to reunite the modern worker with the natural environs of their supposed 'ancestors', but to further separate disparate sociocultural groups from each other and thereby reinvigorate the 'spiritual life' [*Gesundes Geistlebens*] of the community.⁶¹ Herman Jansen, who designed the post-republic residential quarters of Ankara in the 1930s, was influenced by Frisch's version of the Garden City as exemplified by the Germanic categorisation of domiciles – '*Landhaus*' for the elite class, '*Einzelhaus*' for middle class families and '*Arbeitsviertel*' for factory workers. The Kemalist government specifically hired Jansen to translate the Garden City paradigm into a Turkish setting not entirely for functional reasons, since the green belt around the English and German Garden City was meant to be farmed by the inhabitants; this was impossible due to central Anatolia's arid

climate.⁶² For Turkish authorities, the Garden City was symbolic of western progress in the rational spatial segregation between living space and work space. Such symbolic value was important for the Republic to present itself in contradistinction to Eastern religiosity, the crowded conditions of the Anatolian city and the recent memory of the Ottoman Empire's chaotic final years. Hence, it is difficult to attach architectural forms with fixed ideological presuppositions, since they are altered as they cross social/ political/ ethnic boundaries. For Howard, the single family house surrounded by green space symbolised modern man's 'return to the land'. For Frisch, it symbolised the need to create an ethnically 'pure space'. While for the Kemalist regime, the single family house represented an escape from the autocratic rule and crowded conditions of the Ottoman Empire.⁶³

The complications implicit in the act of translating a built landscape from one cultural context to another is further evidenced in the use of serial construction (*Serienbau*) in Kemalist Turkey. Serial architecture developed during the housing policies and practices of Weimar era Germany by Ernst May in Frankfurt and Martin Wagner in Berlin. They designed a typology of *Siedlung* (housing estate) that would 'rationalise' building practices in the modern industrial city.⁶⁴ For these urban planners and designers, the individualistic Ruskinian aura of the house as a creation by a collective of craftsmen had to be negated to contend with twentieth century problems surrounding working class housing. These problems were confronted with the creation of a rational mode of construction that would be efficiently and cheaply designed as 'types' that could be endlessly reiterated, regardless of environmental and topographical conditions. The essential task of construction within this context is the ability to discern which type of already formulated domicile type fits best into any preconceived urban or rural context.

This type of 'architectural reproducibility' is exemplified in Austrian architect and designer Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's report for the construction of village schools across Anatolia, as depicted in her report to a Kemalist government planning official from the late 1930s:

The projects and technical details need to be as simple as possible so that they can be constructed without qualified workers. The types of the village schools have to be completely different from each other, depending on the location, depending on the climate, local construction materials and the size of the town. The architecture of the village school must be in harmony with the whole landscape, environment and silhouette of the village, not only the form, roof and façade but also, above all, the building's color plays a role in this, naturally the color has to be different in each landscape. A school's color in the yellow-brown-green steppes of Anatolia will be different from another one in the middle of rich coastal vegetation. The interiors must also have friendly colors, for which one has to go back to the colors, paintings and crafts that were customary in the past.⁶⁵

These intentions, expressed in the letter, are not of the Western missionaries of technological progress who attempted to transform specifically non-western (thereby 'pre-modern') cityscapes into transnational symbols of technological modernism, but of a sensitive planner who wants to give a voice to the peasant villagers of Anatolia, increasingly at odds with the rapidly modernising city centres of Istanbul and Ankara. Schütte-Lihotzky created a series of forty-nine permutations of structural types and then allowed the villagers to construct the ideal assemblage that would best represent their unique life-world. Hence, one could argue that Schütte-Lihotzky's consultative method of planning is a form of advocacy for the 'agency of the oppressed'.⁶⁶ However, this set of permutations is akin to a pre-set language of fixed signifiers that delineates the terrain of the enunciable or – in this

particular context – the buildable. Furthermore, these forty-nine types were designed around a western notion of a collectively ingrained totalised 'Turkish past', based on the assumption that the diverse ethnic populations of Turkish villages would be able to come to a consensus that there is an aesthetic type defining the particular identity of their polis. Therefore, Schütte-Lihotzky's method is based upon the presumption that ethnic identity, as well as its supposedly corresponding architectural ideations, is reducible or translatable to a series of common types. Thus, we arrive back at the essential question, how can such a mode of translating identity through material structure exist if that which is being translated is constantly in a state of flux, such as language itself? In this context, translation becomes a dubious exercise in the coercive consolidation of cultural identity into a fixed lexicon of architectural symbols.

This possible reductionist threat that stands in the shadow of modernity's logocentric perspective of the built landscape brings us back to Benjamin's own discussion around the nature of symbolism as discussed above. To reiterate, the modern discourse of architecture and urban planning tends to envision the diversity of human habitation as a chain of symbols that *denotes* a specific meaning, intent or unity of purpose. On the other hand, Benjamin's dialectical image, as preceded by his theorising of an allegorical gaze, *connotes* a constellation of relationships. These two different verbs are key in understanding the difference between Benjamin's understanding of the image and the common discourse on the symbol. Denotation implies a direct definition between symbol and its meaning (for example, a male stick figure denotes the 'men's room'). On the other hand, connotation evokes a relationship between an image and a myriad of images. While denotation relies on a strict chain of identity between sign and meaning, connotation allows for a chasm, however minute or expansive, between the sign and meaning. Instead of getting a message *out*

of a symbol, like a bumblebee suckling nourishment out of a flower's pistil, the observer must read these relationships *into* the image through an interpretive lens much like a translator actively rearticulating the voice of the original text by hearing its reverberations reflected in a new language.

Interpretive horizons

To fully understand the textual implications of Benjamin's dialectical image, we need to read this concept in relationship to Benjamin's theory of language and its translatability. As we discussed above, language has the capability to both conceal and reveal the primordial spark of creation. In this context, the textual component of the dialectical image is not a sight of inscriptive totality but an encounter between the past, as a confluence of disparate narratives, and the contemporary moment (*Jetztzeit*). In this flash of recognition, history is perceived as an object to be actively 'constructed' instead of merely recalled.⁶⁷ Reminiscent of Gadamer's dialogical hermeneutics, place is continuously produced and reinterpreted through a 'horizon of interpretation' (*Horizontverschmelzung*), a 'horizon [which] is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us'.⁶⁸ Rather than a closed text, as bounded by authorial intent and editorial authority, the dialectical image can only be 'read' through a constant alteration of the framing devices shaping critical perception, as informed by historical and subjective consciousness (discussed above as *Mémoire Involontaire*). By overextending the logocentric trappings of Benjamin's discussion of the dialectical image, we risk covering over the radical core of Benjamin's thoughts on historicity: a constellation of temporalities through which material remains are perceived as fragments blasted out of the continuum of ideologically-induced narratives. Hence, the dialectical image is not etched in stone; its significance constantly shifts like the shadows that emerge and dissolve along the sun's trajectory. Benjamin's dialectical image is, thus, not stuck within a fixed prism of three-dimensional pictorial

space. As opposed to the Renaissance pictorial tradition in which the image is petrified into a 'figure of knowledge', Benjamin's conception of the image exists within a hermeneutic flux constantly eluding the totality of ideological agendas. In Sigrid Weigel's words, Benjamin's image is best understood as an *Ähnlichkeitskonstellation*, a constellation of semblances which transcends the simple 'form-content' paradigm of visual representation.⁶⁹

Benjamin's approach offers an alternative means of viewing architecture, by emphasising the task of observation as an embodied encounter rather than an objective analysis or a detached reading of a text. A place cannot be lifted out of the 'blank space' of time and studied in isolation but only as a crucial intersection between what it has signified, what it currently signifies, and what it will come to signify.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press / Boston: Belknap Press, 1999).
2. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso Press, 2009), 140. Originally published as *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1928).
3. For further information on the concept of the original Garden City, please see: Ebenezer Howard, *The Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965). In *The Disappearing City* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1932), 17–19, Frank Lloyd Wright discusses his plan for the Broadacre City in which every family is allotted an acre of land. Wright's plans for the vast sprawling suburban metropolis stem from the architect's belief in 'individuality' as the 'fine integrity of the human race.' Therefore, for Wright 'organic modern architecture' binds the 'common spirit of the people' into a cohesive image of a 'great unity'. For further information on Daniel Burnham's *Columbian Exposition* and its relationship to the civic discourse emphasised in the 'City Beautiful' movement, please

- see: William Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1989). For a foundational text that expresses the essential relationship between urban aesthetics and civic morality as the touchstone of the City Beautiful movement, please see: Charles Mulford Robinson, *The Improvement of Towns and Cities or The Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1906), 253–271. For a discussion on Le Corbusier's concept of visual perception and its relation to the built landscape, please see: Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover Press, 1985).
4. Le Corbusier emphasises the importance of 'primary forms' in the built landscape in that they are able to be 'clearly appreciated' within a single optical glance. Thus, Le Corbusier's optical view of architecture and the cityscape derives from the perceptive capabilities of an imaginary everyman, who 'looks at the creation of architecture with his eyes, which are five feet, six inches from the ground. One can only deal with aims which the eye can appreciate, and intentions which take into account architectural elements.' Le Corbusier, *New Architecture*, 62.
 5. Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), 3.
 6. *Ibid.*, 7.
 7. Kathleen Boyer discusses the way in which urban space has been modelled after three key phases of image traditions, which reflect differing 'states of capitalism' throughout the course of modernity: the city as a 'work of art' influenced by theatrical stagecraft of the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century city as 'panorama' and the 'city of spectacle' (twentieth-century Los Angeles and New York City). Kathleen Boyer, *The City Of Collective Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 64–65.
 8. *Genesis 1–26* as quoted in Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Michael Friedländer (London: Routledge Press, 1910), 12. W. J. T. Mitchell also discusses the difference between *zelem* and *töar*. W. J. T. Mitchell, 'What is an Image?' in *New Literary History* vol. 15, no. 3 (1984): 521.
 9. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, 13.
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. W. J. T. Mitchell, 'What is an Image?' 529.
 12. Aby Warburg, *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, ed. Dieter Wuttke (Baden-Baden: Verlag Valentin Koerner, 1980), 202. A classic instance of Warburg's concept of '*Nachleben*' can be found in his discussion of the relationship between Pagan cosmology and the advent of astrology during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as he writes in his essay 'Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther. According to Warburg, practitioners of this median art that stands between theology and science in the early Modern era, such as John Dee and Thomas Hood, were able to distance the possibilities of divine interventions by recasting the irrational pantheon of Pagan entities into a rational system of astral constellations that could be both numerically graded and empirically observed by means of charting their discreet movements. Thus, the birth of modern science contains an 'after-image' of pagan atavism.
 13. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso Press, 2009), 140. Originally published as *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1928).
 14. Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 139.
 15. *Ibid.*, 140.
 16. *Ibid.*, 176.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. *Ibid.*, 185.
 19. Sigrid Weigel, *Walter Benjamin: Images, The Creaturely, and The Holy*, trans. Chadwick Truscott Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 199. 'The concept of *Bild* (image) is defined as a constellation in which heterogenic elements meet to form a condense image in the sense of having a momentous meaning.'
 20. Sigrid Weigel, *Body and Image-Space: Re-reading Walter Benjamin*, trans. Georgina Paul (London: Routledge Press, 1996), 155.
 21. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 152.
 22. 'The form of wood, for instance, is altered by making a table out of it. Yet for all that, the table continues

- to be that common every-day thing, wood. But, as soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent... The mystical [fetish] character of commodity does not originate, therefore, in their use-value.' Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Friedrich Engels and Ernest Untermann, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: Modern Library, 1936), 82.
23. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 84.
 24. 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' can be found in Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 83–223. For further information on the influence of Lukács's theory of reification on Walter Benjamin, see: Margaret Cohen, 'Walter Benjamin's Phantasmagoria', *New German Critique* 48 (1989), 90.
 25. Lukács, 'Reification'.
 26. Louis Aragon, *Nightwalker*, trans. Frederick Brown (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall Press, 1970), 5. Originally published as *Le Paysan de Paris* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1926).
 27. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 458.
 28. *Ibid.*, 464.
 29. Tyrus Miller, 'Glass before Its Time, Premature Iron: Architecture, Temporality and Dream in Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*' in *Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*, ed. Beatrice Hanssen (London: Continuum Press, 2006), 243.
 30. Jacob Falke, *Geschichte des Modernen Geschmacks* (Leipzig: T. O. Weigel, 1866), 380. Quoted in Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 152.
 31. *Ibid.*
 32. Quoted in Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 152. Original quote from Sigfried Giedion *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete*, trans. J. Duncan Berry (Santa Monica: Getty Press, 1995), 87
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. *Ibid.*, 167.
 35. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 423.
 36. *Ibid.*, 462.
 37. Max Pensky, 'Geheimmittel: Advertising and Dialectical Images in Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*' from Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*, 115.
 38. Margaret Cohen, 'Walter Benjamin's Phantasmagoria', *New German Critique* 48, (1989), 206.
 39. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Vol. 3 1935–1938*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Howard Eiland (New York: Schocken Press, 2002), 345.
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. 'Most memories that we search for come to us as visual images. Even the free-floating forms of the *mémoire involontaire* are still in large part isolated, though enigmatically present, visual images.' Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Press, 1969), 214.
 42. Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 6, trans. Andreas Mayor and Terrence Kilmartin (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 255.
 43. John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell Press, 2002), 261.
 44. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 202.
 45. *Ibid.*, 212.
 46. *Ibid.*, 240.
 47. *Ibid.*
 48. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 522.
 49. *Ibid.*, 461.
 50. McCole, *Antinomies of Tradition*, 283.
 51. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Press, 1978), 327.
 52. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (Hoboken: Blackwell Press, 1974), 163.
 53. *Ibid.*, 212.
 54. Edmund Husserl, *Origin of Geometry*, with an introduction by Jacques Derrida, trans. John Leavey, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 160–161.
 55. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 69.
 56. 'Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life [...] a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife.' Benjamin's description of a text's afterlife bears a resemblance to Warburg's notion of an image's continual survival [*Nachleben*] (see note

- 10 above). Ibid., 71.
57. Jacques Derrida, 'Des Tours des Babel', in *Difference in Translation*, ed. and trans. Joseph Green (Ithaca, Cornell University Press: Cornell University Press, 1985), 217–221.
58. Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey and the Modern House* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).
59. Howard, *Garden Cities*, 45.
60. Theodor Frisch, *Die Stadt der Zukunft* (Bremen: Bremen Outlook Verlag, 1985), 9–16.
61. Akcan, *Architecture in Translation*, 36.
62. Ibid., 38–40.
63. For an in-depth account of the cultural transference between German/Austrian architects and Kemalist urban planning, see Bernd Nicolai, *Moderne und Exil. Deutschsprachige Architekten in der Türkei 1925–1955* (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998).
64. Michael Hellgardt, 'Martin Wagner: The Work of Building in the Era of Its Technical Reproduction', *Construction History* vol. 3. (1987), 96–97.
65. Quoted in Akcan, *Architecture in Translation*, 212.
66. Ibid., 213.
67. 'Die Geschichte ist Gegenstand einer Konstruktion [structure], deren Ort nicht die homogene und leere Zeit sondern die von Jetztzeit [now-time] erfüllte bildet.' Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 701.
68. Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinscheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Continuum Press, 2006), 303–305.
69. Sigrid Weigel, *Body and Image-Space: Re-reading Walter Benjamin*, trans. Georgina Paul (London: Routledge Press, 1996), 46.

Biography

In the spring of 2007, Ross Lipton received his Bachelor's degree in Literature from New School University. In 2010, he received a Master's of Liberal Arts from the University of Pennsylvania. From 2010 to 2015, Ross taught World Literature at SUNY Binghamton while working towards a doctorate in Comparative Literature. He currently teaches Philosophy at La Salle University in Philadelphia. He is presently working on a dissertation exploring the influence of musical harmony, as a metaphor for both aesthetic and social / political concordance, on the various articulations of urban space from the late eighteenth century to the late twentieth century. Ross Lipton was recently awarded a Fulbright Research Fellowship Grant to study at the IFK (Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften) in Austria for the 2016/2017 academic year.

Revolutionary Climatology: Rings of Saturn, Ringed by Red Lightning

Sarah K. Stanley

Reveal to these depraved, O Republic, by foiling their plots, your great Medusa face, ringed by red lightning. (Workers' song, 1850)¹

Introduction

Walter Benjamin recognised that architecture and technical media taken together were capable of generating a new materialism. Benjamin saw the arcades as a form of infrastructure, consisting of a glass iron structure set atop the narrow passageway between dwellings. It was literally a street transformed into an interior, selling products destined for domestic interiors and the fashions that people wore while parading in public. The arcades were no longer fashionable by the time Benjamin arrived in Paris; many had been destroyed during the Haussmann renovation. The structures had begun to show the edges of ruination as an outmoded form, just as media archaeology seeks out the dead ends of technological history.² It was only a failed architecture that could become the object of study for an historical materialist.

Benjamin elaborated his concept of historical materialism in his last work, 'On the Concept of History', explaining how it involves learning from the tradition of the oppressed and the emergency situation that had become the rule.³ Benjamin's practice of historical materialism becomes a media archaeology activated through literary montage and photo philosophy. He elaborated cues from a range of architectural sources. Foremost, he redeploys

Sigfried Giedion and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's *Building in France* within *The Arcades Project* drawing upon not only its content, but also its layout design.⁴ The layered reassembling of the book's graphic and textual elements becomes a media environment, rather than a mass of quotations, as *The Arcades Project* is often dismissed. Benjamin's unique contribution is the multiplying of sources by choosing highly charged passages closer to image than historical writing. With this in mind, the methodical indexing and cross-referencing of the citations from hundreds of sources contains the potential for a proto-electronic archive. It becomes possible to uncover the 'primal history' of nineteenth century architecture that lay beneath narrative by unfolding smaller variegated facets of the historical text.

Media archaeologist of the arcades

Central to Benjamin's mode of writing are his site-specific diagrams outlined in 'A Berlin Chronicle'.⁵ Benjamin's encounter with architectural theory of the early 1920s (Giedion, Moholy-Nagy, *G Magazine*) sparked his interest in industrial architecture, including how the structures appeared in photographs. The genesis for *The Arcades Project* was the literary work *Le Paysan de Paris* by Louis Aragon, and its mode of literary and graphic montage.⁶ The book contained a photograph of the Passage de l'Opéra, one of the earliest glass-covered passageways that had become the meeting place chosen by Aragon for the gatherings of Dada. Also influential to Benjamin's methods must have

been Karl Kraus's satirical-literary techniques using a *détournement* of quotations.⁷ Literary montage transforms text into a medium closer to cinema, and maybe even to the weather, considering Benjamin's frequent references to rain, sky, clouds, atmospheres, auras, air, breath and breathing, gas lighting and lightning storms.

Benjamin's writing takes a literary, autobiographical turn after he joins the editorial meetings of *G* magazine in 1923, and starts writing for newspapers on a regular basis. He writes the first drafts of 'One-Way Street' using sections of letters he had written in 1923, published in 1928.⁸ These experiments lead him to develop the revised method of scholarly research that he undertakes in *The Arcades Project*.⁹ What had begun as the usual routine of writing outlines and collecting research materials eventually evolved into an archival project. What distinguishes *The Arcades Project* is that the collections of quotations were longer and more extensive, and sorted under broader themes, than ever would be undertaken for a single book project. He had become a future librarian of the highly fragmented circulation of textual passages that half a century later has become the underlying logic of the Internet. Without academic affiliation, Benjamin spent a good portion of his time in the library, an architecture of information and indexing technologies. The Bibliothèque nationale in Paris (1868) contained some of the most innovative uses of lightweight iron construction, combined with the first interior gas lighting and glass oculi. During long hours of copying out notes, it is likely Benjamin absorbed the technical systems of both the architecture and informational systems as methodological resources.

Very few of the many publications about *The Arcades Project* focus upon architecture, perhaps because Benjamin sought to rework the traditional schemes of architectural history, paying little or

no attention to architects or their buildings. Detlef Mertins, in his essay 'Walter Benjamin and the Tectonic Unconscious', discusses how Benjamin changes Sigfried Giedion's *Building in France* 'into optical instruments for glimpsing a space interwoven with unconsciousness'.¹⁰ Mertins downplays Giedion's engagement with film and photography already intrinsic to *Building in France*, designed by Moholy-Nagy, foremost film and photo theorist. Eve Blau has argued that Giedion's use of images (still and moving) in his publications explore 'duration and immanence', and the images are relational rather than determinate.¹¹ Nevertheless, Benjamin's theory of the optical unconscious applied to tectonics does evoke media archaeology as a nonhuman world made visible. This can be seen most clearly in his preference for gas lighting, discussed further on. As will be made clear in the following discussion of Benjamin's photo philosophy, he never emphasised visuality for its own sake, since he had been tutored by German artists who had absorbed Soviet Constructivism.¹²

Benjamin studied *Building in France* for its content and imagery, yet most crucial was the design by which the information is presented. Similar to *The Arcades Project*, sections of *Building in France* make use of long strings of direct quotations, introduced as 'instead of derivations, some voices from various moments of the period'.¹³ The entries resort to the same type of punctuated language that Benjamin favours in his choice of passages. For instance, the encyclopaedic sounding 'Henri LABROUSTE (1801–75). Attempts for the first time to combine engineer and architect in one person: architect-constructor.'¹⁴ Giedion adds very little analysis or commentary in much of the book, the exact method that Benjamin decides to utilise for his own decade long project. *Building in France*'s design reflects the functional clarity of the new architecture through a parallel information architecture, which Benjamin recognised.

Never before was the criterion of the minimal so important [...] the minimal element of quantity: the 'little', the 'few.' These are dimensions that were well established in technological and architectural constructions long before literature made bold to adapt them.¹⁵

Benjamin was motivated to transform knowledge production generated by the printed book. 'The book is already an outdated mediation between two different filing systems', he wrote.¹⁶ An archaeological method is laid out in 'A Berlin Chronicle' (1931): 'He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is only a stratum.'¹⁷ These earthen excavations were the 'so many thousand printed characters run through the fingers' every week at the library, the physical act of opening hundreds of printed books to scavenge a few lines. 'Rather than attempt a historical account of this process, we would like to focus some scattered reflections on a small vignette which has been extracted from the middle of the century (as from the middle of the thick book that contains it)'.¹⁸ Other references to archaeology abound throughout the volume, such as methods for dislodging the episteme out of its shell. 'If the object of history is to be blasted out of the continuum of historical succession, that is because its monadological structure demands it.'¹⁹ The practice of media archaeology often evokes the nonhuman, the point at which media itself are capable of cutting loose epistemic objects.²⁰

Benjamin's reception of photography is crucial to his engagement with *Building in France*.²¹ The ways Benjamin references photographs in *The Arcades Project* are linked directly into Giedion's cache of images. Just as photography disrupted the very terms of artistic engagement through its technical character, a similar operational change was underway within architecture. Along these lines, *The Arcades Project* explores the media that emerge

from within architectural structures and infrastructure, rather than as simple representation, which is the equivalent of the façade. Architectural media emerge from the glassed passageways in 1820, the same time period photography is invented and gas lighting is first introduced into interiors. Likewise, the photographic exposure imparted to metal and stone is an animation of the material world that cinema would further accelerate. 'These stones were the bread of my imagination', Benjamin wrote in his essay on Marseilles, which aligned his thinking more with primitive architecture than modernism.²²

Architects were writing books and publishing magazines that brought together industrial structures and technical equipment through photographic layouts. Moholy-Nagy's numerous publications drew from Berlin Dada and De Stijl, as well as from Le Corbusier's graphic design created for *L'Esprit Nouveau*.²³ His first book *Buch Neuer Künstler* (1922) followed Le Corbusier's method of juxtaposing machine technology with works of art or design. In one illustration, the metal engineering structures of a bridge is presented with the Constructivist art of El Lissitzky.²⁴ Photography and film were central to Giedion's revised historical methods, while as an artist, Moholy-Nagy was engaged in making films from animated storyboards freely mixing graphic elements, photographs and text. [fig. 1]

Benjamin's encounter with Dada artists and Bataille, known for their dictionary entries and creation of encyclopaedias, may have led to his development of the alphabetical ordering system. 'The father of Surrealism was Dada; its mother was an arcade.'²⁵ 'This work has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks. Its theory is intimately related to that of montage.'²⁶ By adopting the cutting skills of the film editor, Benjamin broke apart the older printed media, making the text into an 'image' ready for swifter

modes of search and retrieval. *The Arcades Project* calibrates a new method of information retrieval through an indexical code assigned to each block of text that could then be cross-referenced. This shift into paratextual devices and epigrams prefigures the linking of text via hypertext markup language (html).²⁷ These passages could potentially multiply from their bound books, communicating automatically without a human narrator. 'How gratings – as allegories – have their place in hell.'²⁸ This liberated lexicon orchestrates a media archaeology that has only just begun to be realised on digital platforms, what Proust intends with the experimental rearrangement of furniture.²⁹

The so-called 'Exposés' written as the sole commentary to *The Arcades Project* contain an outline for a media archaeological praxis. 'The historian today has only to erect a slender but sturdy scaffolding – a philosophic structure – in order to draw the most vital aspects of the past into his net.'³⁰ Engels studies the tactics of barricade fighting; Benjamin appropriates architectural theory to rework the Marxist tactics of historical materialism. He considered Alfred Gotthold Meyer's tectonic theory published as *Eisenbauten* (iron constructions) in 1907 as a prototype for materialist historiography. Meyer is critical of the Berlin tectonic school inaugurated by Schinkel, which had sought to apply the same architectonics used in stone and wood for iron construction.³¹ Benjamin refers repeatedly to Sigfried Giedion's photo of Pont Transbordeur spanning the industrial harbour in Marseilles, built by Ferdinand Amodin in 1905. In the steel supports of a transporter bridge, Benjamin identifies the thin net and streaming as its fundamental qualities: 'through the thin net of iron that hangs suspended in the air, things stream – ships, ocean, houses, masts, landscape, harbour.'³² Similarly, indexical systems rather than chapters opened passageways to be read more fluidly.

All photographs did not hold the same value for Benjamin. He often quoted Brecht about how the information presented by photography can also mislead, and that this must be made explicit. 'Reality proper has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relationships, the factory, let's say, no longer reveals these relationships. Therefore something has actually to be constructed, something artificial, something set up.'³³ Constructivist photography is fully operational in *Building in France*. Most other photographs of the Eiffel Tower emphasise its height and placement in the landscape, while Moholy-Nagy's photographs in the book were taken from within the structure, looking up from below into the meshwork of multiple points and angles. This presents a vertiginous volume of interpenetrating lines that emphasise the tower's capacity to transmit electrical signals (for radio and TV). [fig. 2]

Prefabricated parts assembled on site reduced the labour and human interaction required. 'Each of the twelve thousand metal fittings, each of the two and a half million rivets, is machined to the millimetre [...]. On this work site, [...] thought reigns over muscle power, which it transmits via cranes and secure scaffolding.'³⁴ Clearly the ironworks that comprise its frame were crafted with more than functional requirements in mind, yet despite this Gustave Eiffel stressed its engineering and scientific uses. The optics develop less from the views seen from the actual structure than its constant presence felt in every part of the city.³⁵ It organises the way other urban architecture becomes visible, just as the Paris arcades caused new passageways to open in the middle of the city. Prior to the construction of the arcades, no safe, sheltered pedestrian walkway existed on the street.

Moholy-Nagy also had been drawn into photography by its technical-reproductive capacities, similar to the possibilities of a new architecture based upon methods of fabrication. Much like Benjamin in



Fig. 1: Dynamik der Gross-Stadt (Dynamic of the Metropolis), Laszlo Moholy-Nagy in *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* (1925), 122–137.

'A Short History of Photography' and 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', Moholy-Nagy saw the limitations of photography as the reproduction of innumerable images but without the capacity to reveal social conditions.³⁶ His call for a new photography in his 1922 essay 'Produktion-Reproduktion' is now well-known: 'we must endeavour to expand the apparatus [...] used solely for purposes of reproduction for productive purposes.'³⁷ Moholy-Nagy's productive aims share the qualities that Benjamin ascribed to the optical unconscious, to expose social conditions that otherwise remained hidden. Benjamin quotes Brecht in 'A Short History of Photography', saying that the present situation is 'complicated by the fact that less than at any time does a simple reproduction of reality tell us anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or GEC yields almost nothing about these institutions.'³⁸ The slave labour used by Krupp during World War II is now widely documented through court testimony, a shocking exposé compared with the large archive of company photographs that feature heroic steel armaments prepared for promotional purposes.

In 'Saturn's Ring, Notes on Iron Construction', the only essay on *The Arcades Project* prepared for publication, Benjamin emphasised outmoded media: 'The arcades are the scene of the first gas lighting.'³⁹ His sensibilities are made clear when he expresses regret over the changeover from gas lamps to electric lights: 'The old gas torches that burned in the open air often had a flame in the shape of a butterfly, and were known accordingly as papillons.'⁴⁰ These butterfly lights, the flame resembling fluttering wings, were demonstrated almost on command in the newspaper offices in *Citizen Kane*.⁴¹ Kane steps up onto a chair to adjust the brightness of the gas flames as he examines the final daily news proofs, a fitting tribute to Walter Benjamin's own forays as a journalist and storyteller for radio. Cinema was only made possible with electricity, yet

the arcades presented a proto-cinema with its gas and overhead lighting.

The methods employed in producing *The Arcades Project* were continuations of insights Benjamin had gained through writing and research. His discovery of the relaying of practice into theory was first realised through drawn diagrams. In 'A Berlin Chronicle' Benjamin asks some questions about his past, and answers become inscribed: 'to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments, only in its folds does the truth reside, that image, that taste, that touch'.⁴² Automatic writing favoured by the Surrealists played a part, yet Benjamin describes the use of diagrams to organise and even produce the writing. He explains how he carried a sheet that contains a diagram drawn while sitting in a café in Paris, eventually lost, but later the schema was recalled while writing about Berlin. He writes a chronicle of his life in Berlin through the diagram's way-finding, much like his first experimental writing. 'One-Way Street' is a compilation of urban sites orchestrated with large title headings that read like advertisements, or diagrams.

Underground works: excavations in progress

The diagram Benjamin describes is a series of branching trees, outlining a genealogy of his ideas as connections to other literary works (what would later be called intertextuality). The diagram brings together relations to other texts and interactions that then form passages, a method to transcribe events that merge memory, sensations and urban sites.

Underplaying personal relationships in favour of nonhuman ones he notes, 'the veil that gets covertly woven over our lives shows people less than the sites of our encounters'. Benjamin's attention to the nonhuman contributed to his practice of historical materialism in *The Arcades Project* in ways that also develop in his urban writing.⁴³ He speaks of insights appearing to him 'with the force of illumination'. He



Fig. 2: Eiffel Tower with Lightning, 1900. Source: Wikimedia Commons



Fig. 3: Bibliothèque nationale, (Henri Labrouste 1868), photo: Georges Fessy.



Fig. 4: Interior 1, Plantings, State Library Kulturforum (Hans Scharoun), 2015, photo: author.

attributes the premise of sudden awakening to the constellation of things that make their appearance on the streets of Paris, the walls and quays, the places he had paused, the collections and rubbish, the railings and the squares, the arcades and kiosks. Primary in this mode of writing was the importance of entering into the flow of events without explaining how or why they happened. Benjamin uses the example of how Herodotus prefaces a story by noting that a very wonderful thing is said to have happened.⁴⁴ A well-known example is the story of Arion the renowned harp player who was saved by a dolphin after being forced by bandits to jump into the ocean. This was another way of supporting the marvellous of the everyday important to Surrealist literary interventions.

In 'A Berlin Chronicle', Benjamin's recalls a charged site: as a young man, he looked into the glass-enclosed bar at an Ice Palace owned by his father. Although unable to speak with her, he gazes at a woman dressed in a tight sailor suit. He describes the memory as an intense sexual awakening of transgendered desire. In another instance, he has forgotten the address to the Synagogue or got lost on his way, yet feels with a great force the sudden liberation from family duty. The scene is only remembered through the use of a diagram, an immense pleasure at letting things take their course, and the process of transforming relations with his surroundings. 'Diagrams must be conceived as Hammers and Songs.'⁴⁵ This mode of writing becomes a tool for excavating urban sites through metal and stone structures (architecture) and signage (advertisements). Benjamin writes in 'One-Way Street', 'What makes advertisement superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon says – but the fiery pool reflecting it in the asphalt.'⁴⁶

Benjamin continually downplays language in favour of affective images closer to cinema. Neon lighting was invented in Paris with the first neon signs appearing in 1910 produced by a gaseous

liquid that Benjamin preferred to electrical lighting. A neon sign on the side of a building spelling out 'Amour' in red, illustrating neon in a book, shows how photography captures these atmospheric effects. For Benjamin, sites are mapped through his interaction with the media found on streets, nonhuman worlds that only emerge through a wilful 'letting go' of human volition. These writing modalities Benjamin outlined as a diagram contribute to the marking out of sites as intensive encounters, which were erotically charged to varying degrees.

To the public: please protect these new plantings

The atmosphere of the surrounding environment is frequently evoked in *The Arcades Project*, often through Benjamin's own immediate situation in architecture. In libraries for example, Benjamin pursued his project beneath the ornamented vaulting of the reading room of the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, and 'the glassed-in spot' facing his seat at the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin: [figs. 3–4]

These notes devoted to the Paris arcades were begun under an open sky of cloudless blue that arched above the foliage; millions of leaves, the breath of the researcher, the storm, the idle wind of curiosity, covered with the dust of centuries. For the painted sky of summer that looks down from the arcades in the reading room of the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris has spread out over them its dreamy, unlit ceiling.⁴⁷

He asks, 'What is "solved"?' Do not all the questions of our lives, as we live, remain behind us like foliage obstructing our view?⁴⁸ The second floor of Berlin's State Library contains a large installation of plants and trees. The ceiling is lined with large skylights, ocular lenses shaped like the round pores of plants, while a long glass wall extends along the entire length of the library. It is a long building, much like the ones Fourier had envisioned for social housing. The interior contains an open plan space with few barriers and open decks that float above



Fig. 5: Interior 1, Purple Haze, State Library Kulturforum (Hans Scharoun), 2015, photo: author.

the ground, illuminated from all directions. During the day, natural light enters from the rows of ocular portals that cover the entire ceiling, and at dusk, the darkening purple sky presses its atmospheric light against the three storey glass wall. [fig. 5]

The aura that Benjamin defined was much vaster than any surrounding a single work of art. It was closer to an atmosphere.⁴⁹ It was the organisation of the senses in an urban corridor, a series of events unfolding in the landscape, the far-off mountain range, mediated by passing clouds, the branch of a tree. Glass architecture appears first in a photomontage, a medium that created fluid relations between the older stone architecture and industrial materials that appear as an environment. As for the new architecture, it appears like a storm in Mies van der Rohe's Glass Skyscraper Project (1922), blowing the wreckage of history into a single towering glass wedge. It rises on the skyline as climate, and reappears in 1950s midtown Manhattan generated by capital flows related to the sale of luxury products, the same immaterial systems of wealth that had drawn Benjamin to study shopping arcades. 'With the destabilising of the market economy, we begin to recognise the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled.'⁵⁰ Although Benjamin mostly certainly knew of Mies van der Rohe through both their associations with *G* magazine in Berlin in the 1920s, he never mentions the architect or his work, yet does make references to Le Corbusier's urban writing, never his architecture. This is no doubt due to his deliberate neglect of the so-called victors of traditional historical writing.

Benjamin's choice of research subject during his exile follows the troubled Germany economy. By 1935, the German economy was geared solely towards massive public works projects in order to finance the printing of money to break free from its debt obligations. Benjamin chose the subject of iron construction, the same iron and steel works so

crucial to German military rearmament. Benjamin would have become aware by 1931 when the news broke that Germany had been secretly remilitarising, organised through industrialists like Krupp who constructed Hitler's war machine and ensured his political power. It was begun as a strategy to force the French and British national banks to end the heavy debt burden imposed after the First World War, yet the tragic outcomes still reverberate today. During the Second World War the iron and steel industries would utilise prison labour from concentration camps, an extreme case of worker exploitation within capitalist production. Benjamin reveals his political project in *The Arcades Project* to be class struggle that results in ecological devastation. 'The later conception of [human] exploitation of nature re-enacts the actual exploitation of [humans] by owners of the means of production. If the integration of the technological into social life failed, the fault remains in this exploitation.'⁵¹

In *The Arcades Project*, the research is concerned with the genealogy of tectonics. Housing reform in 1920s Berlin had produced a vast new housing stock using long rows of prefabricated buildings. The *Siedlungen* or housing estates, created during the Weimar Republic using new financing schemes, had a close relation with Fourier's elongated communal structures, yet this goes unmentioned.⁵² Instead, Benjamin notes that locomotives required iron tracks, while the rail then becomes the first prefabricated iron component, the precursor of the girder. He then notes, 'iron is avoided in home construction but used in arcades, exhibition halls, train stations – buildings that serve transitory purposes.'⁵³ The sites were passageways, streets and bridges. Architecture becomes fluid as is suggested at numerous points in *The Arcades Project*, just as the liquidation of the interior took place during the last years of the nineteenth century, in the work of Jugendstil.

The nearest stop to Benjamin and Hegel's University of Berlin is Friedrichstrasse Station, the stop prior to the Hauptbahnhof (Central Station). The newer brick façade dates from 1950, but the covering over the platform dates from 1927. The station requires walking down one level that contains shops and cafes, and walking up again using an escalator. Compared with the Hauptbahnhof, the roof is a heavier metal structure with pitched roof and yellowing opaque panels of glass. Today, travelling by train from Berlin Hauptbahnhof south towards Frankfurt is to follow the route Benjamin travelled to the University of Frankfurt in 1928, in a final attempt to find support for his dissertation, and to Paris in 1933, fleeing Berlin.

Siegfried Giedion notes in *Building in France*, 'the artistic draperies and wall-hangings of the previous century have come to seem musty.'⁵⁴ Likewise, the train platforms are covered by the rounded glass ceilings that resemble curtains or woven textile. The Hauptbahnhof is a new station with a wide spanned glass ceiling that covers a four storey shopping arcade. The plan for the modern arcades has expanded to include the train station platform and shops, a common design feature in Berlin and elsewhere in many cities.

The glass shell roofs that now cover rail terminals no longer require structural supports, yet still use the small panes of glass in order to make a curved expanse – large pieces of glass do not bend. Upon arriving at the Hauptbahnhof platform, the wide glass ceiling is a net stretching from one side of the large building to the other. It offers 'a wide angle lens' that allows a peering out at once to sides of the street and the full expanse of sky. A photo taken of the glass canopy appears in the small rectangular screen the size of a celluloid negative, while the lifesize digital camera advertisement on the platform promotes the camera's nonhuman eye. The sweeping glass arcade roof infrastructure matches

the latest high-speed digital cameras, even while some of the freight trains passing through are from another era altogether.

Revolutionary climatology

For over 100 years, anecdotal reports have appeared in the scientific literature describing brief luminous glows high above thunderstorms. They were given little more credence than UFO sightings until 1989, when university researchers accidentally captured a 'red sprite' on a lowlight video camera. Red Lightning Sprites are now known to flicker like transient, phantasmagoric auroras in the mesosphere, at the very edge of space, whenever unusually powerful lightning flashes within storms far below.⁵⁵

More than architecture, *The Arcades Project* reports on the weather. [fig. 6] Arcades share a genealogy with planetariums, star-gazing architectures, and also with greenhouses. Scientists did not believe Red Lightning Sprites existed, until it was registered on infrared video. Meanwhile, the cause of lightning itself still remains a mystery. What is known is that lightning and all its related displays are intrinsic to the functioning of the earth's weather systems, such as rainfall and heat distribution. 'Or Goethe: how he managed to illuminate the weather in his meteorological studies, so that one is tempted to say he undertook this work solely in order to be able to integrate even the weather into his waking, creative life.'⁵⁶ *The Arcades Project* was written as a literary way-finding system, in order to gain access to what Benjamin called the constellation of awakening. *The Arcades Project* presents an infernal archive, a would-be guide and manual to generate dialectical images, to awaken from the internalised mythologies of capitalism.

Dialectical images cluster momentarily; the subtractive powers of media evaporates language in a hum of electrical impulses. Light/ning is the

electrified plasma or neon tube lighting. Red Sprites become a charged image of weather systems at the intersection of electrical and electro-magnetic forces. 'His nerves had become so sensitive to atmospheric electricity that an approaching thunderstorm would send its signal over them as if over electrical wires.'⁵⁷ To watch a filmed recording of lightning seeking to make contact on the ground, it extends what is called a stepped leader, or jagged bolt that must connect with a similar line extending upward. On earth, the lightning frequency is approximately 40–50 times a second or nearly 1.4 billion flashes per year. Taken together, a cosmic neuronal system flashes into view for a brief second.

Other technical media, namely lighting and photography, activate the arcades as media compared with the darkened enclosures of nineteenth century interiors. The protected passageways provide shelter from inclement weather while the gas lighting and sunlight exhibit climatic conditions. Benjamin's own sensitivity to climate was evident. 'Are we not touched by the same breath of air which was among that which came before?'⁵⁸ In 'On the Concept of History' Benjamin quotes Fourier, one of the iconic figures of *The Arcades Project*:

According to Fourier, a beneficent division of social labor would have the following consequences: four moons would illuminate the night sky; ice would be removed from the polar cap; saltwater from the sea would no longer taste salty; and wild beasts would enter into the service of human beings. All this illustrates a labor which, far from exploiting nature, is instead capable of delivering creations.⁵⁹

In the fields with which we are concerned knowledge exists only in lightning flashes. Sigrid Weigel elaborates upon how Benjamin's flash of knowledge operates in relation to text and image, or his concept of *denkbild*, or thought-image.⁶⁰ The connection between *The Arcades Project* and other writings suggests that Benjamin was testing out

how to construct a literary apparatus for producing new forms of knowledge. In his essay on Surrealism Benjamin explicitly maps out the revolutionary power of writers, and his intention to make use of what he had learned from reading them.⁶¹ *The Arcades Project* does open large passageways into the future of the book. More than scholars, it has been artists that have attempted to make new work using the materials from *The Arcades Project*. 'Velocity, tactility, proximity – these were to be the principles of a radical new criticism. "One-Way Street" made this plain with its own distinctly metropolitan literary architectonics.'⁶² It was taken up with the practice of *détournement* by the Situationist International, announced in the inaugural journal as the 'integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu'.⁶³ There has been at least one sustained effort to generate a hypertext document using materials from *The Arcades Project*. In addition, a recently published nine hundred page book, *Capital*, claims to use *The Arcades Project* as its model for unwinding the twentieth century of New York City, covering many of the same topics found in *The Arcades Project*. It largely succeeds in becoming a literary vehicle that Benjamin had imagined for his own work.⁶⁴

The Arcades Project organises an urban archaeology of the recent past that began with the photograph of an arcade, the Passage de l' Opéra, before moving underground: 'Nadar's superiority to his colleagues is shown by his attempt to take photographs in the Paris sewer system: for the first time, the lens was deemed capable of making discoveries.'⁶⁵

The charged revolutionary potential of the mass actions planned for COP21 (the Paris Climate Conference) were intensified by the terror attacks just two weeks prior, confirming Benjamin's sentiment that the chaos of emergency events is the rule. Climate change and globalised terror provide a backdrop for Benjamin's own life as a refugee,



Fig. 6: Exterior 1, Test Patterns, Kulturforum (Hans Scharoun), 2015, photo: author.

living in Paris while working on *The Arcades Project* (1933–40).

Often the entries in *The Arcades Project* create a continuum between materiality and technique. The ring of Saturn becomes an iron railing, and the painted foliage on the ceilings of the Bibliothèque nationale: 'as one leafs through the pages down below, it rustles up above', when the lightning flash of dialectical imagery sends out its shock waves, the past is allowed to resurface into the present.⁶⁶ Benjamin suggests that this way of knowing always involves a 'stillstehen' or 'zero-hour': 'The read image, by which is meant the image in the now of recognizability, bears to the highest degree the stamp of the critical, dangerous moment which is at the basis of all reading.'⁶⁷

This is how the architecture of the arcades functions in *The Arcades Project*, old media glowing from the interior of an empty mollusc shell, the natural allegory Benjamin often uses to describe nineteenth century interiors: 'arcades dot the metropolitan landscape like caves containing the fossil remains of a vanished monster: the consumer of the pre-imperial era of capitalism, the last dinosaur of Europe'.⁶⁸

The text is the thunder rolling long afterwards.

Notes

A warm thanks to Jean-Louis Cohen whose work first inspired me to begin a research proposal about *The Arcades Project*. Thanks to Sanford, for his own hammer and songs. For Walter Benjamin, who cut the zig-zag path through the center of my writing with Red Lightning, first the title that arrived just prior to a violent thunderstorm while finishing the first draft, and in the final hour, to learn that Red Lightning is real.

1. Adolf Stahr, *Zwei Monate in Paris*, vol. 2, (Oldenburg, 1851):199, cited in Walter Benjamin, 'Exposé of 1935',

in *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press, 2002), 12. In his 'On the Concept of History', trans. Dennis Redmond ([1940] 2005) Benjamin suggests this idea of an abrupt, violent and destructive revolt, possible at any time, with incalculable consequences, accessed 30 January 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>.

2. 'Past media are not dead, but undead, principally to be re-activated and thus in a radically present state of latency'. See Wolfgang Ernst, 'Media Method-Method and Machine' (Lecture at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, 18 November, 2009), accessed 30 January 2016, <https://www.medienwissenschaft.huberlin.de/de/medienwissenschaft/medientheorien/ernst-in-english>.
3. Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History'.
4. Sigfried Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete*, trans. J. Duncan Berry (Santa Monica, CA: The Getty Center, [1929]1995).
5. Walter Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle', in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Random House, 1995).
6. Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. and intro. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: Exact Change, 1994), appeared in installments in *La Revue européenne* before being published as a single text, *Le Paysan de Paris*, in 1926. It comprises four sections: 'Preface to a Modern Mythology' ('*Préface à une mythologie moderne*'), 'The Passage de l'Opéra' ('*Le Passage de l'opéra*'), 'A Feeling for Nature at the Buttes-Chaumont' ('*Le Sentiment de la nature aux Buttes-Chaumont*'), and 'The Peasant's Dream' ('*Le Songe du paysan*') – the last was added for the 1926 publication. Benjamin himself stated that Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* 'stands [...] at the very beginning' of the Arcades research in 'Benjamin, letter to Adorno (from Paris)', 31 May, 1935, in *Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin: The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 88.
7. Walter Benjamin, 'Karl Kraus' in *Selected Writings*,

- vol. 2, part 2, 1931–1934, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press, [1931] 1999).
8. Walter Benjamin, 'One-Way Street' in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin Classics, 2009). An epistolary novel is written as a series of documents, usually letters, although diary entries, newspaper clippings and other documents are also included. *Le Paysan de Paris* draws upon this mode of writing, and so does 'One-Way Street'.
 9. Graeme Gilloch, 'Paris and the Arcades' in *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002) provides a detailed overview of references that tie together *The Arcades Project* with Benjamin's ongoing writing production. According to Gilloch, all of Benjamin's writings from the autumn of 1927 until his death in 1940 derive from research generated by *The Arcades Project*.
 10. Detlef Mertins, 'Walter Benjamin and the Tectonic Unconscious: Using Architecture as an Optical Instrument' in *The Optic of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Alex Coles (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999), 198.
 11. Eve Blau, 'Transparency and the Irreconcilable Contradictions of Modernity', *Praxis* 9 (2008), 52.
 12. Mertins claims that by linking decorative architecture to the mythologies of Capitalism, industrial architecture to social revolution, Benjamin 'radicalised and politicised social conflict'. This was also the basis of Soviet Constructivism that had been an active artistic force in Berlin throughout the 1920s, often featured in *G* magazine, and that then had become the reigning ideology at the Bauhaus. See Mertins, 'Tectonic Unconscious', 197–99.
 13. Giedion, *Building in France*, 94–97.
 14. *Ibid.*, 94.
 15. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, F4a,2.
 16. Benjamin, *One Way Street*, 60.
 17. Benjamin, 'Berlin Chronicle', 314.
 18. 'Ring of Saturn or Some Remarks on Iron Construction' (1928), in Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 885.
 19. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, N10,3.
 20. 'Media archaeology is both a research method in media studies, and an aesthetics in media arts [...] it denominates the nonhuman procedures which happen in media themselves.' See Ernst, 'Media Method-Method and Machine', accessed 30 January 2016, <https://www.medienwissenschaft.huberlin.de/de/medienwissenschaft/medientheorien/ernst-in-english>.
 21. Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography' (1931), trans. Stanley Mitchell, *Screen* (Spring 1972), 5–26.
 22. Benjamin, 'Marseilles '(1929), in *Reflections*.
 23. The arrival of Moholy-Nagy in Berlin, the third largest city after New York and London, was part of the internationalisation of art and architecture that took place after the First World War.
 24. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Ludwig Kassák, *Buch Neuer Künstler*, (Zurich: Lars Müller, 1996). Originally published in Vienna in 1922 as a propaganda piece for Constructivism in art, architecture, music, and technology.
 25. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 883.
 26. *Ibid.*, N1,10.
 27. The paratextual has been defined as all that precedes the content of the book or prepares the reader to gain access to the information, such as titles, chapter titles, headings and subheadings, indexes.
 28. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, C1,1.
 29. *Ibid.*, 883.
 30. *Ibid.*, N1a,1.
 31. A. G. Meyer, *Eisenbauten* (Esslingen, 1907), cited in Benjamin, *Arcades Project*.
 32. Giedion, *Building in France*, 7.
 33. Benjamin, 'Short History of Photography', 24.
 34. Meyer, *Eisenbauten*, cited in Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, F4a,2.
 35. Roland Barthes, 'Eiffel Tower' in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982).
 36. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 'Space, Time and the Photographer', in *Moholy-Nagy, An Anthology*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York, Praeger, 1970).
 37. Moholy-Nagy, 'Production-Reproduction', in *Moholy-Nagy*, ed. Krisztina Passuth (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 289–290.
 38. Benjamin, 'Short History of Photography', 526. A disturbing post-war testimony discloses how slave

- labour from internment camps was used by the Krupp industrial complex throughout the Second World War, accessed 30 January 2016, <http://forum.axishistory.com/viewtopic.php?t=64075>.
39. Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century (1935)' in *Arcades Project*, 3.
 40. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, T1a,6.
 41. *Citizen Kane* (1941), directed by and starring Orson Welles.
 42. Benjamin, 'Berlin Chronicle', 6.
 43. *Ibid.*, 30.
 44. Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935–1938* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press, 1999), 143–66, 'Half the art of storytelling [is] to keep a story free from explanation.'
 45. Sanford Kwinter, 'The Hammer and the Song' in *OASE Journal for Architecture*, special issue *Diagrams*, no. 48 (1998), 31 accessed 30 January 2016, <http://www.oasejournal.nl/en/Issues/48/TheHammerAndTheSong#031>.
 46. Benjamin, *One Way Street*, 59
 47. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, N1,5.
 48. Benjamin, *One Way Street*, 51.
 49. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Collins/ Fontana, [1936] 1973).
 50. *Ibid.*, 13.
 51. Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century (1939)' in *Arcades Project*, 17.
 52. Markus Jäger, *Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style*, ed. Jörg Haspel and Annemarie Jaeggi, (Munich and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007).
 53. Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital (1935)', in *Arcades Project*, 4.
 54. Giedion, *Building in France*, 3.
 55. Walter A. Lyons, et al., 'The Hundred Year Hunt for the Sprite', *Eos* 81, no. 33, (August 15, 2000), 373–377. I was curious whether Red Lightning actually existed, and that is how I found out that it is only a recent discovery based on an accident with an infrared video camera that captured a flash while engaged in another experiment.
 56. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, D1,3.
 57. Dolf Sternberger, *Panorama* (Hamburg, 1938), cited in Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, S9,3.
 58. Benjamin, 'Concept of History', II.
 59. *Ibid.*, XI.
 60. Sigrid Weigel, 'The Flash of Knowledge and the Temporality of Images: Walter Benjamin's Image-Based Epistemology and Its Preconditions' in *Visual Arts and Media History, Critical Inquiry* 41, 2 (2015), 365.
 61. 'Surrealism' (1929) in Benjamin, *One-Way Street*.
 62. Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations*, 101.
 63. For a definition of *détournement*, see *Situationist International Online*, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/definitions.html>.
 64. Kenneth Goldsmith, *Capital*, (New York: Verso, 2015), accessed 30 January 2016, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2011/04/rewriting-walter-benjamin-the-arcades-project/>.
 65. Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital (1935)', in *Arcades Project*, 6.
 66. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, S3,3.
 67. *Ibid.*, N3,1.
 68. *Ibid.*, R2,3.

Biography

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Review Article

The Memory Works: Between Monuments and Ruins, the Case of Contemporary Budapest

Rodrigo Rieiro Díaz

Introduction

'Memento Park Budapest. The gigantic memories of communist dictatorship.'¹ Thus reads the head of the website of this theme park about *honfibú*, next to pictures of the statues of the communist era that until recently embodied part of the Hungarian self-mythology.² All these statues, now stored in a park on the outskirts of Budapest, form a sort of contemporary Parco dei Mostri dedicated to tourism and memory.³ Lying on vacant lots among electric poles, shrubs, and some small outbuildings, are the statues of the mythical characters of the past, scattered like fallen gods. Precisely the same price, the loss of divinity and its transformation into the demonic, was the price that Walter Benjamin said the pagan deities had to pay to survive the Christian era, their only conceivable salvation. Benjamin's project was to construct a political explanation of the surrounding cultural world in developed capitalist societies, where everyday life is lived among the buildings and industrial products of the recent past. He argued that the objective world of neglected objects expresses meaning.⁴ The discarded material from earlier times could be raised to a source of knowledge about the historical truth.

The goal of this review article is to examine whether Benjamin's semantics of the fragment applies to the discarded materials of our own time. Some locations in present-day Budapest may be considered a perfect case of study for Benjamin's physiognomy, so they are surveyed in that light in the second, third and fourth sections. Benjamin

believed that in the metropolitan consumer's discontinuous experience of reality there was an emancipatory potential to break with the politically subjugating fantasy of progress. Therefore section five discusses Budapest's success as the locus of the redemption of the oppressed. Finally, in the last two sections the focus is directed towards the local phenomenon of *romkocsmá*. It is employed as a case of study to wonder whether urban phenomena of re-use of ruins could house an emancipatory potential or, conversely, serve the interests of the hegemonic groups and the contemporary dominant discourse.

City of memorials

Memento Park encloses the rejection of a rejected past. It is a collection of historical objects exploded outside the historical continuum. We do not have to go far away to find that this peculiar way of intertwining the past with the fabric of the present is manifested in other nearby ruins. Újpalota (The New Palace) is the main urban development of Janos Kadar's Hungary. [figs. 1–2] Its speed of implementation, from 1968 to 1977, and size, 15,886 housing units, make it the most significant example of the Hungarian version of *plattenbau*: the *panelház*. This housing system proliferated vastly in the Soviet sphere of influence during Khrushchev's rule in the USSR. In Budapest, nearly one in four people still live in one of these housing units.⁵ Only thirty-three thousand out of its more than sixty thousand inhabitants in the 1980s remain here today.⁶ After the fall of the regime in 1989 and subsequent privatisation

of housing, there have been certain internal migration flows in the city. The abandonment of this large housing estate, relatively new and not far from city centre is not unconnected to its symbolic status.

However, to visit the stage of Hungarian real socialism one must go a little further – and farther back in time. Dunaújváros (the new town on the Danube, formerly Sztalinváros) was the first and most important of the fourteen new towns that were built in post-war Hungary. It was built mainly between 1949 and 1961 along the Danube, some 50 km south of Budapest next to heavy industry pole Dunafer. The ideal city for the workers, image of a new society, it fit into the line of the Stalinist era and its resolute belief in the omnipotence of planning. Weiner Tibor, the architect of this goulash Magnitogorsk, was trained alongside Hannes Meyer in 1930s Moscow, and went on to working with Grete Schütte-Lihotszky in Paris for several years afterwards. Despite this impeccably modern training, representative and spectacular aspects were fundamental in the design of the city, ordered around Vasnű Út (Iron and steel industry Avenue), 'creating a close relationship, both in spatial and spectacular terms, with the industrial pole.'⁷ Particularly during the rule of Kádár's government, the city came to symbolise the new Hungarian socialist society and therefore the inclusion of the city in the particular mythology of at least a couple of Magyar generations, as a constant presence in the mass culture of goulash communism. Postal stamps and postcard collections were issued, and it served as the setting for novels or musicals, but above all, it became the filming location for numerous films by the state film producer Hunnia. *Kölyök* (Kid) by Szemes Mihály (1959) is the best known example of these slightly moralising films of manners. The story of the orphan – starring the then very popular Törőcsik Mari – accompanies long descriptive sequence shots of the city. The film contributed to construct Dunaújváros as a popular symbol of the sociocultural model that it supposedly embodied. [figs. 3-4]

The symbolic status constructed by the cultural industry of real socialism for Dunaújváros is equivalent to that of the statues that are now in Memento Park. So is the dilapidated condition of both, after the decline of the world that gave birth to them. The city, which had more than sixty-two thousand inhabitants in the late 1980s, has now lost about a quarter of its population, the result of an evolution which is neither unlinked to the process of restructuring heavy industry throughout Europe, nor to its symbolic status.⁷ Dunaújváros – Kölyök in particular – symbolises a world of national unity, patriotism and promotion of consumption, which appeals to the collective in a dreamlike state, in a rather strangely familiar recipe.

City of oblivion

The communist revolution that took place in Budapest after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the First World War and the following Hungarian Soviet Republic that ruled briefly the country between March and August 1919 were also central in the mythical construction of the People's Republic. The central stage of this revolution was the working-class district of Csepel. The main industrial area of Budapest, located in an island in the Danube near the river port, has been, since its industrialisation in the late 1800s, a recurrent focus of insurrection and has a peculiar tradition of urban guerrilla. The last worker's councils resisted the countrywide white Romanian invasion on the island in 1919, and their leading role in the revolutionary process gave the neighbourhood a place in the mythical historiography of the later People's Republic. A bust of Kalamár Jozsef, revolutionary leader of Csepel, rests in Memento Park. However, Kalamár was tortured and killed by new urban guerrillas during the 1956 anticommunist revolution in Csepel.⁹ Then too, the last pockets of insurrection were suffocated on this industrial estate. The few Transylvanian migrants who now live and work among the last operating factories of the extensive industrial area at Csepel could hardly make any fuss



fig. 1



fig. 2

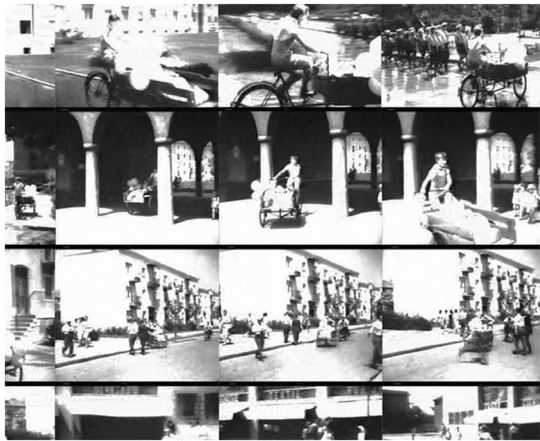


fig. 3



fig. 4

Fig. 1: Memento Park, 2006. Photo: Author.

Fig. 2: Újpalota, 2006. Photo: Author.

Fig. 3: Kölyök, Mihály Szemes and Miklós Markos, dirs., (Hungary: Hunnia 1959). Source: Hunnia Records & Films Production.

Fig. 4: Dunaújváros, 2006. Photo: Author.

today. Among them, as in Memento Park, only the phantasma remains.¹⁰ [figs. 5-6] 'The destruction of the monuments that were built to signify the immortality of civilisation become evidence of change in its transience'.¹¹

However, real socialism is not the only ideology whose ruins are today enclosed within the walls of Memento Park. It also contains the rubble of at least three other ideologies that have shaped the history of Europe in the twentieth century: the colonialism-imperialism (of the Austro-Hungarian Empire here), the late-capitalism that followed the collapse of the economic system that ruled the Eastern countries, intertwined with the nationalist ideology that served both of them. Pest, the town on the left bank of the Danube, is arranged based on rings and radii, starting from the ruins of the Roman settlement of Contra-Aquincum. The same academic composition based on symmetries and axes found in the Haussmanian layout of this Paris that Hitler did not forgive, is reproduced in the suburban deposit of statues. The disposition of Memento Park in plan evidences the Austro-Hungarian imperial ideology in Budapest. An ideology, also in its Hungarian variant, that appears combined with the claim of certain founding or colonial myths. In this case, the myth is of the seven Magyar tribes, unified by the legendary Árpád, to leave the steppes near the Ural Mountains and find in the plains of the Danube their promised land. The composition of the statues park by Eleőd Ákos of seven circles together as one village of seven yurts, could hardly be unaware of this symbolism. [figs. 7-8] In fact, Memento Park has a symbolic component relevant to the renewed Hungarian nationalism, given the foreign occupation component of postwar communism in Hungary. Even the kitsch entrance to the theme park appears as a post-modern reflection of the neoclassical National Museum, expression of the imperialist ideology that culminated in World War I. At the zenith of that ideology, when the Millennium of Hungary Exhibition was held in 1896, another

group of statues was erected at the end of the great avenue Andrássy in Pest: the monumental statuary Hősök Tere (Heroes' Square), including representations of the seven Magyar leaders led by Árpád. After restoration during the 1990s historicist revival, it became one of the tourist spots of the Prague-Vienna-Budapest tours, as well as the meeting point of the neo-fascist party Jobbik.¹² [fig. 9-10]

City of ruins

Memento Park simply condenses the ruins of its surroundings: the ruined city of Budapest. The whole city conserves many traces of the recent past, which provide a report on the material from which our present is made. Budapest is the first derivative, the second is Memento Park. The particular arrangement of historical events during the twentieth century in Budapest enabled this sort of densification. They were not very different from those in many other European cities (from East Germany in particular); the singularity of Budapest is that the destructiveness of the periods of crisis, its prolonged economic effects and their concatenation in time left less opportunity for concealment.

One of the main objectives of Benjamin's project, to adopt the point of view of what has been excluded, in order to face the destruction of material nature as it has actually happened, is to provide a dialectical contrast to the futurist myth of historical progress, which could only be upheld through forgetfulness of what had happened. Forgetting what happened is particularly difficult when the material traces of the recent past accumulate in the way they do in Budapest. The ruinous condition of the Austro-Hungarian imperialist ideology, latent under decades of real socialism, which can be found both at Hősök Tere and in Memento Park, is evident in much of the extensive historic centre of Pest. Before the Second World War the centre of Pest was already hoary, afterwards it was devastated. However, the housing policies of the People's Republic were always aimed at the construction of new housing estates, leaving



fig. 5



fig. 6



fig. 7

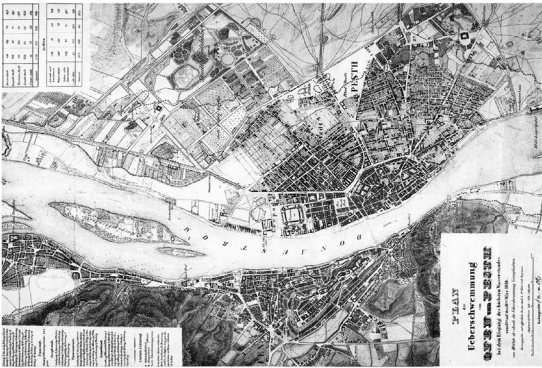


fig. 8

Fig. 5: Memento Park, 2006. Photo: Author.
Fig. 6: Csepel Művek, 2006. Photo: Author.
Fig. 7: Aerial view of Memento Park. Source: Szoborpark.
Fig. 8: Plan of Pest, 1838 Source: Szoborpark.

the city centre in a state of relative neglect. After the fall of the socialist regime, ideological motives steered Hungarian authorities to promote private property, favouring home-ownership by the residents already living there. This policy consolidated in very degraded buildings residents who lacked the resources to repair them. A hundred thousand flats in central Pest need major repair today, and up to thirty thousand of them should be evacuated if Western standards were applied.¹³ Ideological and economic reasons have so far prevented municipal and national authorities to undertake major strategic operations of beautification through public investment that would trigger gentrification in similar situations in other places. Despite the apparent profitability for tourism and real estate speculation which such processes would bring, the insoluble contradiction of Budapest housing policy maintains the status-quo of degradation of the housing stock, limiting both public and private renewal operations.¹⁴

Today, the arcades of Paris do not exist other than as a simulacrum. But in Budapest, they are kept, seemingly for no other reason than the lack of money to tear them down. They are the everyday material reality at the heart of current Pest.¹⁵ This has been the working material for the Hungarian filmmaker Forgács Péter. In his series *Private Hungary*, Forgács has worked since 1988 with home-made films shot primarily by members of the bourgeoisie of 1920s Budapest, where the daily lives of families in peaceful everyday environments were registered before, and sometimes after they were truncated by the historical dramas of the twentieth century. [figs. 11-12] This author explodes out of the historic continuous home images, originally filmed to be displayed in the family and private life, and gives them a new meaning. Combining archival work, documentation and interpretation, the private films rescued by Forgács – like a *flâneur* of waste material of previous generations – consist of images stripped off the flow of the here and now. 'What yesterday – or a hundred years ago – was deep

and exciting, can be comical or sentimental today, [which] suggests that life can be lived another, and not this way'.¹⁶ Forgács works over images of the past intertwined with the present in the dilapidated centre of Pest as another renowned Budapesteer did before him: André Kertész. Kertész was one of the greatest photographers of his generation and one of the pioneers of photojournalism. He made his first works in pre-war Budapest but looking at his photographs, many contemporary urban features are recognisable – not always the concrete buildings, though often those too. At the end of his life, Kertész would come back to photograph his home town. He made a series of photographs in 1971 entitled *Budapest*, particularly telling about the nature of the city. It contains images of girls and young women with statues in urban settings. The juxtaposition of petrified and transitory nature in this series has the power to show the atmosphere of Budapest, where present-day everyday life coexists with the phantasma of the recent past. [figs. 13-14]

City of trash

In Memento Park too one finds examples of the petrified images of the past coexisting with the fleeting experience of the present. The park contains another layer of debris, interspersed with the older ones: the ruins of late-capitalist ideology, exalting its banality in the phenomenon of tourism which is the economic infrastructure of the park. The break of the aura of the 'fallen gods' is perceptible, from the cultural value that those reified heroes of communism must once have had. At the same time, the overlapping ruins at Memento Park bring the clear flash of truth about the process of cultural transmission as a triumphal procession in which the rulers of today pass over those now underground.¹⁷ Benjamin's project of questioning the view of history as progress as such, not dependent on the conscious will of individuals, is based on his understanding that this vision damages the efforts to confront critically the present and to promote an in-depth transformative praxis. He hoped that the



fig. 9



fig. 10



fig. 11



fig. 12

Fig. 9: Memento Park, 2006, photo: author.

Fig. 10: Hősök Tere, 2006, photo: author.

Fig. 11: Forgács Peter, Dési és Jenő, 1989. Source: Forgács Peter.

Fig. 12: Pest, 2006, photo: author.

surrounding discarded material world in capitalist societies could be raised to a source of knowledge about the historical truth. For Benjamin, the cognitive explosion in a political sense occurs when the present as now-time is bombarded with empirical profane fragments of the past.¹⁸ Well, that bombing is constant in Budapest. If the devaluation of nature and its status as a ruin could become politically instructive, they should be in Budapest. It is possible to distinguish between the tradition of the culturally and socially dominant groups, owners of the means of cultural transmission, and the broken tradition of the oppressed, ill-concealed by the hegemonic groups due to the peculiarities of recent history in the city. If those images contained the strength to awaken from the world of our parents,¹⁹ there should have arisen in this city a reform of conscience to shake the dream world outside itself.²⁰

It is not foreseeable, however, that the revolutionary pedagogy of the already-there will announce the dawn of the day of the revolution in Budapest in the near future. On the contrary, the most ruthless capitalism develops with great success in the city, supported on a thriving nationalism. In fact, the situation of the Hungarian Roma minority after the neo-Nazi rise in the country finds physical expression in the ongoing urban developments in the city.²¹ Corvin Promenade was a recent renewal process of Pest that entailed the gentrification of twenty-two hectares in Józsefváros district, one of the neighbourhoods where the Roma population is concentrated.²² [fig. 15] The expulsion of the poorest stratum of the residents, including many Roma families, is a pattern repeated in Middle Ferencváros, the other main urban renewal project in Budapest,²³ and is actually fostered by the city's renewal policies.²⁴ After the discourse on the urban regeneration of degraded environments, the hegemonic groups induce the exclusion of all which might disprove the totalizing mythological construction serving the dominant discourse. Benjamin's hope

for the redemptive potential of a praxis triggered by a hermeneutic of discontinuity seems rather optimistic today. The city's situation begs the question whether the remnants of the material world of mass consumption are not ruins, but trash.

City of ghosts

There is also in Budapest an improvisational culture, freed and even nourished by the rapid decline of the city, which finds its meeting point in the *romkocsm* scene – literally pub in ruins. The *romkocsm* phenomenon arose more than ten years ago in the district of Erzsébetváros, the old Jewish quarter in the centre of Pest, in a state of neglect at that time. It was in this context that cultural associations and private developers began to rent abandoned buildings at low cost, to use them as places of production and dissemination of contemporary art, cafés, etc. Everything developed in line with projects generated by the collectives themselves, artists or associations, and the young people who frequent them. [fig. 16] Of course, this scene of temporary re-use of urban ruins has much in common with other contemporary urban phenomena, especially in Germany. However, some notable differences exist. Real estate pressure is lower in Budapest, which has contributed to lesser erosion of the scene over time. The peripheral location of major tourist circuits – few tourists go into the city beyond the week-end – has also slowed its commodification. The question is whether the ruined built environment already-there in Budapest has a sort of atmospheric agency that has contributed to trigger phenomena such as *romkocsm*. It may be possible to read these phenomena of re-use of urban ruins as

concrete political acts, and in each case limited, of opposition, claiming, construction, and resistance from below as being able to find a motivational basis of their reflective linkage with the broken tradition, marked by defeat, of the struggles for the emancipation made in the past.²⁵



fig. 13



fig. 14



fig. 15

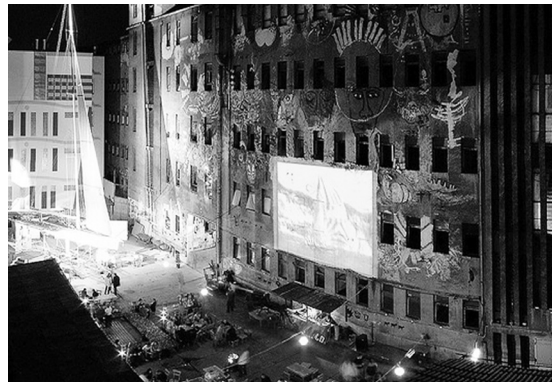


fig. 16

Fig. 13: Mother and daughter, Budapest 1971. Source: André Kertész.

Fig. 14: Memento Park, 2006, photo: author.

Fig. 15: Corvin Promenade, photo: author.

Fig. 16: Romkocsma Tűzraktér, photo: author.

City of angels

Nevertheless, Benjamin's hope for the emancipatory potential of the discontinuous experience of reality by metropolitan consumers finds a sinister reflection in the fragmentation of experience by the contemporary dominant discourse. In fact, the rise of inequality, one of the features of late capitalism, has been identified at the core of the patterns of informalisation proliferating in the Western cities.²⁶ When the most effective marketing strategy becomes blurred with simulacra of cooperative constructions, and temporary re-use of urban ruins becomes, in the name of flexibility and innovation, a catalyst of city branding, all the while displacing and dispossessing the excluded, the role of phenomena like *romkocsmá* has to be balanced in terms of what they mean for the democracy and the quality of urban life from the subaltern point of view.

However, the potential ability of everyday spaces to become, however briefly, places where lived experience and political expression come together must not be underestimated. Temporary use of the city entails the possibility of a 'social decommodification' and a weakening of the land tenure.²⁷ In Budapest's post-commodification context, use-value of the city prevails, at least for a while. Budapest, especially the centre of Pest, poses an unbeatable context for a collective transformation of the built environment. The *romkocsmá* scene can be read both as a simulacrum and as a rehearsal of the long-awaited housing renewal of the city: the practice of transformation of the city for the benefit of all which would foster democratic practices in the everyday and regain public influence over urban life after the mass privatisation of multi-family housing. The tension between the melancholic oppositional encounter with the ruined built environment in a sublime perspective and the motivational basis for a cooperative reconstruction of the surrounding material world from the fragments of the past remains unresolved in the *romkocsmá* scene. Gentrification

through *honfibú* or new democratic practices in the city, that is to be solved by the residents of Budapest.

Notes

1. *Szoborpark. A kommunista diktatúra gigantikus emlékművei* in Hungarian. Note that the root *emlek-* in *emlékművei* (monuments, memories) means memory. A literal translation of *emlékművei* would be 'the works of the memory'.
2. The *honfibú* or patriotic sadness defines a general mood marked by melancholy that would supposedly define the character of the Hungarians.
3. The Sacro Bosco (Sacred Grove), colloquially called Park of the Monsters (Parco dei Mostri in Italian), also named Garden of Bomarzo, is a Manieristic monumental complex from the sixteenth century located in Bomarzo, Italy. It is populated with sculptures and small buildings among the natural vegetation.
4. Susan Buck-Morss, *Dialéctica de la mirada. Walter Benjamin y el proyecto de los Pasajes*, trans. Nora Rabotnikof (Madrid: Visor, 1995), 253. First published as *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).
5. 'Panelpiac – túl a mélyponton?' [Panelház market, beyond the lowest point?], Otthon Centrum, August 2006, accessed June 29, 2015, <http://www.oc.hu/ingatlanpiac/269>.
6. 'Magyarország Helynévnyvtára, 2012' [Hungarian Census 2012], KSH (*Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*), accessed June 29, 2015, <http://www.ksh.hu/apps!cp.hnt2.telep?nn=23649>.
7. Pál Germuska, 'Between theory and practice: Planning socialist cities in Hungary,' in *Urban Machinery: Inside Modern European Cities, 1850–2000*, ed. Tom Misa and Mikael Hård, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2008), 233–255.
8. 'Helynévnyvkönyv adattár 2011' [Cadastre 2011], KSH (*Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*), accessed June 29, 2015, http://portal.ksh.hu/pls/ksh/docs/hun/hnk/Helysegnevkonyv_adattar_2011.xls.
9. Sándor Hegedűs, 'Védnökség a mártírsírok felett:

- Kalamár József [Patronage of the tombs of the martyrs: József Kalamár], 2008, accessed June 29, 2015, <http://www.aszabadsag.hu/cikkek/2008/19/mozgalom.html>.
10. In the sense of immaterial images related to memory, imagination, and time.
 11. Buck-Morss, *Dialéctica de la mirada*, 193.
 12. Third political party in the National Assembly of Hungary.
 13. Ivan Tosics, 'Housing renewal in Hungary: from socialist non-renovation through individual market actions to area-based public intervention', in *Renewing Europe's Housing*, ed. Richard Turkington and Christopher Watson, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), 161–186.
 14. The main exceptions to the rule, the largest-scale attempts at the gentrification of Pest, are addressed below.
 15. The recent renewal and opening to the a rather international public of the large Gozsdu Udvar (Gozsdu Arcades) as a leisure venue, as well as the ongoing restoration of the emblematic Parisi Udvar (Arcades of Paris), point to the transience of this status too.
 16. Forgács Peter, 'Arqueología del tiempo o memorias alternativas' [Archaeology of time or alternative memories], in *Documentamadrid 2011* (Madrid: Documentamadrid, 2011), 320–322 (322).
 17. Walter Benjamin, *Obras. Libro I, vol. 2*, eds. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Scheppenhäuser, with the collaboration of Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Sholem, Spanish eds. Juan Barja, Félix Duque, and Fernando Guerrero, trans. Alfredo Brotons Muñoz (Madrid: Abada, 2008), 309. First published as *Gesammelte Schriften. Band 1–2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989).
 18. Walter Benjamin, *Libro de los pasajes*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Luis Fernández Castañeda, Fernando Guerrero, and Isidro Herrero (Madrid: Akal, 2005), N2a, 1-3. First published as *Das Passagen-Werk* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982).
 19. Ibid. Ms. 1126, note 8 to 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century'.
 20. Ibid., Marx cited as an epigram to convolute N.
 21. The events in the village of Gyöngyöspata during Easter 2011, with Roma people fleeing from the neo-fascist militias that controlled the village, reported in the international press, spread abroad the worsening fate of the Hungarian Roma people after the rise of the extreme right.
 22. Ian Cook, 'Are you ready to move?', Museo de los desplazados [Museum of the displaced ones], 2009, accessed June 29, 2015, http://www.lefthandrotation.com/museodesplazados/ficha_cook.htm.
 23. Tosics, 'Housing renewal in Hungary', 173.
 24. Ibid, 185.
 25. José Manuel Romero Cuevas, 'Sobre la actualidad de Walter Benjamin' [On the present relevance of Walter Benjamin], *Constelaciones 2* (2010): 371.
 26. Saskia Sassen, 'The informal economy: Between new developments and old regulations', *The Yale Law Journal* 103 (1984): 2289-304.
 27. Margaret Crawford and Tobias Arnborst, 'Don't obsess about permanence... A conversation between Margaret Crawford and Tobias Arnborst', in *Urban catalyst. The power of temporary use*, ed. Philipp Oswald, Klaus Overmeyer, Philipp Misselwitz, (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2013), 105-116.

Biography

Rodrigo Rieiro Díaz studied architecture in Madrid, Barcelona and Budapest, where he attended the Budapesti Műszaki és Gazdaságtudományi Egyetem. He practised in Madrid, Istanbul and Copenhagen, and is completing a PhD at Escuela Técnica de Arquitectura de Madrid, on participative processes of transformation of housing, focusing on small-scale interventions. He is currently on a research stay at Statens Byggeforskningsinstitute in Copenhagen.

Review Article

Paris and Berlin: On City Streets and Loggias

Stéphane Symons

Towering over the city of Brussels, visible from almost anywhere on the ground and seemingly oblivious to its surroundings, the Palace of Justice is surely one of the most notorious buildings in Europe. With a twenty-four thousand ton dome of more than a hundred meters high and a built ground surface of more than twenty-five thousand square meters, it is bigger than St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and was for a long time considered the largest building in the world. Its construction took almost twenty years, from October 1866 until October 1883, sparking all kinds of legends about architect Joseph Poelaert losing his mind (and the construction plans along with it). Poelaert, in fact, had died in 1879 and thus did not even make it to the day of the building's inauguration.

Its enormous size and eclectic style are detrimental to the skyline of Brussels but they have spurred the imagination of various artists and writers. The Palace of Justice in Brussels, for instance, plays an important role in W. G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* (2001) and it is a key element in Francois Schuiten and Benoit Peeters's famous historic-futuristic graphic novel *Brüsel* (1992).¹ Somewhat unsurprisingly, Sebald describes it as 'a singular architectural monstrosity' and 'the largest accumulation of stone blocks anywhere in Europe'.²

At least one fascinating element in this building connects it to something that was hugely important to Walter Benjamin's views on the city and,

as we will see, illustrates important issues that go beyond it: the use of iron and steel in the construction of large buildings. A mere ten years before the construction of the Palace of Justice commenced, in 1856, the Bessemer converter was invented, an oxygen furnace that converts iron into large and commercially interesting quantities of steel and thereby drastically revolutionised the architecture of big buildings. Ample use of this new technique and these new materials was made for the construction of the Palace of Justice but, strangely, none of the iron and steelwork was kept visible. Huge blocks of stone cover up the steel and iron, confining these newest of all materials to the darkest of areas within the building's internal structure.

Benjamin's interpretation of Paris as the so-called 'capital of modernity' helps us to understand what was truly going on in such instances. For in his essay 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century (Exposé of 1935)', Benjamin states that 'iron is avoided in home construction but used in arcades, exhibition halls, train stations – buildings that serve transitory purposes'. The invisibility of steel and iron in the Palace of Justice, in other words, can be read as a disavowal of any semblance of transitoriness, specifically because this building needed to be presented as a genuine *monument* to what is just and right (it is, after all, a *palace* of justice).³ The visibility of steel and iron, that is, could have been regarded as detrimental to the self-presentation of the state as an *absolute* power.

Picking up on such examples, this review article will investigate a conceptual duality central to two of Benjamin's works: the essay on Paris mentioned above and his autobiographical text *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (1932–1938). On the one hand, Benjamin renders numerous analyses and descriptions of buildings and experiences that present themselves as absolute and internally unified, giving the impression of being autonomous and immutable. On the other hand, Benjamin focuses objects and perceptions that present themselves as transient and in flux and are therefore experienced as contingent and incomplete. These latter objects and perceptions derive their significance from something that is inevitably *external*.

The first striking feature of the essays, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* and 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century' is that both titles combine a *spatial* reference (in both cases a city) with a *temporal* one. This is not at all a coincidence since it reveals something that is dear to Benjamin's heart, namely the idea that the true meaning of a given historical period, in this case the nineteenth century, can only come to the surface through the careful analysis of what was left behind in space, that is, buildings and streets. In line with what Benjamin, in his unfinished magnum opus *The Arcades Project*, describes as 'dialectical images', in both the Berlin and the Paris essays it is made clear that, in his view, the past only becomes legible through the present, that is, through something that it cannot in any way have anticipated and that inevitably remains alien to it. Benjamin writes:

It is not that what is past [*das Vergangene*] casts its light on what is present [*das Gegenwärtige*], or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been [*das Gewesene*] comes together in a flash [*blitzhaft*] with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill [*Dialektik Im Stillstand*]. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal

[*rein zeitliche*], the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural [*bildlicher*].⁴

For Benjamin, the genuine meaning of the past can only be understood by turning to what has remained behind and to that which has outlived its own moment.⁵ This notion of 'remains' can be understood in the double sense of the word. Firstly in the sense that the German art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929), who was an important influence on Benjamin, makes of it, that is, as a *Nachleben* or 'survival' of the past within the present and as a force that is, against all odds, still at work in and through it. 'Historical "understanding"', writes Benjamin, 'is to be grasped, in principle, as an afterlife of that which is understood'.⁶

Secondly, one can understand the concept of 'remains' in a more common-sensical manner, namely as denoting something that is purely material, that is, as a left over or residue. For Benjamin true meaning resides not in what is immediately understood or experienced as meaningful but in those things, remnants, ruins, detritus, that are revealed as not *being* meaningful *in themselves* but as *having been made meaningful* by way of the unsuspected presence of something *external*. In a 1935 letter to Gershom Scholem, for instance, Benjamin writes that it is possible to 'capture an image of history' in 'the detritus of present existence'.⁷ Similarly, in *The Arcades Project*, he writes that 'the interest which the materialist historian takes in the past is always, in part, a vital interest in its *being* past – in its having ceased to exist, its being essentially dead'.⁸

Upon first view, such a connection of time and space (time becoming spatial) is reminiscent of Benjamin's famous definition of the aura as 'a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be'.⁹ It may even evoke the famous

scene in Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* (1882) when the old knight Gurnemanz leads Parsifal, *der Reine Tor* (the immaculate Fool), to the site of the Holy Grail Ritual and the two men cross an enormous distance in but a mere number of steps. What is at stake in these two examples, however, is the opposite of what is at stake in the connection of time and space in the Berlin and Paris essays. In the concept of the aura, and in Wagner's opera, the dynamic of a time-becoming-spatial entails a dynamic of *purification*. In such instances, a given object, however banal it may be, resonates with an ambiguity of meaning and with a strange distance that renders it untouchable and seemingly turns it into an autonomous unity. What matters in the Berlin and Paris essays, conversely, are experiences (in the first essay individual ones, in the second collective ones) that are incredibly *precise* and *distinct*. These experiences have a presence that is acutely perceived by or manifest to the Self and, moreover, they are revealed as *incomplete* and as *unfulfilled*.

An example drawn from the Berlin text can make clear what is at stake here. In a paragraph titled 'News of a Death' Benjamin recalls an experience from his youth that can be called 'an involuntary memory in reverse', that is, an experience that, at the moment of its taking place, was already perceived to refer forward to a future moment of legibility. Benjamin writes:

I may have been five years old at the time. One evening [...] my father appeared [...] [and] gave me the news of a cousin's death. I did not take in everything he said. But I did take special note, that evening, of my room, as though I were aware that one day I would again be faced with trouble there. I was already well into adulthood when I learned that the cause of the cousin's death had been syphilis.¹⁰

What is remarkable in this example is that a moment in time, in the past, seems to have migrated to a place in space, namely a room, and that it, for

that reason, has managed to keep itself intact. In other words, the part of information that Benjamin's father left out of the story, the cause of the nephew's death, is not at all absent from Benjamin's memory but, to the contrary, it has become an element of 'excess' in the past or a dimension of 'too much' within history that has by that token managed to survive all the way until the present. To recall his memories, therefore, Benjamin has to turn to material things that have nothing to do with what is truly at stake in the story and somehow retrieves, in and from these objects (which are hardly interesting in themselves and outlive the visit of the father), that which is most essential to this visit.

Two things are important here. Firstly, a Proustian element rings throughout Benjamin's memoirs. What is truly meaningful to the Self cannot but come as a shock to it. The most significant form of memory is considered that type of memory that seemingly comes from without, not having been appropriated by the narrative individuals tell about themselves and build their identities from. What genuinely speaks to the self is thus believed to be *heterogeneous* to it: it does not seem to originate in the same place as our conscious ego but it has seemingly survived of its own accord – *alongside* but not mastered by the faculty of our voluntary memories.

Secondly, this past that has preserved itself in, as Gilles Deleuze would have it, a 'pure' state, has managed to do exactly this because it has become displaced, that is, because it has lost its most proper abode and because it was, instead, kept or maintained by a material medium it obviously does not have a natural connection with.¹¹ For this reason, such moments of the past resonate with a sense of dislocation, of incompleteness or a lack of fulfillment: they are not autonomous or unified, not enclosed in themselves, but they are still, for some reason or another, at work or dynamic. Such moments of the past have not simply passed: they

are still in movement and they have the power to affect things and moments that they seemingly have no affinity with at all.

The same way of thinking underlies the Paris essay where the experiences analyzed by Benjamin are collective and the past that is commemorated is no longer a private or individual one. In the Paris text as well, what is at stake is not the past 'as it has been' but the past to the extent that it still is, history to the extent that it is still at work within the present. 'A given state of affairs', writes Benjamin somewhere, 'becomes historical posthumously, as it were through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years'.¹²

The manner in which the nineteenth century *becomes* historical, in the twentieth century, is determined by the material remains that it has left behind; not on account of the initial grandeur of its buildings and the original splendor of its avenues but through the ruins of the former and through the over-used and worn-out state of the latter. Thus, on a collective level as well, what is truly meaningful first comes as a shock to the self-understanding of a given state of affairs and, in the public realm as well, it is perceived as residual, that is to say, as a dimension of 'excess' or as a 'too-much' of the past. It is for this reason that Benjamin introduces, in the Paris text as well, the view that certain technical inventions create things that are, in origin, artistic but subsequently 'outgrow' the context of art and cannot be fully absorbed by it. In the Paris text we see something that is similar to the way in which, in the Berlin text, little five-year-old Walter did not absorb all of what is father told him but thereby left open a dimension of too-much in the past through which it became unfulfilled and could therefore subsist all the way into the present.

Benjamin writes that 'architecture, with the first appearance of iron construction begins to outgrow

art' and uses iron as that element of excess which is to be found within the past but is not absorbed by it and thus allows it to survive until the present.¹³ For Benjamin, it is important to realise that our understanding of the nineteenth century as a historical force is tied to an analysis of these things that cannot be reduced to the period in which they originated: what is at stake is to understand the meaning of buildings, images, texts and so forth, however old they may be, as still unfinished and open to change and to grant them a renewed life and significance through our interpretations and readings of them. This is why he emphasises that steel and iron are important because they are 'transitory' (they are used for tracks and roads, that is, for things that serve as a mere gateway for other things), why he focuses on the idea that glass is indispensable because one cannot leave behind traces on it (glass does not have a status of its own: it is a medium, both opening up to external reality and shielding us from it), why he makes so much of the invention of photography (capable of 'making' discoveries: a photographic image is no mere registration but it creates something novel and this something is a part of reality) and, most important of all, why he named his unfinished magnum opus *Passagen-Werk*.

The English translation of this book, *The Arcades Project*, is misleading because it misses both the idea of movement and transition (*Passage*) and the idea that such change and flux can be 'put to work', that is to say, that movement and transition are not mere chaos or differentiation but that a specific type of significance can be retrieved from *within* it. The *Werk* in *Passagen-Werk* denotes that what is in movement or transition is not by that token to be reduced to mere variation or change. What is at stake is the discovery that what is in movement can for that reason create a network of relations and connections with other things and only in this way actualise its meaning. Of central importance to *The Arcades Project* are these phenomena from

the nineteenth century that are not *reducible* to their past-ness because they have somehow survived into the twentieth century (and continue to survive into the twenty-first century). Benjamin is, in other words, drawn to phenomena that, through this survival and on account of these alterations, make legible or understandable what was most essential to the nineteenth century and, moreover, what might still be of crucial importance to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For Benjamin, solely what is excessive and residual is still unfulfilled and open to change and can therefore render an experience of the past that is truly meaningful or significant to the present. But this can only happen on the condition that we find the means to really grasp such experiences and develop the tools to understand and comprehend them for what they are.

Now, the question arises: what spaces, in both the Berlin and Paris texts, are most equipped as the starting point for this quest to discover meaning and significance from *within* change and movement? In the Berlin text, Benjamin focuses on the loggia. The loggia, Benjamin emphasizes, is a type of covered balcony that is to be regarded as part of *both* the interior and the exterior of an apartment. As Benjamin writes, loggias 'mark the outer limit of the Berliner's lodging' and they both grant the lodger a view on the hustle and bustle of the outside world, while also protecting him from this seeming chaos.¹⁴ It is telling that Benjamin describes the loggia at the outset of his biographical essay because it denotes a viewpoint from which, indeed, things and experiences that are alive and unfinished, in movement and still changeable can *nevertheless* be studied, understood and made meaningful. A loggia 'allows space and time [to] come into their own' because it is sufficiently isolated from outside forces to not get fully caught up in them, yet it is also sufficiently immanent to them to make a viewpoint possible that releases one from all too rigid accounts of the Self and identities that are fixed and immobilised.¹⁵ The

loggias give 'solace' but this solace lies precisely in 'their uninhabitability' and it only works for someone 'who himself no longer has a proper abode', that is, for someone who has dared to distance himself from his normal self-understanding and is open to the feeling that something revealing about the ego can be found precisely in what lies outside of it.¹⁶

In the Paris text, this same duality underlies, of course, Benjamin's views on the arcades which, as covered streets, are a strange combination of both the private and the public sphere: as streets, they share in the dynamism, anonymity and unanticipated movement that mark the city, but, because they are covered, they do not merely signal chaos or change but they open up a circus of visibility and a festival of gazes in which phenomena and processes can be studied and made meaningful. The arcades thus constitute a 'world' in themselves but one that is 'miniaturised', that is, one that can be made to yield meaning *in* its very anonymity, contingency and multiplicity.

The most illustrative inhabitants of the arcades are, therefore, of course the *flâneur* and the solitary walker. In his review of Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin* (1929) Benjamin describes the city as 'a mnemonic for the lonely walker: it conjures up more than his childhood and youth [but also] more than its [that is, the city's] own history'.¹⁷ The *flâneur* submerges himself in the very randomness, arbitrariness and chaos of the city but he nevertheless meets it as endowed with a relevance to his own particular existence. The meaning encountered by the *flâneur* is therefore neither a quality of the city (it does not teach him new facts about the city) nor does it allow for a restored possession of the Self: it arises in the very movement that relates the city to the Self and vice versa and it remains permanently dis-lodged between both. The anonymous nature of the city is thus a part of the very experience of its being meaningful to the Self. Put differently, what

is so puzzling and overwhelming for the *flâneur* is not *what* he encounters in the city or *what* he learns about himself but the sentiment that something anonymous, collective and public like city life has *something at all* to say *about* his most intimate ego.

This same structure underlies the closing paragraph of the Berlin text, entitled 'Sexual Awakening'. *Berlin Childhood around 1900* starts with the relatively safe environment of the loggia but it drops the reader, at the end of the text, in the middle of the bustling life of a big city street. This environment is, however, in its very dynamism and life made meaningful because Benjamin describes how it is only by loosening one's firm grasp on one's surroundings and by allowing the outside world to break through the shell of one's whole self to firmly established identities that one's most intense desires can be awakened. 'In one of those streets I later roamed at night', Benjamin writes, 'in wanderings that knew no end, I was taken unawares by the awakening of the sex drive'.¹⁸ Describing the moment in which he understands that he will be irredeemably late for a Jewish New Year service, Benjamin discovers a moment of liberty and genuine freedom in the heart of the sentiment of being lost.

Suddenly, in the midst of my perplexity and dismay, I was overcome by a burning wave of anxiety ('Too late, I'll never make it to the synagogue!'), but also, at the very same moment and even before this other moment had ebbed, by a second wave, this one of utter indifference ('So be it – I don't care').¹⁹

The structure of pleasure and desire is here described as distinctly *non-auratic* because they relate to a reality that has lost all semblance of being self-enclosed or autonomous. What awakens one's desires is here described, moreover, as not self-identical or interesting in its own right, but as part of a movement of constant flux and change. 'The two waves', Benjamin writes, 'converged irresistibly in a dawning sensation of pleasure, wherein

the profanation of the holy day combined with the pandering of the street, which here, for the first time, gave me an inkling of the services it was prepared to render to awakened instincts'.²⁰ This movement, therefore, does trigger a feeling of anxiety but also, and at the very same moment, a sensation of pleasure because it provides proof for the irreducibility of the chance that the object of one's desire will at some point become available to the self.

Notes

1. Francois Schuiten and Benoit Peeters, *Brüsel* (the seventh volume of the chronicles). The story was published in *À Suivre* issues 158, 159, 160, 171, 172 and 173; from March 1991 to June 1992. The Casterman album was published in 1992.
2. W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2001), 29. For more information about the Palace of Justice, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5357/> (accessed on June 20, 2015)
3. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4.
4. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, N3,1.
5. For further context, see also Benjamin's essay 'On the Concept of History', trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings* Vol. 4, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). In this way, as Friedlander writes, 'one might say that Benjamin brings together the two senses of "realizing" – realizing as making something real or actual on the one hand and recognizing or seeing something clearly on the other. This is strikingly put by emphasizing how knowledge of a historical object is not "knowledge about" it but actually part of being an object itself', in Eli Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin. A Philosophical Portrait* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 63.
6. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, N2,3. For more information on the connection between Warburg and Benjamin, see, amongst other texts, Sigrid

- Weigel, 'Bildwissenschaft aus dem Geiste wahrer Philologie. Zur Odyssee des Trauerspielbuchs in der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg'. *Walter Benjamin. Die Kreatur, das Heilige, die Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008).
7. Walter Benjamin, *Briefe 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), 685.
 8. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, J76a,4.
 9. Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography' in *Selected Writings* Vol. 2, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 519.
 10. Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, transl. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 85–86.
 11. For Deleuze's ideas on the 'pure past' see his *Proust and Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York and London: Continuum, 2000), 59.
 12. Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', 397.
 13. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 5. For more information on this issue, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).
 14. Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, 42.
 15. Ibid.
 16. Ibid.
 17. Benjamin, *Selected Writings* Vol. 2, 262.
 18. Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, 124.
 19. Ibid.
 20. Ibid.

Biography

Stéphane Symons is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Philosophy (KU Leuven) in Belgium. His main field of research is continental, nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy of culture. He has published the volume *Walter Benjamin. Presence of Mind, Failure to Understand* (Brill), edited the volume *The Marriage of Aesthetics and Ethics* (Brill) and co-edited the collections *Walter Benjamin and Theology* (Fordham UP) and *Theological Genealogies: Twentieth Century German Thought on Secularisation* (forthcoming).

Review Article

Bankside Urban Forest: Walter Benjamin and City Making

Stephen Witherford

Just a short walk from the numbing pace and noise of train and underground stations, of the buses and couriers at the northern end of Borough High Street, and the new shops and restaurants around the market, is a narrow street heading south, away from the river. Turning into this street we quickly become aware of the profound change in the feel of the city around us. Under the shadow of the wide viaduct we pass, as if through an iron and steel city gate, into a different world. On our left is a metal mesh gate where many hands have woven ribbons, trinkets and name tags. This shrine is to remind us that Cross Bones, the graveyard for prostitutes and the destitute that used to occupy this site, is not to be forgotten or erased by new development. Moving a little deeper we encounter the obsessively arranged leaves of fine art papers in the shop window of R. K. Burt and Company. In this buried location, discovered by only the most determined wanderer, all manner of exotic species can be found. Here you can run your fingers over the different surfaces: hand-made, hot-pressed, cold-pressed, rough, rag, Fourdrinier machine-made, the superior felt side of mould-made. Exceptionally strong lightweight papers from Japan, rough textured from the mountainous regions of the Himalayas near Kathmandu and the smooth surfaces from the ancient mills of Hahnemühle in Germany; the woods and plants of the world can be felt here.

With each step the acoustics soften. We are no longer shouting to be heard. Immersed deeper in the block the chattering songs of goldfinches high in

the plane trees call our attention skywards. These quieter streets are conducive to conversation, our minds wander and we share unthought thoughts.¹ The voice of a young singer escapes from an open window opposite Burt and Co's yard. A student at the Centre for Contemporary Music, accompanied by a keyboard, crafts and caresses the lyrics of youthful desires and freedoms. At some distance behind her, hoisted in the air on thick brick arches, the screech of metal rises above the tangle of old yards and works, the wild squeal of trains slowly arcing into and out of the station at London Bridge.

Our whole body is alert as we pass from street to passage and from passage into a small clearing, the bombed out nave of All Hallows Church. The ruin has been colonised by a thick web of vines and ivy. A few steps lead us to the hollow gothic doorway through which we can penetrate into this grotesque garden of stone and plants. The city feels a great distance away, few would find us here amongst the distorted figures of broken window mullions and the twisted trunks of trees. A flash of light draws our eye. The smooth concrete floor of a railway arch is momentarily lit up by the blue flare of an arc welding torch like a burst of sunlight on moving water between trees. Outside mechanics sit on the stumps of stacked rubber tyres smoking and chatting. Near the river bank the head of an elegant golden female deer catches the light, the carved figurehead on the replica galleon. We pass along Bear Lane and at a bend in Great Suffolk Street a White Hart stands, painted onto the pub nestled

here. Deeper still we edge along Bittern Street. All of these small incidents – signs, marks, places to perch, the corners and the edges – offer visual clues to the wanderer through this intense landscape. To the uninitiated, these are signs of a quiet otherness, a surprising depth, a disorienting richness; the more we return, the more we lose sight of streets and buildings and navigate instead by these markers. As Walter Benjamin observed of Paris:

Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. [...] But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its centre.²

Despite London's size, there are not many places where one can lose oneself in the sense that Benjamin describes. Bankside is, however, one of these places, where one can wander off the beaten track and quickly encounter a city of intense historic depth and whose ancient topography remains close to the surface.

Beyond the limits and law of the City, the southern foot of London Bridge has always been deeply entwined with its movements and trade. Churches, coaching inns, brothels, a prison, hospital, theatre and market all jostled for prominence to form the shifting line of Borough High Street. A little way west along the ragged edge of the Thames' south bank another bridge, Blackfriars, was begun in 1760. As part of a bold piece of Georgian town planning a grand boulevard was laid out across the marsh to the south. Extending alongside the recently rebuilt Christ Church, this road cut across the islets and ditches to a new stone obelisk marking St George's Circus, the intersection with the road leading to the third bridge over the Thames at Westminster. From

St George's Circus, London Road continued south across fields and market gardens to converge with Borough High Street just over a mile south of the river at the Elephant and Castle.

Between the river's edge and these two great approach routes to London was caught a low-lying and haphazardly organised quarter of the city. Immediately behind the long yards and intimate streets that braided Borough High Street and Blackfriars Road, any sense of a coherent urban structure immediately dissolved into a patchwork of marshy fields, tenter grounds for drying animal skins, glass works, breweries, foundries and timber yards. Named after the street along the bank of the Thames, Bankside had no direct routes across its vague terrain. Long skinny courts, wiry streets and oddly-shaped yards were casually connected by narrow passages and alleys. These intensely labyrinthine places were characterised as rookeries, warrens and stews, their inhabitants as slightly less than human. These borderless spaces, where work, life, and sociability were too tightly intertwined provoked in visitors a fear of promiscuous mixing. It would have taken courage and significant local knowledge to navigate your way through this place.

Bankside has long been an area without a coherent form or a singular use, which is not the same thing as it not having an identity. In London many areas have become defined by the dominant activities that have developed there: the West End, Covent Garden, Belgravia, the City or Canary Wharf. Focused on a concentration of certain activities, theatres, expensive residential properties or financial institutions, these areas have come to be increasingly influenced by corporate interests. They are highly regulated, controlled by a few powerful institutions or investors. These have an interest in developing a culture of exclusivity, creating a territory that can gradually be purged of unwanted conflicts. This process has become increasingly self-conscious and self-determining. The urbanism



Fig. 1: Collage of the three historic urban structures – Borough High Street to the east, Blackfriars Road to the west and the river edge to the north – that enclose the urban interior. © Witherford Watson Mann Architects

of these places is largely based on the formal models that London adopted in late eighteenth century: squares, boulevards, and regular urban blocks defining grids of streets. Bankside is very different. Free of any dominant controlling interests, it is more multiple, identifiable by the almost complete absence of these familiar London urban models.

Walking around Bankside today, the co-existence of the archaic and modern metropolis can be vividly experienced, and indeed, this contrast is sharpening. London's insatiable development market fuelled by global finance and corporate interests is clearly visible along the three historic edges that enclose the area: Borough High Street, Blackfriars Road and the river edge. [fig. 1] The 'Shard' is just the highest of a series of towers under construction around London Bridge Station. There are several further towers planned or under construction along Blackfriars Road and the river edge. Where the two bridge approach roads converge at the Elephant and Castle, the complete clearance and reconstruction of the huge Heygate Estate is underway along with a series of residential towers and plans to demolish and re-build the large shopping centre with further towers on top. Although hemmed in by these powerful forces acting along its edges Bankside remains deeply resilient to extensive clearance. Its tangle of streets and viaducts, web of smaller building plots, houses, businesses and historic institutions are like dense undergrowth blocking the path of large-scale redevelopment.

Benjamin's 'to lose oneself' was born out of his vivid encounters with Berlin and Paris. Both these cities were, at the time, more intact than we know them today, before the fragmentation caused by bombing, modernist planning and traffic engineering. The block structures of both cities conformed to the deep institutional models of the European city. Here the busy café-lined streets forming the urban exteriors would have quickly given way to passages into

the depths of the block. Slipping into these urban interiors would have resulted in vivid encounters with the activities and spaces that situated themselves away from the busy streets: workshops, factories, small theatres and quiet church gardens.³ Buildings and activities filled the voids through a combination of improvisation and adaptation. Awkwardly shaped yards lined by shallow rooms gave rise to artists' studios, tailors and furniture makers. To Benjamin, these unexpected encounters within this labyrinthine network of passages and yards must have felt like another world, one where his imagination was heightened through a sense of vulnerability within the sublime metropolis. When Benjamin writes in 'A Berlin Chronicle' of the city as a forest, his reading of the city's unfathomable depth echoes Aragon:

Let us take a stroll along this Passage de l'Opera, and have a closer look at it. It is a double tunnel, with a single gateway opening to the north on to the Rue Chauchat and the two gateways opening to the south on to the boulevard. [...] The gateway to mystery swings open at the touch of the human weakness and we have entered the realms of darkness. One false step, one slurred syllable together reveal a man's thoughts. The disquieting atmosphere of places contains similar locks which cannot be bolted fast against infinity. Wherever the living pursue particularly ambiguous activities the inanimate may sometimes assume the reflection of their most secret motives and thus our cities are peopled with unrecognised sphinxes which will never stop the passing dreamer and ask him mortal questions unless he first projects his meditations, his absence of mind, towards them.⁴

Bankside does not fit into preconceived images of the city. On our walks, we noted and drew to try to digest its complexity. [fig. 2] Back in the studio, we traced our steps in trails of graphite, piecing together the labyrinth in our heads, distilling a sense of structure where at first there had appeared to be none. Following the analogy of the forest, we discerned streams, rides and clearings. Moving along streets



Fig. 2: Drawing recording the topography of Bankside with the river edge running along its top. Small clearings, gardens and historic fragments are located within this topography. © Witherford Watson Mann Architects

that meander and twist feels like following streams, converging and dividing as they head south. Setting across the area from east to west are a series of cuts that allow you to travel more directly, like the ancient rides made through dense woodland for hunting. Caught in this web of streams and rides are a multitude of small clearings, historic spaces and odd buildings that mark the accidents of incremental growth: railway lines and lanes, bomb damaged ruin and street, cathedral nave and turbine hall, abutting yards that have been connected together over time. [fig. 3] The sense of the vast metropolis beyond the edges, the presence of the ancient brooding river, the spatial structure of streams, rides and clearings all combine to heighten our awareness, like being deep in a forest. Navigation is possible through small clues. The smell of the timber yard, the shrieks of children in the small playground, the feel of sunlight cutting between the viaducts, the tiny garden with the painted stone Virgin Mary, a fragment of medieval priory wall, all mark pathways through the depth of this place. This urban interior is rich with unexpected encounters, time seems to slow down as the noise and busy activity along the edges are left behind and you become consumed by the sublime intensity of this interior. Bankside's depth is also a legacy of its local jurisdiction that long set it apart from the law and order across the river.

If [forests] have typically been considered places of lawlessness, they have also provided havens for those who took up the cause of justice and fought the law's corruption. If they evoke associations of danger and abandon in our minds, they also evoke scenes of enchantment. In other words [...] the forest appears as a place where the logic of distinction goes astray.⁵

Is this sense of a different order, an order more recognisable in the wilder nature we encounter in our woods and forests, the very thing that fires Benjamin's imagination within the urban intensity of Paris and Berlin? Could cities be made with

districts that have this kind of depth anymore? Cities are increasingly designed or extended with diagrammatic strategies, greater degrees of logic, management structures and rhetorical promises – more than can be delivered. Distinction underpins the location of activities into organised clusters, the brand of a large-scale development, the self-image of a new district and who might live or work there. The societal benefits of the 'mixed city', the 'diverse city' are frequently invoked but seldom delivered. The dominant tendency is to exert greater degrees of control through the making of new neighbourhoods by clearing what existed and starting again, either wholesale on larger sites, or through the piecemeal construction of increasingly familiar individual 'products', like hotel groups, supermarket chains, offices and corporate public spaces. This type of action seeks to erase the awkward and messy parts of the past that violate the logic of efficiency and legibility – yet these transgressive places are often the very things that stir collective curiosity and imagination.

But when such a complex depth of urban interior already exists, a different set of tactics is needed to engage in its physical and social structures. When our studio was commissioned to prepare a public space strategy for Bankside, we developed a specific set of tools to respond to its depth. Our sensual and imaginative understanding grew out of and embraced this district's unusual conditions, the things that resisted current forms of distinction. Wandering and losing ourselves led us to make a series of drawings which were not about mapping in an abstract or factual way. We were gradually gaining a sense of the deep structure of the area. We recorded what we noticed, we noted what others said was important and we observed where sociable activity took place. We started with these experiences and observations and from them we grew an idea that had its roots in this place, rather than projecting an abstract formal concept onto the area for these physical and social conditions to fit into.

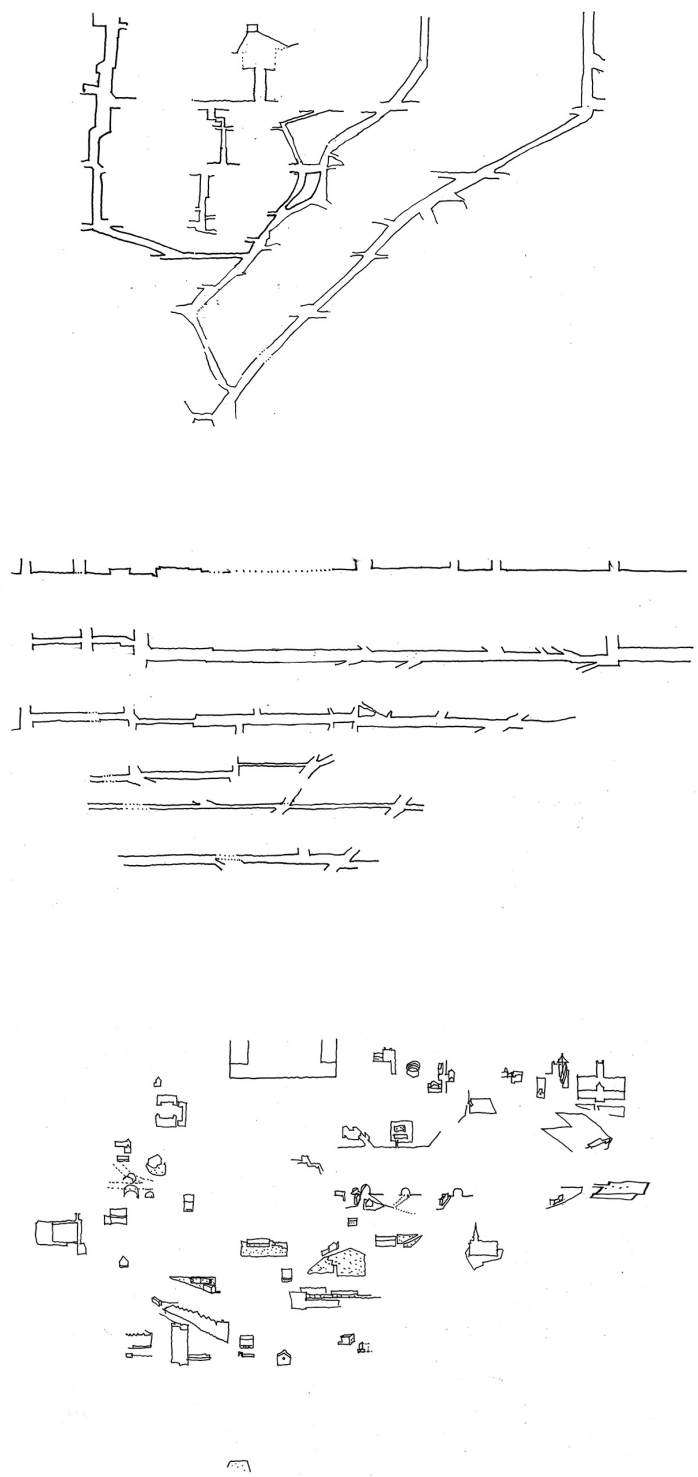


Fig. 3: Drawings mapping the three deep rooted structures encountered in Bankside: the streams – a series of historic meandering streets, the rides – a series of east-west cuts and the clearings within the weave of the streams and rides.
© Witherford Watson Mann Architects.

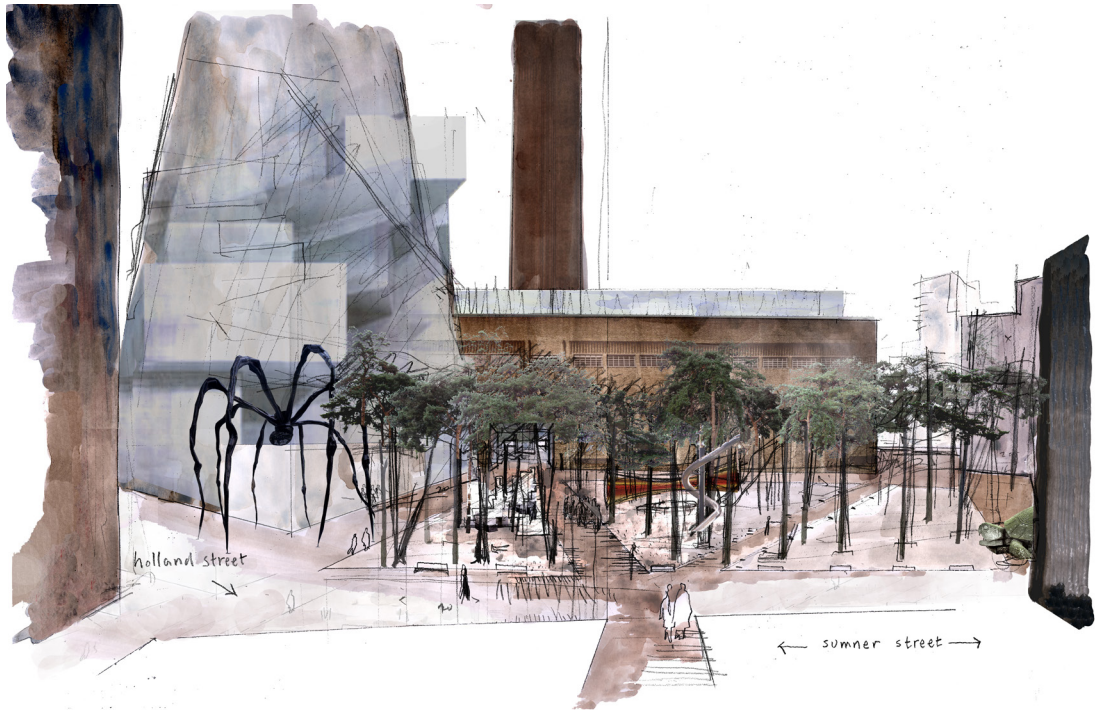


Fig. 4: Drawing of an imagined new public playground on the south side of Tate Modern, occupied by previous Turbine Hall Commissions beneath a grove of scots pine trees. © Witherford Watson Mann Architects



Fig. 5: Drawing of the reimagined Flat Iron Square; the ground is extended to connect to the shops and the café roof is wrapped with a planted canopy to bind in the two existing plane trees, like a woodland hut in a clearing. © Witherford Watson Mann Architects

We developed an incremental framework for how the public spaces – streets, passages, gardens small parks and odd squares – could be improved and added to. We drew on the interpretive world of metaphor to re-imagine this interior as the Bankside Urban Forest.

We imagined new projects and combined these with ones already planned or underway for both modest and significant improvements to public spaces: increasing their extent by laying new surfaces and changing vehicle movements; adding trees, additional seating and safer cycling routes within existing clearings; increasing the planting and enabling some public access within small gardens; and creating more vivid public places within proposed new developments. [fig. 4] At Flat Iron Square we encountered a small island between three streets within which stood a café occupying the former public toilets. The canopies of two enormous plane trees filled the sky above this café. The northern edge of this modest clearing is cut at an angle by the steel latticed bridge carrying the railway over Southwark Bridge Road. We re-imagined the café as a woodland hut, a hybrid of the natural and man-made, situated in its own small clearing. [fig. 5]

This was one of the early projects that we were able to realise. The café was extended by the addition of a new oak canopy thickly planted with woodland flowers that enjoy the dappled light through the crowns of the two plane trees that rise above them, whose trunks the new structure binds into the café. Like the roots of the towering trees, a new web of granite stretches across the ground, in-filled with new and reclaimed paving to weave together floor, café, canopy and shops. The kerbs, road crossings and cycle route were all bound into this triangular web that echoed the lattice structure of the viaduct. The closure of one short street and removal of vehicles enabled the island to be connected to the existing shops on the south side. Responding to the qualities we encountered, we

shaped a vivid public space that has now become the setting for new activities: children's parties, art exhibitions, small music performances, and a jazz club. These activities can thrive deep within these forest conditions, sheltered from the busy commercial life at its edges.

Intervening in the public spaces within this deep urban quarter continues through many small and a few larger-scale projects, temporary, completed, underway and planned for the near future. The re-making of the river edge walk, the Union Street Urban Orchard, the connection of Redcross Gardens to the primary school entrance, new footways and seating at Great Suffolk Street, a new public garden at Cross Bones Graveyard and sports garden at The Marlborough, new public spaces at Tate Modern and within the Neo Bankside and St George's Circus residential developments and a large new public space, Elephant Square, at the re-configured northern roundabout of the Elephant and Castle. Many different authors, architects and local organisations, such as the Bankside Open Spaces Trust and Southwark Council, are all contributing proposals and making projects within this open framework. [fig. 6]

Our wanderings into the interior of Bankside immersed us in the depths of this district. We didn't simply lose our way, we submitted to its complex structure. Through the metaphor of the forest we opened the possibility for a profound metamorphosis – from a city into a natural metabolism. Working with this deep structure and within the fine grain of the neighbourhood we have implanted an idea in the public consciousness, and provoked others to make individual projects that add to the quality and diversity of life in this place. Through mostly small-scale interventions we have sought to establish a relationship between the depth of the urban interior and exterior, responding to the rich diversity of these physical settings and the nature of human interactions that these support. This

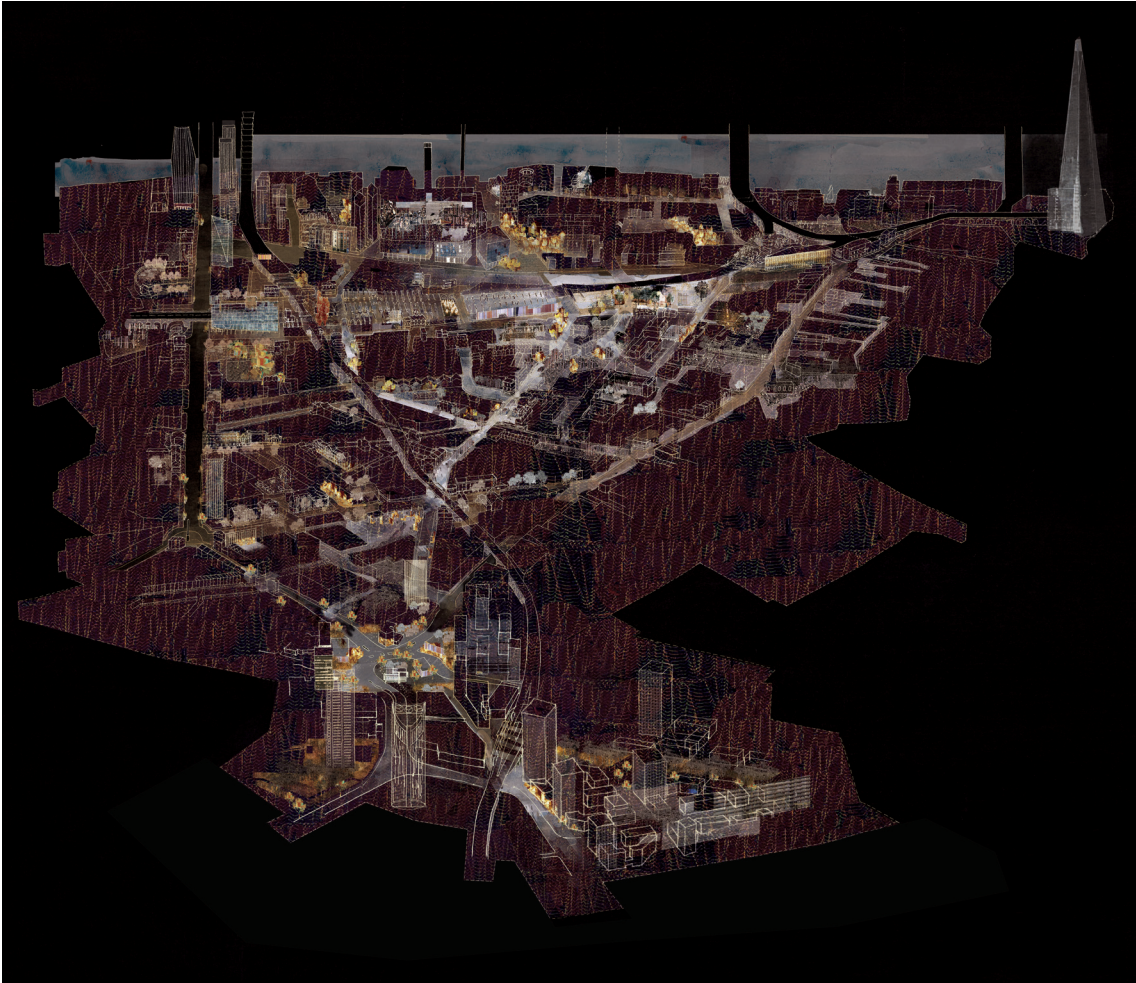


Fig. 6: Drawing of the Bankside Urban Forest, as imagined once the public spaces gradually evolve and intertwine. The river edge runs along the top and Blackfriars Road and Borough High Street converge in the south at the Elephant and Castle where a huge public square is under construction. © Witherford Watson Mann Architects

approach opens up further opportunities for social exchange and public life. Bankside Urban Forest enabled us to lose ourselves and by doing so, recognise and commit to the diverse ecologies and exchanges that make our cities vivid landscapes of the collective imagination.

Notes

My special thanks to William Mann for his critical support and suggestions in key aspects of structuring and phrasing this essay.

1. 'Unthought thoughts' here refers to the relationship between our feelings and the world, thus the deep associational and analogous imagination stimulated by a heightened sense of awareness of a situation.
2. Walter Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle', in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, (London: Verso, 1979), 298.
3. 'Urban interior' refers to a term used by Dalibor Vesely during a private conversation on the Bankside Urban Forest in 2007. Vesely articulated the meaning of this term more fully in his essay 'Between Architecture and the City' in *Phenomenologies of the City*, ed. Henriette Steiner and Maximilian Sternberg (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).
4. Louis Aragon. *Paris Peasant* (London: Pan Books, 1971), 28, as quoted in Vesely, 'Between Architecture and the City', 153.
5. Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). With thanks to Ken Worpole for bringing this quote to our attention in his excellent essay 'The Bankside Urban Forest' – published in *Topos* 61, *Urban Space* (2007): 51.

Biography

Stephen Witherford is the founding director of Witherford Watson Mann Architects, with Christopher Watson and William Mann. The practice was established in 2001 and has focused on exploring the spatial and social relationships between public buildings, public spaces and public housing through a series of built designs, masterplans, urban frameworks, exhibitions and articles. The practice was awarded the 2013 RIBA Stirling Prize for the construction of a contemporary house within the medieval ruins of Astley Castle. Stephen is a Trustee of Tate Gallery, a member of Tate Modern Council, the Mayor's Design Advisory Group, and the British School at Rome Faculty of Fine Arts. He was a Visiting Fellow in Urban Design on the London School of Economics Cities Programme and continues to write and lecture on architecture and urbanism.

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Footprint

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Footprint is published by Stichting Footprint in collaboration with Jap Sam Books and the Architecture Theory Chair, Faculty of Architecture and The Built Environment, TU Delft, PO Box 5043, 2600 GA Delft, The Netherlands
+31 (0)152781830, editors@footprintjournal.org

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Delft University of Technology

**JAPSAM
BOOKS**

ISBN: 978-94-90322-64-9

www.japsambooks.nl

ISSN: 1875-1504

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