Introduction

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What follows is composed of papers first presented 6–7 April 2001 at a symposium held by the Forbes Center for Research in Culture and Media Studies at Brown University.[1] This symposium, "Benjamin Now: Critical Encounters with *The Arcades Project*," was provoked by the 1999 English-language translation of Walter Benjamin's monumental *Das Passagen-Werk*, the most legendary work of the most legendary of twentieth-century cultural interpreters and theorists. There was also a new and (as of this writing) ongoing multivolume set of translations appearing as Benjamin's *Selected Writings* from Harvard University Press. While focused on *The Arcades*, then, the symposium implicitly considered the extent to which the English-language academy has a "new" Benjamin on its hands. We thought, as my co-organizer Kevin McLaughlin puts it in his afterword, that "*now* might be an opportune moment for a reconsideration of the critical work of Walter Benjamin."

1. I am responsible for the overall tenor and substance of this introduction, but a few of its paragraphs include specific wording that is heavily inflected by Kevin McLaughlin's contributions to symposium-related documents. I am grateful for his collaboration and generosity.

Our "now"—not Benjamin's. McLaughlin is implicitly referring to Benjamin's concept of *Jetztzeit*, the "now-time," the point at which objects, activities, and actions from the past may be cognized in a unique and heretofore unrecognizable constellation, as an image, a figure. For Benjamin, this dialectical image manifests a knowledge uniquely available to a specific present moment that will then pass. It is precious because it is generated by and includes the desires, needs, and contexts of the present and so can be lost if not formulated now. It is also precious because although an image, it conveys a knowledge that is in some fundamental sense rigorous. This is not an obvious or simple concept. But I admit that I reflexively imagine that the essential question of this collection of essays might be formulated in something of a Benjaminian manner: What previously unrecognized cognitions will flash up from our new encounter with *The Arcades Project*, as cognitions about Benjamin's work that make available something new of the dangers and the dreams, the forgotten and the remembered, of his time, but also and simultaneously of our own?

Benjamin addresses this kind of question to the remarkable abundance of textual fragments he quotes as traces of the Paris of a previous generation, the Paris he named capital of the nineteenth century. This conjunction of historical time and geopolitical space is indicative. The years during which Benjamin conceived and worked through *The Arcades Project* were years of some of the most extraordinary political, social, and intellectual crises of the twentieth century. In formulating his own answers to his question, he was working not only on the objects of study, nineteenth-century Paris and, more broadly, the inception of modern culture and society. He was also working through the conceptual, linguistic, and interpretive means by which he and his generation might understand culture and society—that is, the subject in an epistemological sense. Clearly both of these sides, object and subject, have their histories and their politics.

What is our situation now, as subjects confronting *The Arcades Project* as an object? It may appear that we are in a qualitatively different position and context from Benjamin's. Many political and theoretical questions that engaged him—about culture, textuality and language, modernity and society, knowledge and history—however compelling, can seem significantly distinct from ours simply because there has been an ongoing history of politics, theory, and criticism since his death. (And certainly, most of us in the First World academy, where the interest in Benjamin is so intense, work in very different circumstances than did he.) Yet Benjamin teaches us to watch not only for irreducible particularity and radical novelty but also

for symptoms and compulsions of repetition and return in that very particularity and novelty. For example, Benjamin and certain colleagues attributed crises they lived to sociopolitical and sociocultural systems whose economics, aesthetics, and social fantasies were structured by war. As I am writing this, it is almost impossible to avoid asking whether we are living at a moment that is in the process of unveiling its own forms of perpetual crisis and war. But this is not to call on Benjamin in the name of an immediacy of "relevance," an immediacy I suspect he would abhor; his time was not only the same but different. It is better to begin elsewhere. In unique and original ways, Benjamin engaged fundamental problems bearing on culture, textuality and language, modernity and society, politics and history. Even though he lived and worked in a different time, there is a drive in his corpus that seems recognizable now, something that draws our present to him. The first problem is to convert such recognizability into cognition. This means not allowing the strange object that is *The Arcades Project* to become too familiar too quickly.

For it has received a remarkable welcome. The appearance of a full and integral English translation of *Das Passagen-Werk* in 1999 was widely treated as a major intellectual event, attracting notice even in nonspecialized venues such as the *New York Times*, the *Nation*, and the *London Review of Books*. In the scholarly world, *The Arcades Project* is almost certainly in the process of becoming canonical. But part of what makes the translation of this legendary text so significant is that certain of Benjamin's other writings were already canonical.

In his own lifetime, Benjamin's importance was acknowledged mostly in highly distinguished but relatively restricted European intellectual circles. (The plural is important, for it has always been difficult to categorize Benjamin neatly or align him with a single mode or school of thought.) After his notorious suicide, committed in 1940 while fleeing the German invasion of France, some key members of these circles—including Gershom Scholem, Theodor Adorno, Hannah Arendt, and Georges Bataille—were involved in preserving his work and then promoting his legacy. After the war, their labors eventually resulted in a much wider sphere of appreciation. The take-off point was perhaps the 1961 German publication of a one-volume selection from his writings (previously collected in two volumes in 1955) under the title *Illuminations*. In the English-speaking world, a crucial moment was the translation of a somewhat different selection chosen by Arendt and also published as *Illuminations* in 1968. It may be worth noting that the distribution of Benjamin's work in the English language began during a historically par-

ticular configuration of dangers and dreams, comprised in part by the conjuncture of political upheavals and related student rebellions now so insufficiently summarized as "the sixties," and the academic theory boom that was simultaneously being unleashed.

Considered as a scholarly writer, Benjamin worked in an astonishingly wide variety of fields, including literary criticism (or comparative literature) and theory, hermeneutics, history and historiography, philosophy and language theory, sociocultural theory, mass media and visual arts, mass culture and urban studies. *Illuminations* contained major essays in all of these, including some that drew on material from the as yet unavailable *Arcades Project*. Almost immediately several became standard reading in the burgeoning interdisciplinary theorization of culture and modernity that cut across several critical studies disciplines, and some were soon cited as foundational for conceptualizing the postmodern *avant la lettre*. More translations followed in the 1970s, as the set of available Benjamin texts were deployed in important debates in several fields. But at least in the English-speaking world, this status was originally achieved on the basis of a small proportion of his writings.

Now, however, Benjamin's legacy may undergo a major reassessment. The Harvard edition is making available a much wider array of his writings and is also retranslating some already available texts, thus providing a more complete picture of his diverse oeuvre. By all accounts, it seems to be extending his impact even further. English readers familiar with Benjamin the Marxian interpreter of the mass media and modern literature have found themselves confronted with a participant in the early twentieth-century neo-Kantian debates about language and a leader of the German student movement as well as a Berlin memoirist and collector of children's books. But amid the renewed upsurge of interest in Benjamin set off by the appearance in English of this enlarged body of work, nothing has been subject to greater anticipation than the translation of his last great work, the unfinished, posthumous *Arcades Project*.

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Reading *The Arcades Project* now is a daunting task, beginning from a fundamental difficulty with the very form in which *Das Passagen-Werk* comes to us. Attitudes toward this difficulty inflect all discussions of it. Benjamin's interest in the literary or critical fragment, the aphorism, and like modes of expression is here combined with an unprecedented mass of extracted quotations. Organized as an extensive set of folios or "convolutes"

on different topics, much of *The Arcades Project* consists of elaborate, strategic citations from a wide variety of works originating in or commenting on nineteenth-century Paris. These citations originate in a heterogeneous multiplicity of genres, ranging from poems and novels to police reports, travel guides, and advertisements, as well as works of criticism, history, philosophy, and social theory. They stem from or refer to an uncountable number of cultural and social practices and historical figures: Charles Baudelaire and Marcel Proust, Nietzschean eternal return and Marxian dialectics, Auguste Blanqui and Charles Fourier, the street plan of Paris and street names, politics and revolutions, urban gardens and department stores, the interior of the bourgeois domicile and bourgeois subjectivity, commodification and phantasmagoria, *Jugendstil* and the cartoons of Grandville, photography and fashion, iron and glass construction in architecture, the gambler and the collector, colonialism and prostitution.[2]

Yet this conglomeration of extracts presents itself as an account of the crystallization of nineteenth-century European capitalist modernity, focused through the lens of the cultural, intellectual, political, and everyday social life of Paris. Not only do the extracts, which are filed by topic, succeed one another in ways that often form implicit patterns of cross-pertinence and association (which supplement explicit cross-references to other entries that are sometimes noted in the text). Nested within the mass of citations are notes and luminous commentaries by Benjamin that establish this goal. Furthermore, these commentaries include theoretical, generalizing indications. Whatever their immediate significance within a given convolute, then, they also evince Benjamin's ambition for a methodological and philosophical breakthrough in modes of historicization as well as the conceptualization of modern culture and society. On the one hand, much of the content of the convolutes may seem to suggest the epistemological fantasy that nineteenth-century Paris, the object of study, is presenting itself through its own products and traces. This sometimes leads to questions of

2. An account of the peculiarities of this text could go on. For example, Benjamin compiled his entries not only in German but equally in French, some in translation and some not. (The English-language edition has usefully translated all into English, with typographical indications as to which language was originally used.) This is a reminder of something obvious but easy to forget as we look at the carefully designed Harvard edition: To read *The Arcades Project* now is not to read it as anyone could have read it in Benjamin's own lifetime. The folios contained sheaves of handwritten transcriptions and commentaries. Only after Benjamin's death and an editorial decipherment could anyone else claim to read it. Indeed, only after some of his work became standard reading in the critical disciplines was *The Arcades Project* made into a book.

voice, a difficulty in inferring an evaluative attitude toward some extracts. On the other hand, this fantasy is short-circuited, for elements of the whole also seem to drive at conceptual and even philosophical goals. Speaking schematically, these two impulses are manifested formally as the extremes of citation (letting the object or state of being from the past speak for itself) and of commentary (asserting the activity of the epistemological subject to speak in the present around and through the historical object).

This conjoining of past and present is therefore a problem at the heart of reading this text. But clearly this is something that goes to the heart of any claim to historicize. Nineteenth-century Paris is no more. It can be encountered only in the repetitive drive to construct and re-construct it inferentially from the traces the past leaves for the present to interrogate—that which conventional historiography would call primary source documents. The German historicism Benjamin identifies as an opponent aims to hierarchize and select from the mass of such "documents," in order to relegate them to the status of evidence for the past existence of a definitive, synthesizing historical sequence. This is to sublimate their peculiarities and particularities under the umbrella temporality of the already achieved sequence that bears "what has been," thereby fixating and fixing the flow of time. Of course there is some selection and hierarchy in the cited material that composes so much of *The Arcades Project*. But the sheer bulk of citations is itself a formal blockage to any smooth historiographic sublimation. The form of the text foregrounds the "documents," refusing to subsume them under a sublimating umbrella temporality. But in that case the problem becomes the nature of the alternatives for incorporating traces of the past, and ultimately for knowing history.

A concise synopsis or reduction of *The Arcades Project* into a small number of generative theses may well seem illegitimate in the face of its heterogeneous multiplicity. And yet, what would then be the status of those generalizing concepts and figures that Benjamin invents and develops, and that are so often invoked as examples of his methodological, critical, and philosophical originality? The mass of citations is intermittently informed— sometimes clearly, sometimes cryptically, sometimes critically—by key formulations of some of Benjamin's own theoretical and historiographic ideas and concepts, such as historical affinities and constellations, trace and aura, homogenous empty time and "now-time" [*Jetztzeit*], monad, the flaneur, the collector, the dreaming collective, and (possibly above all) the dialectical image. These ideas and concepts have already attracted much attention, though often on the basis of their appearance in certain of his more tradition-

ally formed and polished texts. (Many of these pertinent texts were based on material in his *Arcades* folios, but as contributions to this volume will occasionally note, not without some loss of nuance and comprehensiveness.)

Several of these Benjaminian concepts and general notions point toward a type or state of being not usually transmitted by concepts and generalizations. We might call them intermediary states. There is a crucial example in Convolute K. With references to Proust and Freud, Benjamin characterizes the Parisian arcades as the product of a dreaming collective in the course of shaping and misshaping its memories.[3] In that case, one might expect Benjamin to carry through the figure of the dreaming collective by opposing it to the proper historical consciousness of a wakeful, reasoning collective. This is not quite what happens. In one of the most noted figures of *The Arcades Project*, he instead emphasizes the process that occurs *between* sleepful dreaming and wakeful consciousness—the process of awakening. It is this intermediary state that is associated with the kind of historical knowledge he envisions: "[T]he moment of awakening would be identical with the 'now of recognizability,' in which things put on their true—surrealist—face" (N3a,3). Thus, "Awakening is . . . the dialectical, Copernican turn of remembrance" (K1,3). It is therefore "the Copernican revolution in historical perception," in which "what has been" is no longer the fixed center (K1, 2). Furthermore, the struggle to engage in the intermediary state of awakening is not only that of the nineteenth century. Benjamin describes *The Arcades Project* itself as "an experiment in the technique of awakening" (K1,1). What I call Benjamin's concern with intermediary states is therefore fundamental to his conceptualization of history. But *The Arcades Project* is pervaded by them, not only with respect to temporality and history but also with respect to spatiality and sociology, as in the ambiguities and reversals of the bourgeois division between inside and outside discussed in some of the essays included here.

To be moderately clever, one might even suggest that the very object with which we are concerned is itself in an intermediary state, a state of unfinishedness. This returns us to the problem of form. One straightforward response is to treat the text simply as an extraordinarily interesting set of research notes. On the other hand, it may still be premature to treat the form in which we now read *The Arcades Project* as a contingent rather than necessary aspect of it. If Benjamin was working toward a radically different

3. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), K1,1 through K1,5. Hereafter, references to this text are cited parenthetically by convolute number.

sense of the politics and language of historicity, the form of the text may well be a component of that enterprise. Perhaps this latter position need not even judge whether he succeeded, but it certainly requires active reading and some speculation to flesh it out and develop the possibilities that lie in this text for us. In fact, any position on or account of this text will be on a terrain of significant discussion and debate. The least that can be said of the contributions to this volume is that this is their terrain.

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How to understand *The Arcades Project* now? The essays included here are rich and varied. Some approach the text from a fairly expansive angle, giving us an overall purchase on it, while others begin from particular moments, figures, concepts, or convolutes. Some complement one another, some diverge from one another. Explicitly or implicitly, they all address Benjamin's sense of historicity, knowledge, and the textual. Taken together, they make for a complex tissue of ideas, arguments, and positions about *The Arcades Project* and Benjamin's work. This kind of collection might be ordered in a number of ways. Given the many possibilities, we have chosen a simple and neutral strategy. We begin with articles that propose different kinds of overviews of the project and then move toward those that begin from more focused attention to specific concepts or passages and then branch out.

We start with Samuel Weber's careful reading of Benjamin's approach to Paris as a structure of places. Weber emphasizes the categorically disturbing nature of intermediary, transitional states in *The Arcades Project*. Crucial to his exposition is Benjamin's explication of the German word *Schwelle*. As a spatial designation, it is more than threshold, border, or definitive limit of a place. It is a zone of transition, change, movement, where the edges of a place are inflated, such that inside and outside spaces overlap and the division between them breaks down. Much as the figure of awakening designates the *time* of a structuring indeterminacy that blurs the boundaries between sleeping and waking along with the putatively distinctive modes of thought and memory associated with them, *Schwelle* is the *space* of an analogous mediatory indeterminacy. Weber draws attention to the spatialization of such intermediate states in Benjamin's Paris in order to bind space to linguistic or signifying structures. This enables him to argue that Benjamin's account of Paris comprehends the city as text, in the sense of Jacques Derrida's generalized textuality. That is, the city is ultimately con-

stituted in the unending network of differential significations, readings and rereadings, interpretations and reinterpretations that underlie all significa-tion. *Schwelle* thus implicitly becomes analogous to *différance*. Weber gives us something like a poststructuralist *Arcades Project*, whose allegorical con-sciousness stems from a profound awareness of the constitutive force of textuality. And the moment of dialectical image, which crystallizes a sudden *historical* rather than spatial revelation, is therefore the moment of a certain kind of readability for a mode of signification.

If Weber gives us a powerful entry to *The Arcades Project* focused on spatial indeterminacy and generalized textuality, T. J. Clark addresses the historicity of its raw materials in relation to the history of the bourgeoisie. For Clark, Benjamin's earlier work on *The Arcades Project* led him toward a fuller engagement with Marx in its later stages, an engagement never completed. Clark therefore divides *The Arcades Project* into two phases. The key object of the first half is indeed the Parisian *passages* and build-ings. These are implicated in the intoxicating, phantasmagoric conflation of spaces—inside and outside, private and public—that is a kind of collective architectural dream experience historically specific in its overriding social and class confusions and obfuscations. The key object of the second half of *The Arcades Project*, on the other hand, is Baudelaire. The huge mass of materials in the Baudelaire folio marks a conceptual and theoretical turning point toward the category of the commodity and commodification, although the new materials and theory are less finished than those of the first half. Benjamin comes to the idea that Baudelaire's poetry and its allegorical char-acter were invested not just by modernity but by the processes of com-modity exchange whose universality Marx had identified as a structuring dominant of modern capitalist society. Its formal tendency toward incorpo-ration of fragments and fragmentation of the surface of social life, along with its substantive awareness of commodification, identifies this poetry with *The Arcades Project* itself. Clark is skeptical of the desire to draw finished con-cepts and theories from *The Arcades Project* and doubtful of Benjamin's mastery of Marx. But he nevertheless finds central to the later sections of *The Arcades Project* a strong sense of the unavoidable force of abstract labor power, exchange, and commodity fetishism in art, as well as a con-sciousness of the suffering and class conflict that undergirds the bourgeois pleasures and intoxications that seem to seduce Benjamin in the earlier parts of the text.

It would be a mistake, I think, to too quickly invent a debate between a poststructuralist *Arcades Project* and a politicized or Marxist *Arcades Proj-*

ect. But in their convergences and divergences the contributions of Weber and Clark suggest an initial range of approaches to the work, from language, textuality, and interpretation to the social and political theory of capitalist modernity. These converge on the problem of how the text grasps the space and time of history. Howard Eiland provides a complementary angle of entry by focusing squarely on the formal uniqueness of *The Arcades Project*. While acknowledging both the importance of levels of language and interpretation and of Benjamin's interest in Marxism, his contribution to discussion of these is staged at the level of what might be called aesthetic form.

Howard Eiland proposes to consider *The Arcades Project* in relation to Benjamin's noted discussions elsewhere of distracted reception and the modernist aesthetic devices with which it is associated. He shows that, especially when thinking of Bertolt Brecht, Benjamin conceived of distraction as a symptom generated by commodification, which Eiland does not separate but aligns with the intoxicating alienation of phantasmagoria. Yet in other writings (centrally in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"), Benjamin conceived of distraction as an epistemologically radical experience of modernity, a new mode of perception attached to the disunified surface of things (a surface reminiscent of *The Arcades Project* itself). But in both cases, whether promoting the Brechtian resistance to distraction and intoxication or modernist participation in them, Benjamin privileged montage as aesthetic device. Therefore, Eiland argues that the devices of montage and superimposition, unthinkable without the modern technical media of photography and cinema, are central models not only for the form taken by *The Arcades Project* but for the dialectical image. Montage and superimposition are modes possible in modern technical media for representing intermediary spatial and temporal junctures and conflations; and the dialectical image is precisely the spatialization of a temporal interpenetration, the interpenetration of past and present.

Peter Fenves also inquires into the mode of representation to which *The Arcades Project* aspires, and he also relates it to another fundamental Benjamin text, but in this case it is *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. For instead of modernist aesthetic technology and form, Fenves's focus is on language and the philosophy of style. He turns to the concept of the monad, which *The Arcades Project* ties to its ambitions for a dialectical historicity. Fenves notes the long genealogy of the paradoxical ambition for a nontechnical, nonphilosophical philosophical language, which Benjamin joins. From this genealogy, Fenves emphasizes Leibniz, who conceives of words that are inseparable from their origins, and which therefore cannot

be troped or semantically transformed—that is, they name in such a way as to contain within them the infinity of all their possible uses and meanings. Leibniz developed the concept of the monad in connection with his study of *Kabbalah* and its search for the mystically perfect word. But Fenves finds versions of this philosophical impulse in twentieth-century philosophy, preeminently Edmund Husserl's phenomenological reduction. The younger Benjamin had already joined this tradition in the preface to his dissertation, when he invokes Adamic name giving, and also in his concept of a primordial history, but unlike Leibniz or Husserl, he was always concerned to align the monad or the reduction with historical knowledge. In *The Arcades*, the monad becomes a word that fixes the flux of time in order to grasp the overlap between past and present that constitutes the dialectical image (Eiland's superimposition). The monad can do this because it has an eternal or timeless character; containing all its possible meanings, it need not change. Benjamin's "dialectics at a standstill," now-time, and awakening are therefore all dependent on monadology. But according to Fenves, just as the quest for a perfectly natural, nontechnical language and a history based on it contradictorily generates technical terms (*monad*, *dialectical image*), only a nonsubject, a no-one, can actually say a monad. According to Fenves, Benjamin's term for this no-one is not the proletariat but the collective, which, along with the monad, becomes a kind of central vanishing point of *The Arcades Project*.

Like Eiland and Fenves, Michael Jennings also invokes another text of Benjamin's to illuminate *The Arcades Project*, but it is one based on materials from the latter, namely his unfinished draft of a book on Baudelaire from the 1930s. Jennings finds that this more conventionally written draft is a corrective to the usual understandings of Benjamin's account of modern experience, which have actually depended on a very truncated published extract from it ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire"). According to Jennings, Benjamin does not give Kantian priority to an innate subjective structure. On the contrary, experience is first determined by the qualities and potential of its object. In *The Arcades Project* and the Baudelaire draft, Benjamin identifies a dominant form of the object that structures experience in nineteenth-century sociality: the commodity. Like Clark, Jennings locates a shift in Benjamin's thinking and associates it with work on Baudelaire, although his view of the shift seems different. (According to Jennings, under pressure from Max Horkheimer and Adorno in the late 1930s, Benjamin displaced the commodity with phantasmagoria.) But the crucial point is his epistemological emphasis on the material, objective surface of things. This has profound

consequences for the approach to modernity and its history embedded in *The Arcades Project*, especially its theory of temporality and experience. For if the commodity form structures objects of experience, then the temporality of experience is generated by it. The central arena of the temporality of the commodity form is fashion, the commodified process of novelty and sameness/repetition. In Benjamin's account, Baudelaire's modernity lay in adopting allegorical form in order to display commodification and its temporality in his poetry even as it worked within them. But this also makes it a poetry that points back to the condition of its own production. It may thereby contribute to an awakening.

It is appropriate to follow Jennings with the next two contributions, for they focus on types of objects crucial to Benjamin's account of nineteenth-century Paris, and they also are concerned with the dialectic wherein an object generated in and for capitalist mechanisms and structures may possess critical potentiality. The object addressed by Tom Gunning is the bourgeois *intérieur*. For Gunning, Benjamin's bourgeois *intérieur* designates a topography that crystallizes in the collective dream of a perfectly secure, privatized space apart from that of the street, the masses, and production. But once again, the intermediary state governs. The repressed incessantly return by means of an "ambiguous spatial interpenetration," the threshold leakage between inside and outside. (Compare Weber's analysis of *Schwelle*.) This interpenetration is found throughout Benjamin's Paris, from the plush parlors of the bourgeoisie to the arcades themselves. In dialogue with Benjamin, Gunning analyzes one privileged aspect of this overlap—optical devices. Certain optical devices were constructed to implement or guarantee spatial separation, but the gaze they presuppose traverses and confuses the boundaries of inside and outside. Referring to the detective story, Gunning shows how such optical devices figure or articulate the dialectic of inside and outside, and therefore, we might say, concretize the intermediary states so crucial to *The Arcades Project*. With comparisons to Michel Foucault and an elaboration of Freud's uncanny, Gunning argues that this visual dialectic is not only one of mastery and anxiety but also one that includes a potential underside of threatening, revolutionary perceptions that can transform and politicize the figure of monadic truth. Gunning's cultural analysis provides an interesting complement to Fenves's philosophical account. Since it includes the whole, the monad—which Leibniz and Benjamin figure as a windowless space, an *intérieur*—may explosively include what is outside it. The classed dream of spatial separation is therefore not only linked to the visual regressions of phantasmagoria and the

ideological inversion of Marx's camera obscura, but is simultaneously the basis for a radical temporality, an awakening that is the standpoint claimed by *The Arcades Project*.

The privileged object of experience addressed by Peter Wollen is clothing as mediated by the concept of fashion, which Jennings identifies as Benjamin's key commodity. Also in dialogue with Benjamin and *The Arcades Project*, Wollen traces out his own historical sketch of the rise of haute couture and ready-to-wear clothing. By highlighting the utopian fantasies inherent in fashion, he implicitly extends utopian potential to the commodity itself and therefore the bourgeois dreamworld. The fashion object is defined by the processes and abstractions of commodity, but it is also concrete and sensuous. It is this sensuousness that mediates the relation of systemic, abstract exchangeability to the individual. Furthermore, the commodified temporality of fashion, with its combination of modern novelty and sameness/repetition, bears directly on the theory of the dialectical image. Its intermediary state of awakening implies the possibility that repressed desires and thoughts associated with sleep and dreaming can be released. Like Gunning, Wollen finds that the possibility of redemptiveness exists in and through objects, including objects which are most complicit with the forces that make redemption desirable. This complements the critical potential of Benjamin's commodity-immersed Baudelaire discussed by Clark and Jennings.

The final two contributions experiment with approaching *The Arcades Project* through a different type of entry. They invoke a body of textuality not explicitly central or directly connected to *The Arcades Project*, but of which Benjamin was probably aware. Instead of claiming a direct linkage with *The Arcades Project*, however, they engage in comparative investigations that treat those other bodies of textuality as in some way paralleling, mirroring, and/or illuminating important concerns of *The Arcades Project*.

The body of textuality to which Claudia Brodsky Lacour compares *The Arcades Project* is Hölderlin's "late" poetry. She is less interested in establishing a genealogical link, even to Benjamin's own writings on Hölderlin, than in exploring a certain kind of parallelism of two unique lines that never meet but are dialectically and mutually illuminating. In particular, she points to a concern with the interrelation of history and architectural form that Hölderlin shares with Benjamin. What Hölderlin calls his "poetic view of history" may be set against Benjamin's theory of the dialectical image. According to Lacour, both the poetic view of history and the dialectical image operate paratactically, between myth and its absence, between the non-

human and the human. With her close attention to nonhuman architecture in the poetry of Hölderlin, Lacour implicitly points out a connection between *The Arcades Project* and Romantic image theory, while providing a distinctive perspective on the problem of the "standstill" in Benjamin's conception of historical temporality.

Henry Sussman invokes Benjamin's connection to Judaism. Unlike Fenves, he is not interested in the Kabbalistic condensation of meanings but, on the contrary, in the tradition of Talmudic commentary that leads to a vast textual or linguistic expansion, which he calls "fractal." Beginning from Benjamin's two Exposés of *The Arcades Project*, which he treats as a kind of literary montage, Sussman proceeds through an account of the spaces in Benjamin's Paris as compartmentalized horizontal zones, in order to arrive at a concept of textual compartments or registers. These are the formal arenas for semiotic and semantic expansion as against the drive to limit and bind textuality. Sussman's primary example is a legal argument about binding responsibilities from the Talmud, but he seems to see such expansionism as a fundamental constituent of all textuality. He identifies a widespread impulse in the history of textuality that more explicitly sets expansionism into play by means of formal, typographical, and graphic devices (his examples include illuminated Arabic script and Islamic art, Joyce, Buddhist stupas, and Derrida's *Glas*). This is the tendency within which he positions both the form and method of *The Arcades Project*.

In his afterword, Kevin McLaughlin also invokes German Romanticism, though from a different angle than Lacour. He carefully glosses the young Benjamin's derivation of a philosophical notion of "criticizability," which is connected to discussions of incompleteness and the potentiality of a great work. McLaughlin argues for a connection between this idea and the cultural criticism of *The Arcades Project*, finding that it underlies such Benjaminian concepts as the distracted public and the collective. Most appropriately, he concludes by applying it to our own discussions of Benjamin, here and now, which all attempt to address the actuality and the potentiality of *The Arcades Project*.

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