REVIEW ARTICLE

Arcade Magic[1]

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It is difficult to predict the fate of *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin's enormous and unfinished work on the cultural history of nineteenth-century Paris, which has finally been published in English. For some time now, the *Passagen-Werk* has had a quasi-mythical status, filtered down to an anglophone audience through such crucial intermediaries as Susan Buck-Morss in *The Dialec-tics of Seeing*. First published in 1982 in Volume 5 of the *Gesammelte Schriften* and then in French in 1989, its interest for Benjamin scholars has passed its height, and non-experts now have the opportunity to assess its wider importance and usefulness.[2] With the simultaneous rolling release by Belknap of the *Selected Writings*, those of us who have known Benjamin mainly from the essays in *Illuminations*, *One-Way Street* and *Understanding Brecht* are suddenly faced with the bewildering range and complexity of his *oeuvre*, in what must be considered one of the major publishing events of recent years.[3] Given the composition of *The Arcades Project* — just over a thousand pages of citations, commentary, fragments and notes, with little in the way of overarching explanatory apparatus — it seems more than likely that the work will have only a minority appeal, too baffling and unrewarding for most readers. Either that, or it will be plundered for the rare Benjaminian aphorisms amongst the thickets of citations which make up the bulk of the work. For the dedicated, there are certainly more than a few gems here: Adorno, custodian of the manuscript for many years, particularly liked

1 Review article on Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1999, 1073 pp.

2 Interest amongst German-language scholars is by no means exhausted, though. See, for instance, Winfried Menninghaus, *Schwellenkunde. Walter Benjamins Passage des Mythos* (1986), Willem van Reijen and Herman van Doorn, *Aufenthalte und Passagen. Leben und Werk Walter Benjamin* (2001) and Sven Kramer, *Walter Benjamin zur Einführung* (2003).

3 Selections from Benjamin's writing, 1913-1940 have thus far been published in *Selected Writings*, *Volume 1, 1913-26*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings (1996), *Volume 2, 1927-34*, eds. Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (1999), and *Volume 3, 1935-38*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings. The final volume (*Volume 4, 1938-1940*) is to be come out in 2003. In addition, a translation of Adorno and Benjamin's *Complete Correspondence, 1928-40* (1999) has also recently appeared. In it Adorno comments at length on the *Passagen-Werk*, as well as many of Benjamin's other essays from this period.

"The eternal is in any case far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea" (B3, 7; N3, 2), while my favourite is this: "An inferno rages in the soul of the commodity, for all the seeming tranquility lent it by the price" (J80a, 1). It is something of received wisdom that the *Arcades* should be approached selectively, in non-linear fashion: unsuitable for reading cover to cover, it is better dipped into here and there, or even read as a kind of primitive hyper-text, with a citation or comment in one "Convolute" leading through a cross-reference to related material in a distant part of the book. Benjamin would undoubtedly have approved of such a "rag-picking" approach to his work, but it is important not to overlook some of the wider ambitions and achievements of *The Arcades Project*. In his attempt to come to terms with the cultures of consumption in the arcades and *magasins de nouveautés* of the nineteenth century, Benjamin anticipates concerns of much later cultural theorists and historians while rethinking the origins and nature of contemporary capitalism and the formation and workings of the modern metropolis. *The Arcades Project* is perhaps most notable for its extraordinary historical method, with its emphasis on residues and collecting, and above all on citation. For those willing to work through the *Arcades*, it becomes clear that this monstrous thing is something like the historical practice for which the endlessly quoted "Theses on the Philosophy of History" gave a glimpse of the theory.

Most of the materials found in *The Arcades Project* were entrusted in 1940 by Benjamin to Georges Bataille, who hid them in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. After the Occupation, Bataille handed these papers over to Adorno, who in turn eventually passed on the unenviable task of editing them to his doc-toral student, Rolf Tiedemann. This English version incorporates Tiedemann's exegetical essay "Dialectics at a Standstill," but eliminates a good deal — although by no means all — of his scholarly apparatus. The volume opens with two versions of "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," an essay already familiar to English-language readers, which Benjamin prepared as "Exposés" for the Institute of Social Research (the Frankfurt School in exile in New York), underwriters of the project from 1934, when Benjamin resumed work on it (he had begun in 1927-29). The end of the book consists of "First Sketches" and "Early Drafts," an assortment of incomplete essays, collected fragments, and outlines. The real substance of *The Arcades Project*, however, consists of 36 "Convolutes," each one a bundle or sheaf of notes and quotations on a specific theme or topic relating to nineteenth-century Paris, labeled with an upper case or lower case letter of the alphabet. For instance, Convolute B is "Fashion," D "Boredom, Eternal Return," M "The Flâneur," W "Fourier," d "Literary His-tory, Hugo," and m "Idleness." The shortest one, "Reproduction Technology, Lithography," takes up only two pages, while the longest, "Baudelaire," extends to 160 pages. Each one consists of a series of numbered entries — Benjamin's own prose, citations with commentary, and most often, citations without commentary — with a system of cross-referencing to other Convolutes. It is hard to dispute those who can find no coherent whole in such a system, but to those who scoff that this is no more than an elaborate card catalogue, one can reply, yes, but *what* a card catalogue.

One productive way of looking at the Convolutes is as a sort of workshop for many of Benjamin's writings in

the 1930s. For instance, in Convolute H "The Collector" can be found the outlines of "Unpacking my Library"; Convolute J, "Baudelaire" provides the elements for "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" and *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*; and the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" is a distillation of Convolute N, "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress." In fact, the entire *Passagen-Werk* is in-separable from all Benjamin's work of the 1930s, which is known collectively as his "Paris production cycle." Paris, of course, is where Benjamin spent the last years of his life in exile, and along with Berlin, Naples and Moscow, is one of the constellation of cities that formed his understanding of the urban. Paris, in this scheme, was the model of the modern capitalist city.

On the trail of capitalism's early history, Benjamin is drawn to the "most characteristic building projects of the nineteenth century — railroad stations, exhibition halls, department stores," all of them "despised, everyday structures" (M21a, 2). It is particularly the Parisian arcade, a marginal nineteenth-century building type deep into decline by the 1930s, which Benjamin saw as the key to unlocking commodity culture. These structures, early experiments in iron and glass, were not great public works, but privately funded initiatives which nevertheless provided public space and access. Their great period of construction was the post-revolutionary era, 1800-1830, and their occupants the triumphant post-revolutionary bourgeoisie. They served many functions: a means of access to the interior of a block, a short cut between streets, a space for strolling sheltered from rain and free from the mud of a Paris still without sidewalks (see Geist 12, 62). But above all else, the arcades provided a means of organizing retail trade and displaying new luxury goods to promenading window-shoppers. It was the surrealists who put Benjamin onto the arcades: Louis Aragon's dream-like passage through the Passage de l'Opéra just before its demolition in *Paysan de Paris*, and Breton's *Nadja* were "the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded'" (Benjamin, "Surrealism," 229). Benjamin's debt to the surrealists can be seen in the following passage of juxtapositions from Convolute R, "Mirrors":

> today 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. On the walls of these caverns their immemorial fauna, the commodity, luxuriates and enters, like cancerous tissue, into the most irregular combinations. A world of secret affinities opens up within: palm tree and feather duster, hairdryer and Venus de Milo, prostheses and letter-writing manuals. The odalisque lies in wait next to the inkwell, and priestesses raise high the vessels into which we drop cigarettes as incense offerings. (R2, 3)

Benjamin eventually distances himself from the surrealists, claiming that they were too content to stay within the dream consciousness of contemporary capitalism. In some of the most cryptic sections of the *Arcades*, Benjamin proposes instead a Proustian model of historical "awakening": "The new, dialectical method of doing history presents itself as the art of experiencing the present as waking world, a world to which that dream we name the past refers in truth.... Awakening is namely the dialectical, Copernican turn of remembrance" (K1, 3).

The Arcades Project is a deadly trap for those who would seek in it a unified conceptual apparatus. Rather than expending too much energy trying to disentangle the metaphysical complexities at work in "awakening" in an attempt to uncover the ultimate theoretical frame for the work, I would like instead to suggest just two areas of the work which call out for further exploration. These are the question of magic and the concept of empathy (*Einfühlung*).

Magic. What is the relation between capitalism and magic? The answer that the *Arcades Project* gives to this question diverges considerably from the conventional response. Historians tend to agree that sorcery in Europe has been in retreat since the Reformation and that capitalism, propelled on by the Protestant ethic, relentlessly sweeps aside the magical world-view. Max Weber called it the "disenchantment of the world." Since magic insists that there is a realm beyond the calculable, it is "one of the most serious obstructions to the rationalization of economic life" (Weber 265). If the twentieth century saw the completion of this process of disenchantment, the nineteenth century was its original crucible. The city, in particular, is generally considered inhospitable to magic, which, as Christopher Hill has argued, is largely "agrarian," and therefore thrives in the isolated constituency of the village cunning man, but fails in the urban industrial milieu of capitalism (Hill 486).

In contrast to this standard view, Benjamin's city of consumption teems with magical effects. Capitalism banishes the wizards, but they take up residence in the arcades as fortune-tellers. Artificial light extinguishes the stars and their astrological importance, but creates the "black magic" of "fairy grottoes" (T1a, 8). Organised religion may decline, but sects of Saint-Simonians — "a salvation army in the midst of the bourgeoisie" (U13a, 1) — spring up in its place. And as for everyday, secular reality, in the *Arcades Project* nothing is more bewitched: the commodity-on-display, as Susan Buck-Morss has argued, is the ultimate apparition in Benjamin's phantasmagoric Paris (Buck-Morss 81). Not only has capitalism failed to entirely desacralize the world, it generates more than its fair share of secular enchantment. In the challenge it poses to Weber's rationalization thesis, the *Arcades Project* is not without precedent in seeking out the irrational and phantomatic elements in capitalism and the modern city. Benjamin in fact turns to *Das Kapital* for support. In particular, the first two sentences of 'The fetishism of the commodity and its secret' (part 1, chapter 1, section 4), are cited in whole or in part in the éxposes of 1935 and 1939 and twice in the Convolutes (G5, 1 and G13a, 2). Their attraction for Benjamin is obvious: "A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (Marx 163). Is not Benjamin's writing precisely the continuous extraction of metaphysical complexities from the trivial and ephemeral? Just as the modern magician deals in trickery and deception rather than mystical powers, the spell cast by the modern city and its commodities is illusory, a prestidigitation of the market, although no less powerful for that. Benjamin is not content, however, with simply denouncing such illusions, and cannot help wondering whether obsolete "pure magic" can still be put to work, an aspect of his thinking which should make us uneasy, but which cannot be dispensed with readily.

There are references scattered throughout the *Arcades* to "faery-plays," gothic theatrical spectacles popular in Paris during the second Empire. Benjamin clearly saw such plays as the aesthetic counterparts of the arcades, which were theatrical spaces for the *mise-en-scène* of the phantasmagoric commodity. It is for this reason that he places so much emphasis on the visual and spatial aspects of the arcades: lighting, windows, signs, displays, entrances and exits. It is no accident that the arcades reach the "height of their magic" (First Sketches, 834) in the Passage des Panoramas, with its many painted scenes bringing to the domesticated interior of the arcade innumerable illusions visible by moonlight or the flicker of oil and gas lamps (see Q3,2). The phantom commodity requires a phantom stage and the arcades were perfectly designed to provide it, as Johann Friedrich Geist, their historian, explains:

> In the time of its conception the arcade was home to luxury and fashion. It offered to the bourgeois public in all its various guises — the *flâneur*, the bohemian, the *boulevardier* — the opportunity to display itself to the world. It presented the myriad products of a blossoming luxury industry for gazing, buying, flaunting, and consuming. The public served by the arcade felt at home in the artificial lighting . . . . It reveled in this illusionistic realm, this man-made jungle under glass, this urban reality which replaced nature. (114)

The notion that the bourgeois "felt at home" in the arcades is crucial to Benjamin's conception of their magic. The displacement of public magic by private and unconscious ritual can be seen in his analysis of the fate of bourgeois "thresholds" in modernity. The mystical power of the "Roman victory arch" which "makes the returning general a conquering hero" cannot be matched by the Arc de Triomphe "which today has become a traffic island" (C2a, 3), although it finds worthy competitors in its miniaturised bourgeois substitutes, "[c]hairs beside an entrance, photographs flanking a doorway," which Benjamin calls "fallen household deities" (I1a, 4). It remains to the collector — the apotheosis of bourgeois acquisitiveness — to undo the spell of the commodity, by removing it from the circuit of exchange and introducing it into an "historical system" (H1a, 2). Even then, Benjamin clearly considers the activity of the collector, whom he compares to an "augur" (H2a, 1), as a form of counter-magic: "It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic circle, where, as a last shudder runs through it (the shudder of being acquired), it turns to stone" (H1a, 2). At moments like these it is difficult to assess the levels of irony or detachment in Benjamin's prose, but his metaphorical attachment to such matters betrays a reluctance to disavow entirely the magical effects conjured up by capital.

In Convolute d, Benjamin suggests comparing the last line of a Hugo poem with the last line of Baudelaire's "Les Aveugles" ("The Blind"). In the latter poem, the subjects of the title fix their blank gaze on the heavens, never bowing their heads to the ground. In the final line, the poet wonders what they are seeking for in the skies: "Je dis: Que cherchent-ils au Ciel, tous ces aveugles?" Unlike the lyric poets who preceded him — Hugo, Lamartine (see D9a, 1 and D9a, 2) — for Baudelaire there are no stars visible in the skies overhead: the promise of transcendence has evaporated. Benjamin takes this as a sign of Baudelaire's modernity: "That the stars do not appear in Baudelaire is the

surest indicator of that tendency of his poetry to dissolve illusory appearances" (J58a, 3). Stars disappear from the skies over the modern city with the advent of artificial lighting. Equally, the stroller in the arcades can be outside, but not fear when the heavens open. The consequences are felt in philosophy as well as poetry, for "Kant's transcription of the sublime through 'the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me' could never have been conceived in these terms by an inhabitant of the big city" (J64, 4). Both modern poetry and modern philosophy, illuminated by gas light, must do without astrological guidance. Benjamin calls this state of affairs in Baudelaire the extinguishing or "renunciation" of the "magic of distance" (J47, 6; J47a, 1; J56a, 12).

It seems likely that the "magic of distance" is equivalent to Benjamin's concept of "aura," that vexed and awkward term most prominent in the "Work of art" essay. "Aura" is a kind of oppressive magic possessed by the artwork by virtue of its uniqueness and ritual value. By renouncing the possibility of such a distance, whether natural or artificial, does Baudelaire's poetry then continue a process inaugurated by Galileo's telescope in the seventeenth century? And is Benjamin's enthusiasm for mechanical reproduction matched by an approval of the extinguishing of the heavens? Insofar as Baudelaire does away with "illusory appearances" yes, but one needs to take into account as well those dialectical companions to Baudelaire, Auguste Blanqui and Charles Fourier, who busily reconstruct cosmologies as essential elements of their revolutionary and utopian ideologies. When Fourier "calculated mathematically the transmigration of the soul, and went on to prove that the human soul must assume 810 different forms until it completes the circuit of the planets and returns to earth" (W1a), or when Blanqui posited an "entire universe . . . composed of astral systems . . . . So each heavenly body, whatever it might be, exists in infinite number in time and in space" (Expose 1939, 25), they were attempting to enlist the stars, not for their ritual or magical value, but for politics. Their apposite failure is, of course, what attracts Benjamin to them. He says of Blanqui's *L'Éternité par les astres*, "[t]his book completes the century's constellation of phantasmagorias with one last, cosmic phantasmagoria which implicitly comprehends the severest critique of the others" (Expose 1939, 25). His insistence on the word "constellation" deliberately betrays his own reluctance to abandon entirely the mythical properties of the stars. The sort of compromise he hoped to reach can be found in the fragment "On astrology." In it he calls for a "rational astrology," "from which the doctrine of magical 'influences,' of 'radiant energies,' and so on has been excluded" (Benjamin, "On astrology," 684-85). Benjamin wants to discard the irrational aspects of astrology but rescue the "manifest configurations, mimetic resemblances" which it is able to recognize. This is clearly a venture with high risks and serious potential for misunderstanding, but it is difficult to know how to read Benjamin without taking them into account.[4]

Empathy. Nothing could be further from *The Arcades Project*'s conception of history than the desire to

4 See also Winfried Menninghaus, *Walter Benjamins Theorie der Sprachmagie* (1995).

imaginatively project oneself into the past, identifying with imagined historical characters in an activity which obliterates all distance and intervening time. Benjamin equates this approach to the past with historicism and in Convolute M, "The Flâneur," he calls it "the intoxication of empathy" (M17a, 5). "Empathy" is the standard translation of *Einfühlung*, which literally means "in-feeling" or "feeling into." The term can be found scattered throughout the *Passagenwerk*, and it also appears elsewhere in Benjamin's writings, most notably in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," where it takes a prominent position in the polemic against historicism in Thesis VII. In spite of its ubiquity in his *oeuvre*, Benjamin never fully defines the concept, nor does he acknowledge his sources for it, even though he is by no means the first to employ it. Turning to the wide literature on the subject which predates Benjamin is not, however, the most fruitful exercise, since his use of *Einfühlung* is hardly orthodox. Neither is it consistent, for its relatively straightforward meaning in Benjamin's critique of historicism is complicated by the further subtleties it takes on when he applies it to commodity fetishism.

For Benjamin, the slogans of nineteenth-century historiography, whether it be Ranke's injunction to see the past *wie es eigentlich war*, or Michelet's *réssurection intégrale du passé*, give no guarantee of a purity of gaze into the past, but are further symptoms of a dreaming century. "The history that showed things 'as they really were,'" he writes in Convolute N, "was the strongest narcotic of the century" (N3, 4). In order to achieve historicism's ambition — reliving an era in all its specificity and difference from the present — the historian must paradoxically enter a state of melancholic forgetfulness. This is because historicists, according to Benjamin, must "blot out everything they know about the later course of history" (Thesis VII). It is this forgetfulness that Benjamin calls empathy, and in the "Theses on History" it is historical materialism which is to provide the antidote to it. It is clear from Thesis VII that Benjamin's critique of historicism and empathy is not primarily methodological, but political:

> The nature of this sadness stands out more clearly if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers. (Thesis VII)

Why is empathy inevitably with the victor? Writing well before the "history from below" which he partly inspired, Benjamin found it difficult to envision any historical remainders uncontaminated by the rulers who, more often than not, hold them up as "cultural treasures." For the historicist, the cultural treasure has a totemic value, and in its presence the empathetic relation to the past is summoned up; but the historical materialist views such traces with "cautious detachment." And even though Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* prefers the detritus of history — the ruffle on the dress, the hen which lays praline eggs — to its more familiar treasures, even this detritus he brushes against the grain, resisting the impulse to make of it another "tradition." An alternative to empathy is suggested in Convolute N, but does not make it through to the "Theses on History": the concept of "rescue." Characteristically, Benjamin's

understanding of rescue is not the common sense one. Phenomena are not rescued, as one might expect, "in the main, from the discredit and neglect into which they have fallen, but from the catastrophe represented very often by a certain strain in their dissemination, their 'enshrinement as heritage'" (N9,4). Ephemeral phenomena are not saved for proper appreciation, but from such appreciation: salvation leads away from heaven, not towards it. Does Benjamin then cut off here any possibility of *Einfühlung* for someone other than the victors (the oppressed, for instance)? Certainly, later on in Convolute N he confirms that "the basis of the confrontation with conventional historiography and 'enshrinement' is the polemic against empathy" (N10, 4). As far as history is concerned, it is not just empathy for the victor, but empathy *tout court*, which Benjamin rejects.

Einfühlung was an accepted, if heavily disputed, term in both aesthetics and psychology in the 1920s and 30s, but Benjamin's use of the term fits most closely with the polemic directed against it by his friend Brecht. Brecht's case against *Einfühlung*, sometimes translated as identification, is straightforward. The "Aristotelian" theatre, which is to say most theatre in the Western tradition, and specifically the bourgeois theatre which dominates the stage, is a "culinary theatre" which serves up generous helpings of illusion, putting its audience in a "trance" (Brecht 1974a). The theatrical apparatus is well placed to conjure up empathy in its audience: the darkened auditorium and lit stage isolate the spectator, suspenseful plots and sensational action bring her or him to a heightened level of tension, and persuasive, passionate acting encourages identification with the tribulations of a hero. The measure of a play's success has always been its capacity to arouse emotion in its audience, to generate a *correspondence* between the situation on stage and the feelings of those watching. Nothing for Brecht could be more politically disabling than this empathetic power of the theatre, because empathy implies resignation and acceptance of things as they are. In contrast, Brecht wants his audience to be astonished at what they see before them, want to stop it, and "laugh when they weep, weep when they laugh." Benjamin's full endorsement and faithful exegesis of Brechtian theory can be found in the short essay "What is Epic Theatre?" where he explains how the resistance to empathy emerges directly from political considerations. For an exiled German actor playing the part of an SS man, "empathy can scarcely be recommended as a suitable method, for there can be no empathy with the murderer's of one's fellow fighters" (1973, 22). But then, nor is empathy necessarily the best method for representing "one's fellow fighters," because, as Benjamin points out, the objective is a "relaxed" audience. Instead of empathy, it is the *interest* of the spectator which should be aroused.

Of the many epic techniques designed to prevent empathy, one is of particular relevance to *The Arcades Project*, and a clue that Benjamin was trying to achieve for history what Brecht was doing for theatre: the practice of citation. In order to introduce a split between performer and role, Brecht recommends that "the actor speaks his part not as if he were improvising it himself but like a quotation" (Brecht 1974b, 138). In his earliest writings on Brecht, Benjamin drew attention in particular to Brecht's notion of the "quotable gesture." This technique isolates a social situation, or even a single action pregnant with contradiction, and, removing it from its original context, reexamines it, repeats it, quotes it, under different circumstances, thereby robbing it of its spontaneity and naturalness and

bringing it under renewed scrutiny. Benjamin amplifies this one aspect of epic theatre and gives it a privileged position in Brechtian dramaturgy. He links it to an aesthetics of *interruption*: whereas the dramatic theatre has traditionally relied on continuity and seamless plotting, epic theatre proceeds by jumps and curves, by a montage of clashing material. Benjamin reaches some far-reaching conclusions about interruption and quotation in general:

> We may go even further here and recall that interruption is one of the fundamental methods of all form-giving. It reaches far beyond the domain of art. It is, to mention just one of its aspects, the origin of quotation. Quoting a text implies interrupting its context. (1973, 19)

It is hard to resist reading this passage as a commentary on the compositional strategy of *The Arcades Project* itself. There is certainly enough reflection on citation in the *Arcades* to justify this link. For instance, in outlining the historiographical approach taken by the project, Benjamin writes, "To write history thus means to *cite* history. It belongs to the concept of citation, however, that the historical object in each case is torn from its context" (N11,3). Context, the pristineness of which is so valued by the historicist, is given short shrift by both epic theatre's quotable gesture and by Benjamin's citational history, which collects quotations like "rags," and mounts them in a "literary montage" (N1a, 8).[5] It is worth remembering as well that more often than not Brecht's plays were based on historical themes, because "an old story will often be more use ... than a new one" in the efforts to deprive the stage of sensation (Benjamin 1973, 16).[6] In addition, the concept of interruption squares nicely with Benjamin's wider suspicion of the doctrines of progress and historical continuity, doctrines which he claims are part and parcel of the historicist project of empathizing with the past. Whether or not the violent context-shattering powers of the quotation are truly enough to effect the "tiger's leap into the past" (Thesis XIV) is another matter.

Brecht famously kept on his desk a little wooden donkey with the words "Even I must understand it" written on the sign round its neck. Benjamin, of course, placed no such restrictions on himself. Running alongside the critique of historical empathy in the *Arcades* is a more perplexing use of the term in relation to commodity fetishism. In the Exposés Benjamin comments that the goods on display at the World Exhibitions "glorify the exchange value of the commodity. They create a framework in which its use value recedes into the background. They open a

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5 For further discussion of the function of quotation in Benjamin, see Sigrid Weigel, *Body- and image-space: Rereading Walter Benjamin*, 13 and 38, and Irving Wohlfarth, "On the messianic structure of Walter Benjamin's last reflections," 181.

6 For a recent re-assessment of Benjamin and Brecht's relationship, see Erdmut Wizisla, *Benjamin und Brecht. Die Geschichte einer Freundschaft* (2003).

phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted. The entertainment industry makes this easier by elevating the person to the level of the commodity. He surrenders himself to its manipulations while enjoying his alienation from himself and others" (7). In Convolutes G and m, Benjamin makes this point much more economically with the term *Einfühlung*: "The world exhibitions were training schools in which the masses, barred from consuming, learned empathy with exchange value. 'Look at everything; touch nothing'" (G16, 6 and m4, 7).

"Empathy with the commodity," which Benjamin claims is the same thing as "empathy with exchange value," poses some startling questions for the very idea of empathy. Empathy, almost paradigmatically, refers to inter-subjective relations. One feels empathy for another person. However, in the reformulation of the *Arcades Project*, empathy can be felt for a thing, the commodity, or even the abstraction animating that strange thing — exchange value. When empathy is no longer subject for subject, but subject for object, the consequences for both subject and object cannot be minor. The subject, by seeing the world from the point of view of the commodity becomes commodity-like, while the object world takes on subjective features (hence Benjamin's interest in advertising and the illustrations of Grandville). Certain figures in Benjamin's Paris of the nineteenth century, such as the prostitute and the sandwich-man, crystallize this general condensation of commodity and subject, which is why "Love for the prostitute is the apotheosis of empathy with the commodity" (J85, 2 and O11a, 4). By implication, then, the history that recognized the past "wie es eigentlich war" was a "culinary history," written among the luxury goods of the arcades and the world exhibitions, not so much commodified itself, but predicated — in its fantasy of a full reconstruction of the past — on the very fetishistic structure established by a culture of consumption.

Einfühlung, however, is not primarily experienced by the consumer, but by the bystander in the marketplace, and this is the final complication that Benjamin brings to the term. At the world exhibitions, the masses learn empathy with exchange value, but are "barred from consuming." When one cannot afford something, exchange value, in the form of the price tag, takes on dimensions that are not otherwise visible. But the true practitioner of empathy for Benjamin is the flâneur:

> Empathy with the commodity is fundamentally empathy with exchange value itself. The flâneur is the virtuoso of this empathy. He takes the concept of marketability itself for a stroll. Just as his final ambit is the department store, his last incarnation is the sandwich-man. (M17a, 2)

It is a little surprising to discover that one of the heroes of the *Arcades* suffers from the disease of empathy so roundly attacked in the same pages. Do not the flâneur's random peregrinations through the city reconfigure its space, rescuing the streets from the fossilization of habitual routes? Yes, but it is also true that Benjamin makes of the flâneur something of a fifth columnist amongst the shoppers: "The flâneur is the observer of the marketplace. His knowledge is akin to the occult science of industrial fluctuations. He is a spy for the capitalists, on assignment in the realm of

consumers" (M5, 6). Just as the flâneur is more than implicated in the capitalist fairyworld he strolls about in, he cannot be extricated from the relations of empathy summoned up by that world. Not for the *Arcades Project*, then, the outright elimination of empathy in the manner of Brecht, nor any immediate escape from commodity culture, even less of a return to uncontaminated use-value.

Finally, given the theoretical importance given to citations and citationality by *The Arcades Project*, a word should be said about the extraordinary range of sources Benjamin uses. Even though the work is destined to be trawled for the bits by Benjamin, and only the most assiduous reader will work through all the citations, there is much of interest here. Not the least among these is *L'Éternité par les astres* (1872), the cosmological jail-cell speculations of Blanqui, whom Benjamin took to be a precursor of Nietzsche. In fact, the writings of various utopian movements stand out in the *Arcades* — Benjamin returns again and again to the musings and schemes of Fourierists and Saint-Simonians. The ironic animal allegories of the Fourierist Alphonse Toussenel in *L'Esprit des bêtes* (1856) is a particular find, although his openly anti-Semitic views in other works illustrate Benjamin's worrying tendency to court his enemies. Among the many contemporaries Benjamin cites, Roger Caillois' essay, "Paris, mythe moderne" (1937) gets many airings, a clue to the little explored links between Benjamin and the Collège de Sociologie of Bataille and Caillois. Much of Benjamin's archi-tectural insights, meanwhile, come from *Bauen in Frankreich* (1928) by the Swiss art historian Siegfried Giedion, who is once again receiving attention. Most surprising of all perhaps are the frequent approving citations of G.K. Chesterton's *Dickens* (French trans. 1927). Chesterton, I am reliably informed, is standard fare amongst Dickensians, but in such an unlikely context he comes as a revelation. It turns out that Benjamin and Adorno shared an enthusiasm for *The Old Curiosity Shop*.[7]

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7 Many of the ideas in this review emerged from the Manchester Arcades reading group. Thanks, then, to Ken Hirschkop, Scott McCracken and Bertrand Taithe.

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