

NP:

New Press

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ABSTRACT

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NP: New Press

Dissertation directed by Professor Lori Emerson

Dedicated to the formation of the “social and economic combinations” of new presses, the dissertation NP: New Press addresses the question: What does innovation look like in the publishing context? Its answer—as it assists in the formation of new institutionally-based publishing units—paradoxically involves a certain refusal to answer that question at all, since it is only when NP discovers new projects that it facilitates the collective formation of a business plan and in fact a new press. NP then deliberately moves on to another institution, to the building of yet another new press, since internal to NP is the idea that innovation arrives only in the starting anew, with different people, with different projects, within different institutions, in different locations.

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Interruption

With the passage between each passage, we can't anticipate where Benjamin is going, what links he will make, what themes are going to be continued, expanded, or introduced. We are constantly re-presented with our own spectacle of anticipation but also the spectacle of our own not knowing, our own basic need to re-imagine, a reading that is over and over an arrival in the world anew.

So that reading is the fundamental experience of just this type of ignorance, and if reading then in that way is paradoxically the producer of knowledge, then it is this knowledge, of the experience of not knowing and what that brings forward in the mind, the fear, the possibility, the radical un-linking from pre-existing forms of knowledge, that then crosses into the radically linked experience of the passages.

We could even say the more thoroughly each passage is linked or leads out to multiple levels of meaning and consequence, the more this contrary experience can then take center stage or enter into a dialectic. In the dialectical image¹ there's certainly a passage

1. See page 37.

through something like pure language,² but there is as well this “external” dialectic happening between text and the absence of text, or citation and its opposite, non-citational being.

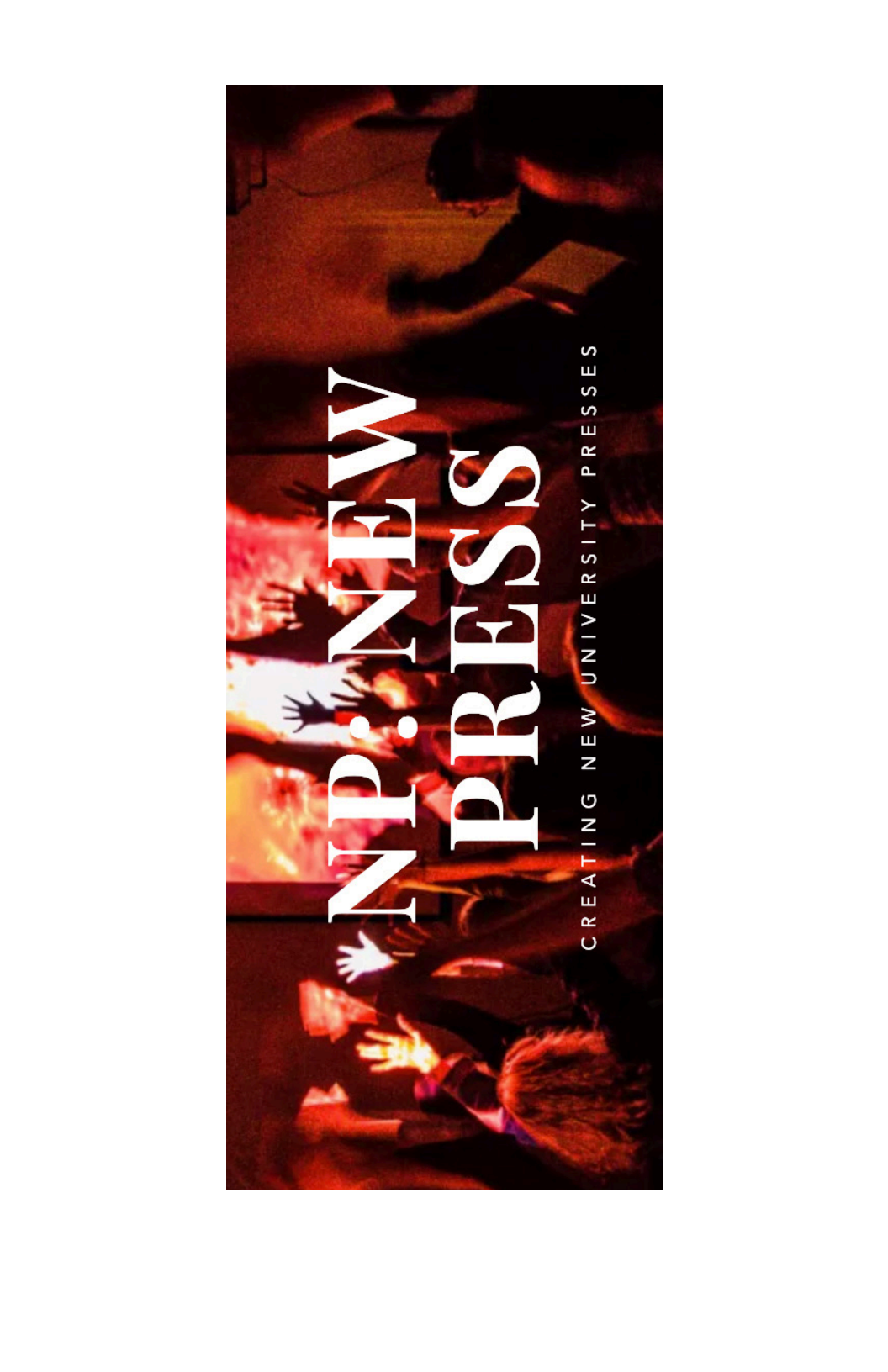
Benjamin refers to this in “What Is Epic Theater?” when he writes

interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring. It goes far beyond the sphere of art. To give only one example, it is the basis of quotation. To quote a text involves the interruption of its context.

Along these lines it’s possible to look at absences created by digital text,³ the way it is, in many senses, backward-looking, a kind of angel of the present, a present that piles up faster than light speed but, and particularly if we look at the material basis of the digital and environmental disaster, only in reference to an “appearance of the disappearance” of the human.

2. See page 104.

3. See page 302.



NP:NEW PRESS

CREATING NEW UNIVERSITY PRESSES

ABOUT US

In a recent issue of *Artforum*, Michael Hardt references the central importance of both “protest” and “thinking” as we work toward “lasting alternatives” through “activism, anti-fascism, and change.” Hardt’s recommendation is for an “entrepreneurship of the multitude” where entrepreneurship “fundamentally means creating new forms of social cooperation,” “new social and economic combinations,” “forms of self-management and mutualistic experiments.” Finally he writes:

Some of the most important work of social movements today, in addition to protesting and resisting the injustices of the ruling powers, is to imagine that a new world is possible. Without losing sight of the urgency of protest, we need to be thinking with an equal sense of urgency about ways to transform those visions into reality.

Dedicated to the formation of the “social and economic combinations” of new presses, the nonprofit NP: New Press addresses the question: What does innovation look like in the publishing context? Its answer—as it assists in the formation of new institutionally-based publishing units—paradoxically involves a certain refusal to answer that question at all, since it is only when NP discovers new projects that it facilitates the collective formation of a business plan and in fact a new press. NP then deliberately moves on to another institution, to the building of yet another new press, since internal to NP is the idea that innovation arrives only in the starting anew, with different people, with different projects, within different institutions, in different locations.

The question of how innovation comes about is crucial, given the speed of technological change and the quickly modified forms by which knowledge is generated and presents itself. Many if not all existing publishers and publications rely on outmoded forms such as the book or journal, forms whose time frames for acquisition, marketing, and production are tied to anachronistic if not oppressive communication technologies and assumptions about what content is and how it is generated. NP is designed specifically to circumvent the problematic nature of publication as we know it, including not simply the way current practices shape scholarship but also the tendency toward reproducing inequality and exclusion.

One of the major components of NP is an attention to the innovation of thinking itself, one that resides as an ongoing and contrapuntal "plan of study" behind the scenes of its active institutional engagement. This plan of study invites collective participation on all levels as it works out a non-institutional blueprint for NP. The plan of study currently takes the form of a blog that opens thinking onto a number of different definitional pathways related to NP, but will also manifest in a variety of other formats, such as exhibitions, printed publications, performances, and emergent community events. The plan of study is in some ways a rhetorical solution to the tendency of any internal structure, in this case for NP, to solidify. The plan of study thus maintains the urgency of thinking of "ways to transform visions . . . into reality." As Hardt writes, "a crucial aspect not only of political theory but also of political practice is to struggle over concepts." The plan of study is where that struggle takes place.

NP joins other publication projects in seeking strategies for more representative content in the realm of publication. Witness any number of projects in the digital humanities, such as the University of Minnesota Press's Manifold, and then a large number of small press initiatives, such as those of Radical Open Access or Publication Studio, which has multiple offices and an open format for editorial decision-making. While these efforts are models for activist publication, NP differs in treating the same challenges by keeping a sharper focus on the institutional nature of publication, on building separate presses, and on building an ongoing program of study that constantly (re)informs the thinking behind its own publication decisions. NP also allows its projects and the institutional contexts out of which they arise to themselves be the arbiters of innovation, forming new presses that are based within the context of where that press takes root.

NP also works to build presses that actively produce forms of legitimacy such as peer review and to thereby qualify new presses for membership in organizations such as the Association of University Presses.

NP functions as a nomadic office that approaches and takes queries from existing institutions with the idea that publishing innovation arises from what is already going on at these institutions. It publishes work only through the establishment of institutionally-based publishing organizations that form around the projects it helps to select. By bringing projects, individuals, and institutions together in this way, as persistently new formations of the "multitude," NP develops new iterations of the social that circulate non-institutionally and hence mitigate against oppressive communication technologies and their associated injustices.

Internal communication

Arcades are formed by the restriction of free circulation. They evolved in this direction for better business, so that populations of the excluded take shape. There is a parallel movement internally, in the psyche, so to speak. This internalization is another theme. For instance, with A5 the word “internal” is mentioned up front. The author of the citation, Poisson, clearly means by this the “mode of internal communication” that the arcades offer, meaning shelter, whereas external modes of communication or transportation are exposed to the weather.

Poisson goes on to do two things, mainly, in the passage: justify the need for “internal communication” by describing how the “royal family” might need it, and deduce further features of the arcades from that starting point. A whole miniature world is constructed here. But we’re also well aware that Benjamin is reading the quote differently, watching, or really surreptitiously explaining to us, how a “mode of internal communication” expressed and constructed architecturally also manifests itself as a structure of human values, such as the “honesty” mentioned in the preceding A4a,3, where a moral value is expressed materially by nailing a coin to a countertop.

We can draw out these parallels almost continuously, hypothesizing ideational or moral networks of ideas that correspond point by point to decisions about how the arcades are built, but in terms of citational method we can also look at how language operates here.

Poisson’s text is being “presented” as objective evidence in the construction of a history of the nineteenth century. That presentation is brought forward by and invokes an imaginative reading where words have a double meaning. We are reading behind the quote, constructing a version of an “internal” arcade that almost certainly was not part of Poisson’s original intention. This secondary meaning is introduced by Benjamin by building a context of other citations and text that point to his intended meaning.

Even so, this is only our starting point for an analysis of how citation works for Benjamin, since can this “secondary” meaning be called Benjamin’s? Can he be said to be constructing a historic truth, or perhaps like a Platonic dialogue, is he, by citationally stepping aside from any idea of ownership or authorial voice, “presenting” us with what are necessarily impersonal historic forces?

Reading the entirety of the *Arcades*

“[*The Arcades Project*] is a book for moving about in, lightly and irresponsibly and, above all, fast.” —T.J. Clark

It is my intention to withstand what Valéry calls “a reading slowed by and bristling with the resistances of a refined and fastidious reader.” [N7a,6]

I’m not the greatest reader, so some of this might not be true for others. But I want to point out the two possibilities here, a fast and a slow reading. The fast reading might get us through the entire book in, say, a few weeks. A slow reading, which is a reading I believe the book insists on, could take a week for 10 pages, which would mean about 100 weeks or about 2 years to work through the whole book.

A fast reading is one that glides over the text, not truly making sense of what is there, that is, grasping why a particular passage is placed the way it is, how it means what it means, reading in effect informationally, a type of reading that it is exactly the goal of the *Arcades Project* to contradict.

I’m not sure that the book makes sense with such a reading.

It is incumbent then on anyone approaching this book to read it slowly, imaginatively, very much like a flaneur walking the city streets, using details to dream oneself into levels of meaning that include the informational but that are also much “more.” In this way the book slips outside of the information economy that we’re perhaps so used to, that defines our expectations of reading as we assume that a work like this can be absorbed according to our

normative time frame, ideas of subject matter that implies, ideas of response.

I want to say that our responsibilities as readers are not unfounded: our attention to detail, our inclination to read closely and to pull out any meanings we can from a particular text, to see everything a text is doing. I believe that this book relies on that inclination, which seems to be a desire to know, a human trait. And Benjamin in essays like “The Task of the Translator” refers to a type of reading that is a “fidelity,” such that “only if the sense of a linguistic creation may be equated with the information it conveys does some ultimate, decisive element remain beyond all communication—quite close and yet infinitely remote, concealed or distinguishable, fragmented or powerful.”

To read the *Arcades* is to live among this element “beyond all communication,” the actual and perhaps living content of any given “passage.”

The contemporary world is not set up for this kind of reading; it expects just the opposite. How do we plan accordingly? Responsibly? The readers of and in this world. I would say there is a certain modernist invocation, as with a work like Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, or Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, of phenomenological experience of reading or being that results from an almost incantatory revisiting of the impossibility of a “normal” progression through the linear accumulation of meaning that the vast majority of books imply, reflect, and insist on. These works exist in opposition to that kind of reading, specifically that kind of experience of reality and history.

One of the remarkable aspects of the *Arcades* is that it accomplishes or presents this alternate form of reading and experience precisely through text that is set up to be read informationally, meaning these texts of the citations. Perhaps one of the great characteristics of the *Arcades* is to show how informational reading, even our simple everyday use of language, our everyday modes of perception, contain and lead at every turn into alternate modes of existence and perception. Indeed it’s finally these latter that seem to take precedence over and direct the other uses of language,

though both types of use are materially determined (meaning part of historical materialism).

Bandeau of cashmere

Fashion as a topic appears very distinctly in Convolute A, before the actual section nominally on fashion, Convolute B. The first outline of the theme is perhaps at A5a,1 with the “bandeau of cashmere.” This is a type of garment, in this case a blindfold “fashioned” by Love itself. It is an exotic (perhaps since it’s from Tibet) covering of things like “proud innocence” (mentioned in A5 as something the arcades were constructed to protect), “carrying away” bookkeepers and burghers, “the stern prude and the frigid coquette.” Fashion is a “magical talisman” and it is a symbol of the internalization of sovereignty referred to in other passages. “It braces the spirit and subjugates the heart.”

Finally this whole ontology is in the form of a comedy, itself performed in an arcade and part of the historical record Benjamin objectively compiles or reports. The fashion thematic courses on through other passages, each time cashmere is mentioned, as with A6,1, and finally as clothing in one of the shops of the arcade. The idea and theme of commerce also become interfused with notions of fashion, such that any time beauty and love are mentioned we immediately look for money.

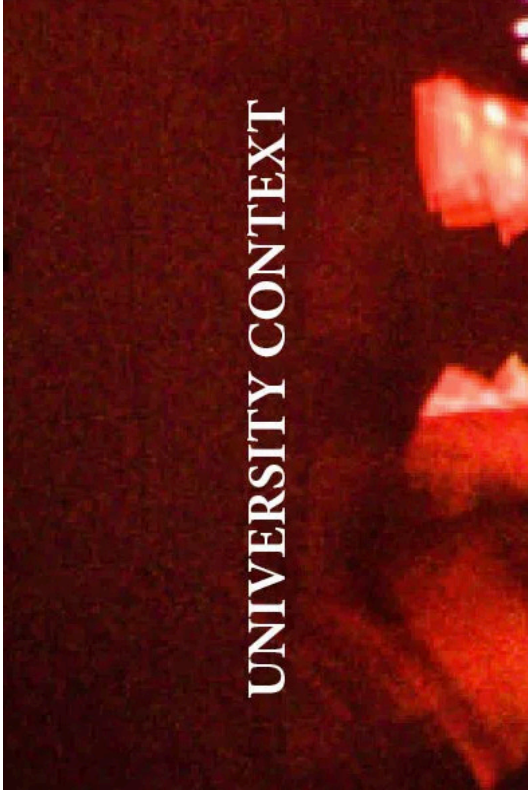
All of this is happening *sub rosa* in the text when we get to a short section like A7a,1:

The beautiful apotheosis of the “marvel of the Indian shawl,” in the section on Indian art in Michelet’s *Bible de l’humanité* (Paris, 1864).

Of course the Michelet—and the bibliographic information here is part of the “foreground” or main discursive line of this passage, not set off at the end or wholly in parenthesis—is a mirror image of Benjamin’s *Arcades*, the great book of humanity with all of the implications of sacredness, so that through this citation the abyssal nature of text is again referred to or presented, or part of experience.

But in terms of fashion, the “exotic” Indian shawl reminds us of the blindfold of Tibetan cashmere that is a stand-in for Love itself, an indication of how fashion and love work to obscure various components of experience, and then with this quote that fabric undergoes a transformation into a spiritual essence, so that the book (its title a reference to another book) functions to convey a history of art and fashion that confirms a kind of deification of the very act of displacement, covering, obfuscation.

We know from the *Arcades* as well that as much as shawls, blindfolds, or other material worn on the body work to hide at the same time as reveal a certain beauty, it is text itself that is the first and final arbiter of the direct and indirect presentation of truth.



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Each press NP coordinates must have a distinct position within the college or university itself and be recognized as a component of that institution or organization (or collection of organizations). NP brings a developing knowledge-base that informs initial negotiations with key institutional authorities so that a viable organizational infrastructure is put in place. While this infrastructure may take shape in a variety of ways, NP works toward presidential- or provost-level authorization as a key initial commitment to starting a press.

NP1

Here, in convolute E, “[Hausmannization, Barricade Fighting],” of Walter Benjamin’s *Das Passagen-Werk* (The Arcades Project) I would like simply to consider the word “étudiants” on page 120 of the English translation. Or I should say page 179 of the German edition, since this work is not in translation, existing, if it does at all, beyond the surfaces of its original manuscript. Even the German edition seems to diverge from or contain additions to the manuscripts themselves. One can only assume, perhaps, that any given editorial intervention will have been a mistake. How many lost echoes?

Can NP take up the lost echoes? What is useful? How much time is there? These questions resolve into reading. A reading that will never be translated, that will never take up all of the echoes, so must be defined by its very openness to the echo and reappearance. That open place, that new place.

NP is a business proposition. But it stays on the other side. A written document of reading a document. It should produce more of those, at one or another remove. All we are trying to do is get to the place of “study,” to explore what that means. We look for its implications until they affect what we’re doing formally and until that effect is taken across the “divide” between what this is and the conversation that creates presses that will be accepted into membership of the Association of University Presses. We can’t cross that divide otherwise.

NP finds its ground in a reading of the *Arcades Project*. A wonderfully ridiculous statement. At least that’s how I feel right now. I do not speak or read German.

NP2 (Counterpath)

NP is happening within the multivalent space of Counterpath, which is an exhibition space in an expanded sense and is hereby breaking new ground, moving into new territory, becoming

something that is both unlike what it was and is a realization of what it has already been, something new.

NP3 (The Biedermeier Room)

The characteristic and, properly speaking, sole decoration of the Biedermeier room “was afforded by the curtains, which—extremely refined and compounded preferably from several fabrics of different colors—were furnished by the upholsterer. For nearly a whole century afterward, interior decoration amounts, in theory, to providing instructions to upholsterers for the tasteful arrangement of draperies.” Max von Boehn, *Die Mode im XIX. Jahrhundert*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1907), p. 130. This is something like the interior’s perspective on the window. [E1,1]

We are being as careful as possible. This is a careful study. By speaking in this way, by studying here, we develop a mode of reading unlike elsewhere, one that lines up, through the creation of new presses, perhaps more closely with the *Arcades* than any other form of “critique,” offers clearer, cleaner recognition of its form and content.

The German text is as follows:

Den eigentlichen und im genauen Sinn einzigen Schmuck der Biedermeierzimmer »bildeten die Gardinen, deren Drapierung möglichst raffiniert, am liebsten aus mehreren Schals verschiedener Farben gemischt, der Tapezier besorgte; theoretisch beschränkt sich denn auch fast ein Jahrhundert hindurch die Wohnungskunst darauf, dem Tapezier Anleitung zu geschmackvollem Arrangement der Vorhänge zu geben.« Max von Boehn: *Die Mode im XIX. Jahrhundert II* München 1907 p 130 Das ist also etwas «wie eine Perspektive des Interieurs auf das Fenster hin.

Finally Google Translate provides:

The actual and, in the strictest sense, only decoration of the Biedermeier rooms “was formed by the curtains, the drapery of which was as refined as possible, preferably mixed with several scarves of different colors, and provided the wallpaper; Theoretically, for almost

a century, the art of living was limited to providing the wallpaperier with a tasteful arrangement of the curtains.” Max von Boehn: Fashion in the XIX. Jahrhundert II München 19 ° 7 p 130 So that’s something like a perspective of the interior on the window.

It’s (reading is) only ever breaking in, a violence, perhaps a key definition of violence, to echoes abounding in a multiplicity. Reading is in fact creating that multiplicity, little else it does, so that the reading, writing, authoring is all of a piece. A cognitive breach, then, unethical, a disturbance. What is all this “breaking in,” a form of selection of one thing over another, one thing to speak about, write about, apply to our own perception? In some sense we’re on delay.

Here is the English translation of the epigraphs that open this convolute and immediately precede the above passage, E1,1:

The flowery realm of decorations,
The charm of landscape, of architecture,
And all the effect of scenery rest
Solely on the law of perspective.
—Franz Böhle, *Theater-Catechismus, oder humoristische Erklärung verschiedener vorzüglich im Bühnenleben üblicher Freudwörter* (Munich), pg. 74

I venerate the Beautiful, the Good, and all things great;
Beautiful nature, on which great art rests—
How it enchants the ear and charms the eye!
I love spring in blossom: women and roses.
—*Confession d’un lion devenu vieux* (Baron Haussmann, 1888)

The breathless capitals
Opened themselves to the cannon.
—Pierre Dupont, *Le Chant des étudiants* (Paris, 1849)

Quoting all this, a kind of sandbox for allowing the emergence of a thematic, the intention is to approach the word “étudiants” in the book title within the Dupont quote. This word translates as “students” (or scholar, *schole*) and the intention with NP is to

unpack or repackage the role of study, the figure of the student, the figure of the scholar. That figure forms our prey at the heart of the institution of knowledge. The intention is to position the organizational multitude of a publication entity, particularly within the university, as itself being a consistent reflection of this, let's call it an "other entity": study. The press would in some sense be the implied city, reclaimed by Haussmann, in some sense, destroyed by him, his "planning," poeticized by him, reconfigured within a particular brand of "veneration."

Let's talk about "decoration." The Biedermeier room is a nineteenth century interior that relies on ornate decoration of all kinds to create a middle-class dream of comfort, wealth, and privilege. Both the surrounding commentary and the citation in E1,1 reduce this decoration—they agree with each other, or, that is, the surrounding commentary (the first sentence and the last) appropriates, quotes, or cites the point being made in the citation by von Boehn—they both reduce that seeming array of decoration to "curtains" alone. The question is what is or is not decoration or ornamentation. The overriding idea is that there is the bare fact of the architectural structure of the room, over which drapery is laid or introduced, within which a domestic interior is formulated by the use of curtains, fabric, material that generates a certain type of illusion via its obscuring what is hidden beneath. The Biedermeier room in this way is made entirely of decoration, and that decoration consists entirely of self-obfuscation, curtains. That is its "characteristic," that is the "perspective" (to quote the final sentence) of the interior itself. It throws itself into a *mis en abyme*, but one with certain themes both circulating around and instigating this particular quality.

An important aspect of the passage is that the Boehn citation itself forms its interior, the external parts of the passage being the opening and closing commentary. The citation thus forms a "curtain" over the agency of the one quoting it, and indeed the instructions contained in the citation for making curtains—to make them "extremely refined and compounded preferably from several fabrics [or "scarves"] of different colors"—form a

methodological statement for the *Arcades Project* itself, an edifice, a fabric “compounded” of an array of different texts.

And the question of agency is central to the passage, on a number of levels. There is the agency of Benjamin as author, which is elided seamlessly—note how the quote appears as a continuation of the opening sentence—into that of the author of the citation, Boehn, dismantling the distinction between commentary and citation. There is the role of the “upholsterer” or “wallpaperier,” a role that is in fact somewhat hard to pin down. First we are told that the upholsterer furnishes the curtains and is central to the interior decoration process. Yet the second sentence from Boehn states that the upholsterer is only provided with “instructions.” The upholsterer clearly is a worker, a laborer, a craftsperson of some kind. In any case, that role moves from the actual composition of the draperies to their more abstract arrangement. These two processes hold equal or interchangeable status. The question raised is what is composition, and what is arrangement? Indeed the composition of the draperies on closer inspection is in fact arrangement on a smaller scale, consists of a “compounding” of fabrics (themselves a conjoining of different elements or threads). Two theories, one of textiles and one of textuality, are *en face* at this stage, a mysterious provision of informational instructions being merged with the artisanal handiwork of upholsterer, or by extension the “author.” We do not know who is doing what. Benjamin is pointing to a certain locus of interchange where we could say institutional forces characterize what is otherwise perceived as direct or hands-on involvement.

The final sentence—“This is something like the interior’s perspective on the window.”—again displaces agency, attributing “perspective” to the inanimate “interior.” We are left wondering in an almost Kafkaesque way (but more formally complex?) who possesses perspective—a type of abstract and authorless instruction, seemingly embedded in the environment itself. But what’s also important to note here is that the “window,” that portal to the outside, in some sense a perspectival starting point, is here categorized as simply another form of drapery, another piece of the

wall-mounted tableaux. The outside world, nature itself, is neither more nor less than another scarf patched into the overall totality of interior decoration, of subjective experience. Thus the world of the Biedermeier room is decoration from top to bottom: there is no outside, no stopping point of the ornamental.

There is also the question of whether the person of the upholsterer is the decoration him or herself. Where the Harvard translation has “furnished by the upholsterer” the Google translation has the quite different “provided the wallpaper.” Did the artisan worker create this central fact of decoration, or did the walls themselves provide it? The issue is not far from the import of the passage. The switch (and indistinguishability) between specificity and artisanal detail, on the one hand, and abstraction, sourceless directive on the other is key. Again, the passage ends by in some sense jumping out the “window” of abstraction, starting with the extremely vague (particularly given the complexities we’ve been talking about) “this is something like” and moving through an entirely abrupt attribution of agency to “the interior,” which is again “compounded” with another abstraction, “perspective.” The final sentence gives us, “properly speaking,” a fabric, a curtain of abstraction that embodies that window it in fact mentions.

What this passage does, what this convolute starts out with, is a move, in this way, to firmly entrench the outside world as an element of an interior perspective. Haussmann, a product of the period of the Biedermeier room, reshaped the exteriority of the city of Paris. Yet he too, like Benjamin with his textual city of the arcades, was a certain kind of interior upholsterer. Working his way concretely through the “several fabrics” of the city’s pre-existing history, reshaping them according to his own ideas, as well as providing “instructions,” a plan writ large that now provides endless perspectives for the living inhabitants of the city.

I will return more clearly to study in another post.



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A crucial first step NP facilitates at any institution is the formation of an editorial board, which consists of approximately five professors or other officials from the member institution who periodically review projects the member press has approved and passed through peer review. This board serves as the final arbiter for projects that carry the institutional imprimatur through its press.

Vogues of language

Language functions on an almost hieroglyphic level with the rebus in A7a,3 and evolves into “literary and military allusions,” is seen as a “vogue” and folded into the progress of fashion. Signboards carry the full import of civilization through this thoroughly commercial rhetoric, a complete equivalence between literary quality and military power. We also see a commentary on the extreme material nature of linguistic meaning, since even as all human life is extinguished it survives in petrified form, a kind of eternal ashen substance.

Following on to A7a,4 the “brand name” becomes the central topic, so that this symbolic nature of language, its “signage,” is further expanded on. Here the collusion of government and industry in shaping communicative practices, public discourse in the marketplace, and the perceptual habits of the masses is shown to be flourishing as early as 1824, and with the final sentence—“The importance of good professional standing is magnified in proportion as consumer know-how becomes more specialized.”—Benjamin throws into relief the manner in which bourgeois society steps in through government power and social standing to shape linguistic usage at perhaps its deepest level, naming.

Insofar as the arcade is a force for specialization it pushes the masses into a place of symbolic powerlessness and reshapes language as a corporatized abstraction. What to do? The succeeding A7a,5 passage presents a protest, “two demonstrations per day,” but it plays out as perfect comedy, far outside of the system and with little impact on it, the protesters themselves “market speculators” and “unlicensed brokers” that the police can hardly be bothered with as they lead them to the slaughter like sheep.

Human dignity is nowhere to be found, which is reiterated again in A7a,6 with the reference to the murderer in the “Passage due Cheval Rouge” (the red horse, again the nonhuman as function of naming), and finally in A7a,7 the return of the signboard.

How do we see text?

The question as to how we are going to see or understand text. How are we going to experience it or let it in? How do we accept it? We are circling around what our relationship is to text at all.

How are we communicating with it? Generated text changes our relationship to text. I think it's safe to say that computers are controlled in an absolute manner by corporate interests.

We start there. We can then build an argument that as much as text itself is computer-generated it too is part of the network of commodities, so that as we continue to present this framework of the reality or presence of text, which defines thought and action, we can then think about an oppositional or resistant use of text.

Primitive version of the arcade

The Galeries de Bois, “which disappeared in 1828–1829 to make room for the Galerie d’Orleans, were made up of a triple line of shops that could hardly be called luxurious. There were two parallel lanes covered by canvas and planks, with a few glass panes to let the daylight in. Here one walked quite simply on the packed earth, which downpours sometimes transformed into muc. Yet people came from all over to crowd into this place, which was nothing short of magnificent, and stroll between the rows of shops that would seem like mere booths compared to those that have come after them. These shops were occupied chiefly by two industries, each having its own appeal. There were, first, a great many milliners, who worked on large stools facing outward, without even a window to separate them; and their spirited expressions were, for many strollers, no small part of the place’s attraction. And then the Galeries de Bois were the center of the new book trade.” Théodore Muret, *L’Histoire par le théâtre*, vol. 2, pp. 225–226. [A2a,7]

A detour that aligns Benjamin with Muret. For instance, Muret seems to be objectively relating the dark, earthy, primitive character of the early shopping gallery, as well as the two defining poles of activity, the milliner and the book trade. But hat-making

invokes the fashionable for Benjamin and its operative role in the function of commerce, with books and everything in them, text itself, in this case just another hat, each milliner on his chair, face out, another author on display.

Just to be clear: we can't possibly imagine that one of Muret's themes was to compare milleners to authors, hats to books (though one hypothesis here is that it was in the back of his mind, and by extension in the minds of the shopkeepers and strollers, perhaps an early nineteenth-century meme or symbolic nexus). Also of note, chronological progression is in play here in that Benjamin first lists the later incarnation of the arcades in A2a,6, then the earlier in A2a,7. We can see by the page numbers in the bibliographic information listed for Muret that this reverses his own ordering, reverses the progress of his history. This raises the idea that most all of the histories Benjamin would have relied on would have been in chronological order, and this ordering is echoed in the strict progression of page numbers, part of the organizing structure of the generic idea "book" (as a kind of Platonic category).

NP Artist Statement

NP calls equally for a business plan and a dissertation prospectus. NP fully and completely crosses, again and again, the divide between a registered business operating in the world and an entity that thrives on its own abstraction, on the way in which it is built up on a foundation of study. This is the way NP approaches and activates the redefinition of publishing and the redefinition of study.

The Business Plan

At its current stage of development, the preliminary business plan is as much as possible the public face of NP. As much as we can refer to NP as a real-world entity we refer to it in terms of such a document. The business plan needs to be a permanent feature of NP and hence of the dissertation project and will be

constantly subject to revision. As a first pass to help clarify the project of NP at the outset, here are nine basic elements of the business (as per an article by Martin Zwilling of *Forbes* magazine):

1. Definition of the problem

The forms of university press publication are not able to keep pace with innovations in the forms taken by knowledge production. For instance, the digital humanities opens vast new terrains of engagement with not only computer-based work but with new modes of performance and community engagement, work that university presses have scant resources or expertise to handle and therefore over-rely almost exclusively on the form of the book. What kind of entity would be able to keep pace with constantly evolving modalities of knowledge production and output?

2. Solution and benefits

NP works with participating institutions to identify significant knowledge projects within those institutions. It assesses how these projects are being produced, what their connections are, and how they might best be brought to greater public attention while still respecting pre-existing criteria for professional legitimation and advancement for their creators. Once a publication strategy is arrived at, NP implements that strategy and further puts in place an ongoing publication entity within the institution that would support future projects.

NP brings to participating institutions an openness to new publication formats that are based on projects as they are currently being produced at that institution. It thus is able to embrace innovation by not forcing projects into formats or forms based either in outmoded or unrelated practices of dissemination. It brings to institutions the ability to form their own press or publication entity based as purely as possible on what is already happening at that institution, allowing both the projects that are produced and the institutions to explore new territory that would more accurately reflect the character of knowledge production as it is actually happening.

3. Industry and market sizing

There are about 140 members of the Association of American University Presses. There are approximately 2,618 accredited four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

Broadly understood then there are approximately 2,478 accredited four-year college and universities in the United States that do not have presses that are members of the Association of American University Presses.

NP would approach these latter institutions as its potential client base, as candidates for the formation of new presses. (This group does not include 2-year institutions, graduate programs, high schools, or other institutional formations such as prisons; thus the market is potentially much larger.)

4. Explanation of the business model

Operating as a 501c3 nonprofit, NP will develop grant applications to organizations interested in university press publishing, such as the Mellon Foundation, to initially fund its central office and core salaries. It will also seek context-specific funding at each participating institution, in the form of possible subventions for projects being produced and institutional funding for operating costs. NP will also work to develop project and press-specific budgets that outline profits and losses from sales of its project outputs and, to an appropriate degree, provide remuneration for its services.

5. Competition and sustainable advantage

While the field seems for the most part untested, competition would most likely be for projects that member presses decide to take on. Once these projects begin to be developed it may be that other publication venues look more desirable or possible. A standard publication contract should prevent losing these projects. Other competitors could be smaller institutional publication ventures. But the objective is to look for new publication models that support projects that fall outside of current models. The existence of competition is important, since it indicates a distinct need,

but it also indicates already-explored and hence less interesting territory.

What we would call a “sustainable advantage” for NP is its willingness to move among different institutions and projects, its unique ability to bring into mentoring relationships already-established presses and working methods, its accumulated knowledge base, and its specifically nonprofit mission.

6. Marketing and sales strategy

After a few months of initial development, the plan is to have a website fully developed and begin to approach potential institutions. This approach will consist in contacts with key administrators as well as individuals such as teachers and researchers in the institution who might have projects the new press could support.

This outreach for specific projects and presses will be combined with the development of a central board for NP, consisting of university press publishing executives and scholars in the field. We will also approach already-existing presses to develop mentoring partnerships that would work to innovate in all key areas, not least with marketing and sales strategies.

Given NP’s particular relationship to innovation there needs to be a reluctance to incorporate the demands of already-existing marketing and sales channels into the formative stages of the projects it aims to support. This does not mean however that presses and project will entirely avoid financial considerations.

Within a year, we should have one to two presses formed, working on two to three projects each.

7. Executive team

The founder and director of NP is Tim Roberts. The initial board of directors consists of the dissertation committee Lori Emerson, Cheryl Higashida, Michelle Ellsworth, Laurie Gries, and John Ackerman.

8. *Funding requirements*

Work on all foundational activity is covered within the dissertation project. Actual funds will come into play once projects are agreed to and separate publication offices are arranged at individual institutions. Once the initial projects are underway, permanent funding for NP central office should include salaries for 5 people, for an all inclusive total of approximately \$1 million per year. This amount would anticipate the founding of at least 5 presses per year.

9. *Financial forecast*

An objective of NP is to concentrate on putting its model in play for one to two presses. If this can happen, along with the creation of dissertation documentation, then the project will be deemed successful in its first phase. Subsequent phases include the foundation of 5 more presses in year 2, then 5 to 10 presses per year going forward. Ongoing relationships with granting institutions as well as income expectations for each press will be explored as part of the dissertation project and further developing this business plan.

Parallel passages

“The bourgeois class, with its various levels, was placed opposite the class of the nobles,” so that in consumer culture there is this continuation or progression, along a spectrum, of bourgeois into noble.

So that there is a further parallel to different forms of symbolic language, which also stand opposite each other. Comparing these two superpositions, there is a flow-through into language of social organization, one form of government to the next, a transparency of the bourgeois, happening through commodity culture, which the arcades are the epitome of.

These pass-throughs of language, insofar as they run parallel to the “passages” of commodity culture and the arcades, of course

call into question how language is used, its nature, but at the same time they dismantle that usage in that they are citations.

In this context Benjamin would have always seen aura as radically compromised for what it was said to have been doing, as a performance in itself.

NP4

But it's possible to question the status in E1,1 of the author, book title, place of publication, and specificity of bibliographic details in any of the passages in the *Arcades*, particularly since my objective is to arrive at the status of the word "étudiants" in the source listing for the third epigraph in E1,1. For it's possible to notice here the radicality of the interrogation of the very notion of, for instance, "author."

What is the "upholsterer" doing, who is this figure? As has been noted, the agency of the upholsterer parallels that of Benjamin in constructing the "history" of the arcades using the textual "fabric" of citations. E1,1 carries with it the interrogation of the status of this figure. Therefore, again we cannot fail to miss the gravity of signification of the author-listing provided, such that when we read the words—and they are indubitably words—"Max von Boehn," our reaction is, well who is he? He himself is creating a fabric of text, one whose primary quality, as we can see in the citation before us, is to shift in and out from specificity to abstraction. Is he an author or is he passing along instructions? Is he himself the drapery?

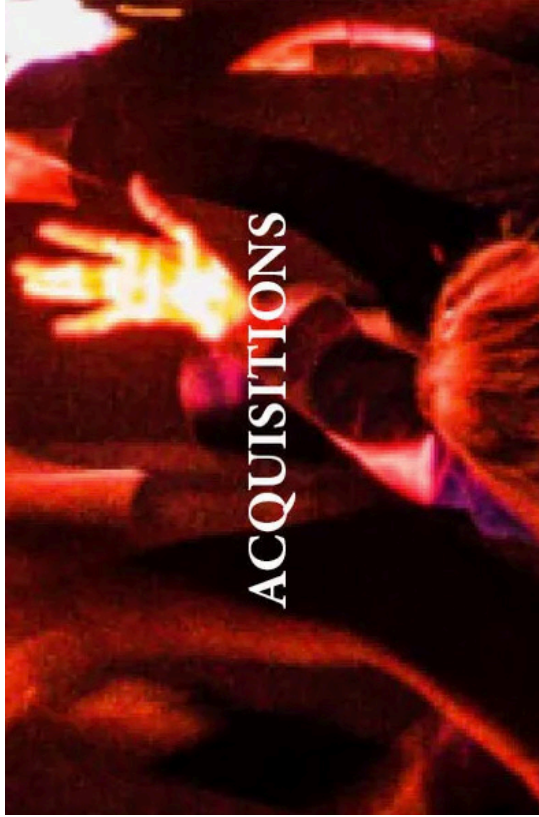
And once we have that question in front of us, the title of his book *Fashion in the Nineteenth Century* itself takes on the characteristic of an ideational and temporal historical abstraction that guides the organization of the texts it contains, that "instructs."

We can also notice that the place of publication is a city, Munich, certainly not unlike Paris; that the publication has a particular year, 1907, that resonates with the temporal qualities of the passage throughout; that the specificities of "vol. 2" and "pg. 130"

will be refinements that contribute specificity to a type of material textuality.

Indeed the argument could be made that one of the overriding concerns of the *Arcades* is the status of bibliographic information in precisely this way, the status of the documentary record of bibliographic information, as a kind of “interior,” in its relation to the “art of living,” and so on.

There’s a sense in which translating *Das Passegen-Werk* is to grapple with this status of bibliographic information, which constitutes and is constituted by citation.



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NP is engaged in project acquisition in two ways. It begins by locating projects a new press might contract and produce as it begins to form and take shape. NP staff begin this process at the same time they locate and train ongoing and longer-term employees at the member institution. NP also engages project acquisition in its own right. That is, it accumulates a temporary reservoir of projects that might be produced at a press it works to develop. These projects are not produced by NP but are highly recommended to its clients.

Operative thematics

There are “operative thematics” extending over groups of passages. We could call the files or convolutes major headings of what’s in play. Essences? An ostensible history is being told about the arcades, so when we have a passage, for example, starting with a specific reference to an arcade, such as “Cour de Commerce,” this makes good sense. We expect the passage to contain a descriptor of this arcade.

But we read for correspondence. Symbols, allegories, Benjamin’s commentary on the idea of “commerce,” the animal, innocence, the machine of killing, the machine directed by the government (are all machines that way?), the cour, the courtyard, the heart, the comedy, the drama of all of this, in an old house in Paris, as part of an arcade, again defining commerce.

The symbolic nature of language opens these themes as we read the informational content and know that the passage says something quite specific and true about what happened in this arcade, and we accept this and learn from it. Yes, the first experiments with the guillotine were conducted here, we learn. But the theme of slaughter is carried over from A1a,3 and Véro-Dodat. Is this, then, more than just another theme?

So in some sense Benjamin develops this extremely high standard for every word that is chosen—even as in fact he didn’t choose it but has only cited it—so that the reader is searching high and low for any possible connection to other material. This can be said even as the idea that each passage is a quotation in some ways defeats that notion of intertextuality or multiple meanings, since the original authors could never have known that they were writing the history we’re being told, that these connections would be presented through what they were writing. That is, unless Benjamin is drawing on an identical semiotic as these other authors were, the same connections and symbolism and so on.

Reasons for close reading

Close reading constitutes the citational: close reading relies on or is oriented toward, it has a worldview of, using what is already here or existent in the world, what has declared itself to be. That's its access to the generative. Citation takes what is already in the world and sees other worlds through whatever that is, it looks at how nominally "other" things define a universe. This is a way to sidestep the compromised self, at least initially, if such a self exists, even as the full subjectivity of the self returns, and very obviously, in the act of reading, the act of imagining what is in front of one. But that's the basic move, to take what already exists—which is why it relates so well to curation (or non-curation), because it is a placing together, a pulling out of the flow, a showing that is a reading, a collection, even a translation.

NP5

To quote the translation of these epigraphs again.

The flowery realm of decorations,
 The charm of landscape, of architecture,
 And all the effect of scenery rest
 Solely on the law of perspective.
 —Franz Böhle, *Theater-Catechismus, oder humoristische
 Erklärung verschiedener vorzüglich im Bühnenleben üblicher
 Freudwörter* (Munich), pg. 74

I venerate the Beautiful, the Good, and all things great;
 Beautiful nature, on which great art rests—
 How it enchants the ear and charms the eye!
 I love spring in blossom: women and roses.
 —*Confession d'un lion devenu vieux* (Baron Haussmann, 1888)

The breathless capitals
 Opened themselves to the cannon.
 —Pierre Dupont, *Le Chant des étudiants* (Paris, 1849)

The Google translation of the title of Böhle's work is "Theatrical catechism, or a humorous explanation, precludes the mere life of common joyful words." Of the Haussmann it is "Confession of a lion become old." Of the Dupont, "The song of students." For the Dupont, we also read "The song of scholars." "The song of idleness." The scholarly and idleness are synonyms for study, the space of study. (I'll turn later to Benjamin's convolute on idleness.)

At this point in the analysis of the bibliographic information in E1,1 it is possible to see what Benjamin has done with the substitution of "Baron Haussman" with what is typically, and what the other epigraphs here are doing, the citation of the city of the publication. Here the implication is of an equivalence of "author," and particularly of Haussmann, with "city" in an active displacement of the bibliographic series. Of course, like an upholsterer with his curtains, Haussmann will have authored the city, as city planner for Paris (otherwise place of publication).

To continue this line of thought it is crucial to underscore the granularity of Benjamin's engagement with the text. This granularity is that same level of detail referenced in E1,1 as constitutive of drapery, of the threads of fabric that either evince the upholsterer's hand or (we don't know which) result from larger, abstract "instruction."

One of the points here is that this level of detail often goes unregarded in treatments of the *Arcades*. In the epigraphs to convolute E, editorial interventions are seen in the punctuation in the bibliographic information in the epigraph source lines. It's possible to have recourse to the German edition of the *Arcades*, though of course this begs the question of what Benjamin's manuscript in fact looked like, the exact material "image" of that paper covered with script (in this case the German edition does in fact adhere to the manuscript, which I viewed as part of this project in February 2019). In any case, it's obvious from these epigraphs and others in the *Arcades* that Benjamin was certainly interested in drawing on standard formatting like parentheses but chose *not* to do so here.

I think we need to pause in our reading, perhaps for a long time, since this manner of intervention seems to be indicative of

a much broader misconception of the *Arcades* as a collection of “notes,” something in the end to be cleaned up and where possible standardized. We see here that such a misconception is very much active, and it fails, for instance, to grasp the import (and I can’t say that I have grasped it either) of the opening passage of this convolute. I’ll say that many of the passages when looked at granularly in this way indicate, on the level of translator or editor intervention, a relaxed editorial hand or license that is tantamount to a misreading at these crucial levels. The translation work evinces a level of analysis we can only be grateful for, but interpreting the *Arcades* one must always have a steady eye on these gaps and lost echoes (which extend into the German edition as well, as indicated by the seemingly arbitrary use of smaller type for “citations”).

What we see then is Benjamin quietly and visually using a process of elision of punctuation as its own modality of discourse. As I’ve pointed out, the role of “city” is in play, such that by removing parentheses the book title and city of publication become indistinguishable. Page number and year of publication are included in the tableaux as well, and in other sections of the *Arcades* it’s possible to see Benjamin theorizing the status of punctuation like the colon, which typically follows the author name. The elision of the varying levels and types of bibliographic information parallels, summarizes, or incarnates the constant and ubiquitous elision of commentary and citation (which again is obscured by, in the English, the use of bold and, in the German edition, smaller type), or, that is, the text of one “author” versus the text of an “other” author. In short, bibliographic information holds the extreme status of “text,” a fabric merged and compounded just as in the opening passage here into a “curtain” of specificity and abstraction. All this forms the basis for a theorization and experience of text and textuality that has barely been mentioned in Benjamin studies, let alone followed through to its larger implications. NP sort of activates some of these implications.

But to return to our trace, thread, or goal. How do we place “étudiants” in this matrix? It is a piece of text in a textual

economy. Its true meaning here is accessed only by a certain granularity in the reading process. The student is a reference, a material instantiation of a text. The student is the title of a book. The student sings. The student is not told apart from the city, itself another artifact of the bibliographic. The student is a collective mind, interior, and in this state of affairs we see how that role operates. Implicated in whatever it is we see as the “outside.” Implicated just as any “interior” functions in dialectical opposition to any “exterior.” And not simply implicated. But constitutive. We do not tell one realm apart from the other.

This is one approach among others to uncovering the way the word “etudiants” means something in this place in the *Arcades*. The kernel of the full portrait of its meaning will not be obtained. We are content to keep such an idea in suspension, to circle back again and again in an approach. The question constantly is will meaning “open itself,” like one of the capitals in the Dupont epigraph, will meaning be revealed behind the “curtain,” as in E1,1?

Note the overwhelmingly feminine characterization of true meaning or beauty, with the masculinized attempt to “grasp.” As in E1,3, it is a “peep-show rhetoric.” But as with so much else in the *Arcades*, there is no figure that does not attach to both tendencies at once, that does not feed through to an opposing figure. “Le Chant,” the song of the students in fact poeticizes this relation. And this most human song in fact poeticizes nonhuman agency, a warlike consummation and victory of disciplinary force. They “opened themselves,” “se sont ouvert.” If the status of “song” is always as part of the “flowery realm,” as “charm,” and “enchantment,” an “effect of scenery,” exactly as found in a Biedermeier room in the construction of a curtain, then the song students sing is one of pulling the curtain back, of opening, of achieving sight. But that revelatory moment, woven into the fabric of song itself, is constantly implicated in a reversal of agency, as in E1,1. These “capitals”—the city of Paris, any city or capital city, a capital letter perhaps, and certainly economic capital itself—are breathless, panting, animalistic, primitive, the stone bridge over which we cross to both freedom and despair, is a poetic of displaced human

agency. The students song of protest, that barricade fighting, is in reality the song of defeat, is itself the allowing in, the prostitution of thought to, mechanistic and nonhuman forces of control and domination, of “city planning,” of the institution. This most personal act of reading and study doubles as invasive institutional force. It forms a war-like combat but perhaps for all the wrong reasons.

Curious division between citation and commentary

The use of bold type in the *Arcades* as published in English by Harvard University Press seems utterly random. Look at Y6a,4 (not bold) vs. Y6a,6 (bold): there is effectively an equal amount of commentary and citation in each, both being primarily citation. It’s as if the editors were well aware of how tenuous the distinction between commentary and citation was, knew that it absolutely didn’t matter, and scattered the formatting to make the point. But indeed it’s a reading of the book, a window into the editorial apparatus that’s been applied to the work that is the *Arcades Project*. It is an intervention into Benjamin’s text, which according to any interpretation he meticulously planned. The editors drape their conception of what is and is not a citation all through the book, giving the impression of a clear-cut oscillation.

As is seen in the translator’s foreword to the Harvard edition, the bold text derives from the German edition of the *Arcades Project*, where a larger typeface was used to designate “Benjamin’s reflections in German”, or, the commentary, and a smaller typeface “for his numerous citations in French and German.” Again, “the larger type was used for entries containing significant commentary by Benjamin.” Thus Rolf Tiedemann, the editor of the German edition, must have either introduced or at least approved of this technique of visually assigning one role or the other to certain pieces of text. The translators of the current edition, while they note that all this is “without textual basis in Benjamin’s manuscript” (!), go ahead and maintain the technique, only now using the bold text rather than text of larger

or smaller size to divide up commentary and citation, assigning bold to “citation.”

They say that using bold avoids the “hierarchical implication” of “privileging” “Benjamin’s reflections over his citations,” but in fact that’s not the entire issue: as one can see in the text itself, the issue is *distinguishing* commentary and citation at all. I don’t want to say that the translators have no sense of how commentary and citation merge, but they do allow this massive formal element of the book as published to go forward, not only misleading readers into thinking that commentary and citation are distinct but not, as I’ve mentioned above, doing a very good job of it!

To be fair, the translators state that “what Benjamin seems to have conceived was a dialectical relation—a formal and thematic interfusion of citation and commentary.” This is true, but given then why let stand the deeply misleading use of bold for “citations,” if in their dialectical relation to commentary they become by definition indistinguishable from commentary? The word they use, “seem,” is troublingly tentative. Moreover, they then again tentatively reference J75,2 as a way to draw out or expand what they mean by this interfusion, and we look at that passage to find a Fourierist characterization of work not as inauthentically exploitative but as a form of children’s’ game play: “all places [read: both citation and commentary] are worked by human hands, made useful and beautiful thereby; all, however, stand, like a roadside inn, open to all.” Here, the “act would be kin to the dream,” not separated from it, as in inauthentic labor. The passage itself is in the mode of commentary (and not in bold), though in fact it is a citation of Fourier and Baudelaire (the last unacknowledged, as the translator’s point out). The passage itself is thus an illustration of exactly the problem of working (an *inauthentic* labor), and asking the reader to work, to bring an inauthentic distinction between citation and commentary across the whole of the *Arcades Project*.

We are left with the impression throughout the *Arcades* of a misperception or misunderstanding by the translators and editors of the very thing that is the defining characteristic of the entire

project. More than anything I'd like this post to indicate an inaccuracy that seems to be circulating at the heart of scholarship around the *Arcades* and by extension Benjamin's work as a whole.

Experiments in a new institutionality

What is the relation of NP to new institutionalism? "New institutionalism" is a movement, picking up from institutional critiques of the 1960s and 70s, within art institutions, such as major museums, to both broaden institutional activity in an arts context and turn a critical eye on institutional behavior itself. Referencing examples from the 90s of expanded notions of the role of the museum:

institutional practice was not confined to traditional exhibition programs (such as solo exhibitions or thematic shows); the exhibition was also conceived as a social project and operated alongside discursive events, film programs, radio and TV shows, integrated libraries and book shops as well as journals, reading groups, online displays, invitation cards, posters and residencies. . . . The art institution thus functioned as a place of production, site of research and space for debate, an "active space between community center, laboratory and academy" (Lucie Kolb and Gabriel Flückiger "New Institutionalism Revisited")

Further we can begin to see in this shifting and expansion of the role of the art institution a burgeoning self-criticality and introduction of social activism, first appearing in "new museology":

A somewhat earlier, comparable approach . . . is found in the 'post-reflexive turn' of museology. At the end of the 1980s 'new museology' came to describe an emerging analysis of the functions and procedures of the classical museum with close attention to their hegemonial western, nationalist and patriarchal narratives and constructs, leading to a greater awareness of the power of institutional presentation. Following this demand for a radical examination of the social role of the museum, the later post-reflexive turn was not confined

to deconstructing the conditions and formats of the museum (such as canonized collection display or authoritarian exhibition theses), it also conceived the museum as a democratically organized ‘space of action’ allowing for a shared, multi-voiced practice. Exhibitions were thus often put together with the participation of multiple actors and conceived as political discursive practices confronting controversial social questions. These approaches, often labeled ‘project-based exhibitions,’ ‘un-exhibition’ or ‘non-exhibition-based curatorial activities,’ saw themselves as critical practices and frequently reflected on alternative narratives of presentation in their approach to exhibition topics. (ibid.)

Just as the museum or art institution, NP views its relation to the institution of the university press, and by extension (a) the university itself and (b) “institution” as broadly conceived, as problematic, presenting itself as a strategy for an ongoing relationship to a ubiquitous institutional substrate or infrastructure that simultaneously circulates as critical meme. NP wants to keep its status as a “body without organs” (see later section) insofar as it believes it can reject any and all characterizations of it as being “functional” at a given place and time. In this sense, functionality is understood as institution and surveillance, the non-escape of the disciplined subject. As NP proposes to engage an institution, its next iteration will always be fast approaching on the horizon. It develops connections it aims to absolutely refuse, making those temporary sites of engagement all the richer for their abbreviated time frame.

Quick clarification of the dialectical image

The dialectical image isn’t something we get to, but something we start with. It’s the historical detail that you set out to read, dialectically moving through it. It is the “historical object of interpretation.” The collector brings a “divinatory gaze.” Finally we encounter “times embedded in the space of things.” Really much of what we do in this context is ask if there is a relevance here for how digital text operates, or how reading at all operates (we are

always already reading digital text). What parts of contemporary existence are in fact divinatory? What historical images are we working with? Are we constantly reading straight through things?

An economy of misrecognition: troubling the event of research-creation

This appeal to technique is, itself, a technique of governance.
—Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, “Blackness and Governance”

As Erin Manning and Brian Massumi write at the beginning of their short 2014 essay, “Toward a Process Seed Bank: What Research-Creation Can Do,” research-creation, also known as practice-based research, comes across in two ways. First, there’s the way it functions as merely a “funding category,” a “nomenclature for higher degrees,” a “finished category” that “reinstat[e] simplistic notions of practice and theory,” “a mechanism for existing practices to interface with the neoliberalization of art and academics.” But, and this is what their essay attempts to explore, we can also engage in a “rigorous rethinking” of the question of “at what level and in what modes of activity do research and creation come together?” This latter process is where interdisciplinarity takes root, where research reveals itself, where “creative” practice reveals itself, as crucially infused with its counterpart, either creation or research again. Manning and Massumi’s quickly depart from the narrower definition of research-creation to go on to build a rubric or language for a fuller and more accurate definition of research-creation.

Their pathway at this point is to treat both sides of the research-creation equation—and throughout their essay synonyms for research are “philosophy,” “thinking,” and synonyms for creation are “art,” “making,” “practice”—as singularities. Those who are concerned with research-creation must necessarily engage with the overlap of these singularities, and the essay acts as a guide, a seed bank, for making this process happen. Their term for this co-occurrence, this form of knowledge that rests at the heart of

research, of art, of interdisciplarity, of the university, is “event.” And though there is an extensive history of theorizing and engaging notions of the event, working its way through any number of philosophers and artistic practices, back to Aristotle, up through Heidegger, Adorno, Deleuze, Badiou, Happenings, and so on, I’m here going to attempt to excavate a definition of event from a close reading of Manning and Massumi’s essay, alongside a consideration of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s short essay “Blackness and Governance,” which uses similar terminology but seems to broaden the implications of what research-creation can do. This method of approaching the event builds a terminology that becomes instrumental to an understanding of event creation in a contemporary context. NP and its program of “study” as events constitute a subtext for these thoughts.

An “event”, according to Manning and Massumi, is “a pedagogical encounter, an artistic exploration, a collective philosophical exploration.” An event happens “when practices come together at the intersection of making and thinking” and expose “their important difference.” We have here then an equation, with on one side the addition of two composite variables—a making, practice, or impulse toward ‘art,’ plus a thinking, research, philosophy. Putting these two in relation with each other, adding them up, equates to an event. But, once we have an event, what do we have? What is the outcome? What has ‘happened’? What have we put in play? Manning and Massumi are very reluctant to characterize this outcome, if they do at all. But we *can* say the event provides a space within which the singularity of both research and creation have been given room to come forward, where their “active” differential is “felt,” where the “forms of linguistic articulation are moved to become practice-oriented” and “words are pushed to make felt the ineffable.”

I want to come back to what is meant by the “ineffable” but first let’s note the complexity of the event. The event represents the discontinuation of the centuries-old yet artificial divisions between university-based scholarly research activity and artistic practice, practice that can be read here as taking place within the

university but also in noninstitutional contexts (though of course it's extremely rare for formal "research" to happen noninstitutionally). What Manning and Massumi's event proposes to do is "activate" the difference between these two things, research and creation, by, again, bringing forward the singular nature of each and seeing how that nature feeds into precisely the singularity of the 'opposing' element, showing how they dialectically "co-compose in event-based formations" and finally result in an "emergent collectivity." What "Toward a Process Seed Bank" sets out to do is provide us with techniques for realizing just such activity, for, first and foremost, honoring the difference of singularities, bringing events into existence, for making their differential felt, for inventing the conditions "as much for the philosophical as for the artistic."

How then do we make an event happen? The question forms another complexity, for as scholars and artists, and following Manning and Massumi every scholar must necessarily be an artist, every artist a scholar, we are faced with a field of activity that is radically inclusive and is in fact constituted by this radical inclusivity, "constitutively open ended." Where do we land? What is the process for deciding on criteria for any action at all? This point, of undecidability, of the inchoate, the barely perceptible, "so close to no interests" (to quote the epigraph above), is where this section of NP would ultimately locate itself. It's dwelling here, at the "prebifurcation level . . . before research and creation diverge into the institutional structures that capture and contain their productivity," that event formation finds its most meaningful activity. This section of NP considers these sources and shows how experimentation with event-creation produces outcomes where new knowledge challenges more settled notions of scholarly and artistic output.

What follows is a brief discussion of two key elements of an event, according to Manning and Massumi, the "ineffable" and "emergent collectivity," with a digression on "collectivity" as read through Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's "Blackness and Governance," with concluding sections on three potential events

conceived within the terminological framework of the first part of this paper.

Ineffability

The “ineffable” plays a key role in an event. As mentioned above, we “feel” the ineffable where language fails to account for what an event produces. An imperative of research creation and event creation is that it remain open to the ineffable, and this does not mean taking an “anything goes” stance now and then but actively grounding scholarly and artistic work in strategies for remaining open-ended, rigorously attending to its institution as a (noninstitutional) tenet. Indeed, one could characterize the *whole* of Manning and Massumi’s research methodology in “Toward a Process Seed Bank” as devising “techniques” for remaining open to the ineffable, getting to that “singularity” through these “modes of experimentation,” “activating” and “making felt” the above mentioned “differential.”

But the ineffable is that thing we set out to understand. It is first characterized as a “text” and an “artistic practice” but overall it is something that moves thought to its limit, which by definition is a nonlinguistic space. There is very much a danger to linguistic articulation, one that destabilizes and effectively *negates* scholarly research as much as it does art. There may be moments at which critical discourse takes on relevance or necessity, but it seems that these must be chosen quite carefully since they imply a discontinued or foregone “suspension of disbelief.” We bring the text or artistic practice into “relation to general ideas” when we pad it with critical discourse, but it is at that point that we disallow the ineffable as its “own formative force.” Attentive to the tension between these two tendencies, “Toward a Process Seed Bank” shows how they co-compose, how they push each other to become more, how they need each other, how the singularity of linguistic articulation is precisely to break itself on the rocks of the artistic ineffable, in some sense containing that very ineffability, and how artistic practice harbors the same structural paradox, no matter

where it goes, in or out of the institution, presenting itself as a subject in need of explanation if it will achieve relevance, even as this explanation is fated to miss the point.

By staying open to the ineffable we are “undone” of the “confidence in ‘where things stand.’” We simply cannot make generalizations that lead to general concepts. We are barred from rationalization, from what we have come to know as reason itself. What we get out of the deal is an experience of the singularity of research and of creation, of the singularity of artistic practice and the practice of research, each of these realized in their fullest potential as they are brought into relation with each other and the singularity (a kind of third level) of their difference results in an event. Finally, then, an event is where these nascent tendencies are brought into relation for the very first time, each dispensing with its solitude as each gives place to the evolving singularity each contains.

Emergent Collectivity

Not unrelated to the ineffable, the end goal, and the starting place, for research-creation is the emergent collectivity. It points to the “new forms of collaboration” implied by research-creation and related to collectivities that emerge over time, over the course of a project or event, collectivities that cannot be characterized before they actually appear and are hence “emergent.” In fact there are a number of elements in the research-creation scenario as Manning and Massumi characterize it that are termed “emergent” and each time the term is invoked it points to an entity that does not yet exist but only appears, emerges, become activated, during the course of the research-creation process.

There a number of ways they characterize this emergence, each of which is simultaneously activated at any given time. These include, as we have seen above, as a way to approach an understanding of the ineffable as only emergent from a process-based understanding, as well as something that is produced unpredictably, an “emergent process” that leads to or itself is what Manning

and Massumi characterize not only as the “new” but as the “singular occurrence of the new,” “creating the conditions for the event.” But overall the emergent collectivity is an endpoint or goal, as much as something that is emergent can be said to be an end. Since of course it can’t be, and this is what we perhaps should remember when we talk about research-creation or practice-based research, its particular brand of being a moving target, its necessarily mobile way of exploring the world, sidestepping stasis, definition, naming, as false certainties, as denials of the emergent and hence as cutting themselves off from both events and collectivities.

And again for Manning and Massumi one of the most important ways of talking about what emerges is as a “collectivity”, which indicates first of all a newly formed or realized association of researchers and collaborators but also the “collective” of singularities of the two pieces of the research-creation equation: thinking and making, research and creation (hence the term “research-creation” is itself a version of words being “pushed to make felt the ineffable” and two singularities being merged and respected, fully spelled out in their own right, resulting in a third, “collective,” term). The intermingling of these two ways of understanding collectivity works to define the human as “in-the-making” and itself emergent, as a result of research and making that refuses to be generalized. But crucially Manning and Massumi’s events and research-creation will not happen without a collectivity, different people with a common participatory project, a community and everything that indicates in terms of class, race, difference of any kind.

Troubling Event Formation

In the final paragraph of “Toward a Process Seed Bank,” Manning and Massumi link their project to the concept of the “undercommons” as expressed by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten in their book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, creating “mobile sites for undercommon thought,” orienting

“experience in the making” and “honoring the ineffable at the heart of dissonance.” Indeed, we can characterize much of Manning and Massumi’s research-creation as what Harney and Moten term the “anoriginary drive,” one that is at all times in relation to governance, which it in fact brings into existence. What Manning and Massumi discuss is very much the placing of the “research-creator” in a position where they “suspend disbelief” in a process of self-denial that enables, for instance, a “technique for reading” that is “singularly tied to *this* text,” postponing the “temptation to be critical,” “allowing the text to open itself up to its own creative impulse.” In this process of creation there cannot be a drive to be original, since originality of the research-creator would obscure the singularity of the text to be read. Hence appropriation, copying, quotation are methods of open-ended reading that achieve generative distancing of the writing subject from the singularity of its subject matter.

Moreover, Manning and Massumi’s “ineffable” can be read as Harney and Moten’s “blackness.” Harney and Moten speak of “disavowal” and we can then understand this as blackness disavowing any external attempt to define it, to bring it into normative discourse, to control it, to bring it out of “ineffability.” Hence there is a constant project inherent in normative, institutional, and regulative discourse, a difference contained in it, to assess, verify, accommodate, subsume, interpellate that which is under study. Manning and Massumi’s research-creation process senses this urgency, this subject matter, and theorizes the need of practice to direct itself in such a way, techniques, critiques, constrains all being designed to get at this singularity, to leave it precisely as it is but also, we should remember, to have it finally be part of language, brought into the institutional context. They sense the impossibility, the looming disavowal at every turn, and what they seem to be doing is setting up a process that will nonetheless insist on engaging it, allowing us to slip into self-assurance, what Adorno might call the “concept.” Harney and Moten cite the “opposition of *Technik* and *Eigentlichkeit*”, or technique and authenticity, and the “improvisation through their opposition” as

it “moves the black aesthetic.” And here the parallel seems clear with research-creation, where “improvisation is key.”

And indeed, Harney and Moten’s anoriginary drive works in a dialectical relation with regulation, which has within it a differential that speaks to Manning and Massumi’s difference of the singularities of research and creation. For Harney and Moten we are constantly operating in a feedback loop with regulation, which situates the black radical tradition within the framework of the ineffable and emergent collectivities. If a collectivity is to emerge, it must contain a radical disavowal of the regulatory framework it must necessarily arise out of. They would posit blackness and governmentality as two singularities whose differential emerges over time as events in history, “a history irregularly punctuated by transformations that [the anoriginary] drive imposes upon regulation.”

And “event” for Harney and Moten maintains the characteristics that we see in Manning and Massumi of combining differentials (in this case blackness and governance), of interpellating an “ineffable” quality, and of providing passage to an emergent collectivity, but Harney and Moten bring into the conversation much more directly this relation to overarching regulation and governance, particularly a relation to their internalization, to their role in the subjugation of “fugitive” communities, giving voice in far more detail and directness to the “neoliberalism” Manning and Massumi cite at the start of their essay as threatening the research-creation movement in the university. Thus while Manning and Massumi can be seen to be very usefully setting out a framework for research-creation and for grasping artistic and scholarly activity both in their own right and in relation to each other, Harney and Moten start with an expanded notion of the sociopolitical relevance of this activity, its implications for marginalized communities, and the complexities of its implementation.

An event for Harney and Moten happens within history, making room for an expanded notion of blackness, but only as it throws itself against regulation or governance, which blackness

itself will always contain some version of. For them, this is where we start and what we always remain aware of.

Gaps

In the end Manning and Massumi seem to run aground when it comes to characterizing what could be said to be this third element, placed at a “prebifurcation” level. The difficulty approached is effectively that of the outside subject position in discussing a dynamic that itself is formative of that subject. If we ourselves are defined by the new knowledge that emerges from an event, how could we now, presumably before that event takes place, theorize a structure of either research or artistic practice that would remain constant for either one of them? We might also say, if blackness is in a state of permanent and radical disavowal, what exactly is the discursive framework within which it and we as readers can circulate simultaneously? Again, to return to singularities, to put it simply, how is it possible to honor difference when you’re yoking it with something else?

While in Harney and Moten, their solution is to “re-route” the anoriginary drive, the imperative for disavowal, in Manning and Massumi we are only “postponing” the “temptation to be critical”: to be sure, at a certain point we give in. We desist from caring directly about “this philosophical text [or art practice],” from “listening,” from reading a text or practice as its “own formative force,” as if it stopped being what it is. So that we have to think that even with Manning and Massumi’s techniques, and perhaps particularly with those techniques, there is very much what they themselves call a “dampening of the singularity of the process.” As Harney and Moten write, “differential or differentiating techniques are made to account and stand in for an absence,” where an “absence” is exactly what these singularities must finally be. “Abstraction of or from the referent is seen as tantamount to its nonexistence,” they go on. And here we need to again return to the opening of “Toward a Process Seed Bank” and question whether even with Manning and Massumi’s stated objective of

saving research-creation from being just another “institutional operator,” they are finally reinscribing those forces they’ve set themselves up to confront. These are indeed the “politics of research-creation.” Again, Harney and Moten seem to comment on the outcome of techniques that too readily assume their efficacy at characterizing a singularity: “Appeals to internal difference are made in order to disallow instantiation.”

Here in Manning and Massumi we can see a certain level of feel-good claims about the innovative nature of research-creation, characterizing it as a domain of activity that escapes, even as it operates within, the academic establishment’s inclination toward “general concepts,” even the very notion of “coherence,” knowing at all “where we stand,” again “the very possibility of generalization.” An unalloyed confidence—even as it qualifies itself at almost every turn—is expressed in the ability of the research-creator to get at the “absolute singularity” of both sides of the research-creation equation, truly allowing them to remain heterogeneous. Harney and Moten would rather speak of, historicize, and linguistically perform, the sheer impossibility of this project, since only in a performative mode, even and particularly discursively, can one continue to honor the ineffable. With this in mind, we have to look at the stakes for artistic content and social justice when we introduce these ideas into the overwhelmingly discursive environment of formal university research.

We can further trouble the research-creation process by looking at its claim to be “at the constitutive level of both art practice and theoretical research.” This a priori positioning of the research-creation theoretical package, so to speak, preceding any of its outputs, indeed makes perfect sense, given that the same project waits at the endpoint of this ongoing teleological arc, at the same time as we are presented with entities that are “new” or “emergent.” The framework cannot change. What we’re attempting to read or experience artistically or from a research standpoint will need to return to the fold, as it were, will permanently need to circulate against the same theoretical and experiential horizon that generated our current state of affairs in the first place. We can ask

then what could possibly change? What could possibly be new? Again, it's important to note that Manning and Massumi are adamant throughout their essay about leaving things "open ended," and that the process-based and inconclusive, incomplete nature of the essay, its leaving itself open for others to add different tactics or techniques, confronts just the issues I'm talking about, in fact raises those issues, but it's also important to vigilantly map out whether this effort is succeeding, is truly activated. "This appeal to technique is, itself, a technique of governance," write Harney and Moten. Is it possible to say that Manning and Massumi's work is finally an "economy of misrecognition"?

Harney and Moten attack a similar definitional complexity, though the subtlety of their positioning of the irreconcilable singularity of blackness approaches the extreme, if not the incomprehensible (as it should be?). The recursiveness of their language, their prose, is so constant that it seemingly pushes language to its breaking point, just as Manning and Massumi might have it, in pursuit of this "ineffable" quality, "push[ing] technique over the edge." And this linguistic deterioration, so to speak, feeds directly into a material instantiation of the character of blackness itself, which dismisses "any possible claim regarding the essence or even the being of blackness," and they note the "irreducible performativity" of blackness, necessarily a dismissal, which is also an embrace, of blackness itself.

But even given these complications, I'd like for a moment to give credence to the overall significance of the event, and begin in my own terms to walk through, at least partially, active hypotheses of how to deal with ineffability and event creation. As we read blackness as a singularity within Manning and Massumi's research-creation equation, we come back to a consideration of the event as the singular way forward for a spectrum of concerns: research, artistic practice, the university, the noninstitutional, the fugitive, the criminal, blackness, community, the undercommons, history, the ineffable.

Event Creation

The rationale for creating events? Humans by their very nature desire to create events (to paraphrase Aristotle). But what does that say? Multiple motives operating on multiple levels at once, the nature of events necessarily being related to previous events, necessarily “taking off” from what has come before, which itself must necessarily be related to what came before that, in a series, a network, tracing outward until we’re left with an inability to reference any one moment as starting point. Is that inability itself the event? Perhaps so: our attempts at analysis and creation necessarily fall apart, experience slipping through our hands. There is then an element of randomization and chance, perhaps to the ineffable, that true prebifurcation level that our process seeds can’t possibly do justice to, where our process seeds are second-guessed as seeds of governance, a second guessing that is the true seed of authentic fugitivity.

Inasmuch as research-creation is concerned with event creation, it will always take root in the analysis, the research, of the singularity of other events, seeing how they emerged, how they themselves are related to yet other events, what forces are at work in their operation, what they might lead to. We start with an event since in many respects that is who we are: Consciousness builds up within us as an accumulation of events, a network of related happenings, even if they’re only related by virtue of happening to us. Event creation is both to attempt to give direction to this development but also to give access to what is already happening in front of us, to work to see this, to work to bring definition to what might otherwise go unnoticed. Before a research-creation project can become activated it must put in place an analysis of ongoing events that traces them back to their own activation point, tapping into the energy of that activation as a catalytic force that means its own event can take shape.

Example

Take for instance, take for a source, the event (at least as it was presented to us in the February 18, 2016, *New York Times* article, “How Tim Cook, in iPhone Battle, became a Bulwark for Digital Privacy”) of Apple’s CEO Tim Cook refusing to de-encrypt the iPhones of the San Bernardino shooters and provide the FBI with potentially useful information. The event, which in this case is a refusal, is notable for the way in which Cook seems to be standing on his own in an attempt to provide the government with an object lesson in digital privacy, to provide the industry with a test case. What we seem to have before us is an ethical visionary defining a new moral plane for the largest of our corporate interests when it comes to standing up for the mass consumer. Here we might say that Cook performs having a grasp of a certain ineffability of digital consumer rights, how the digital should be used, and is facilitating an emergent collectivity of a digitally informed citizenry (albeit one that falls in line behind Apple).

Pause here, in front of this event, and know that it is *an* event, though I want to say it’s not yet *our* event. We simply don’t have enough before us at this stage that relates Apple’s confrontation with the government to what we as researchers would relate to our own notions of ineffability or emergent collectivity, though we can see these things operating in what we have so far. We’re still at a surface level. Continuing then with what we might term “imminent critique” we theorize source events for the subject event, noting at least three major factors that characterize the formation of Apple’s refusal: the competitive market, the death of Steve Jobs and its effect on Apple’s identity, and Edward Snowden’s disclosure of the collusion of major technology companies and the government surveillance apparatus, his status as a folk hero (the person who perhaps in some remote way embodies a radical version of the Jobs mystique). This section of NP is not the place to do more than suggest lines of analysis, but it’s hard not to see that Tim Cook’s protest strategizes increased market-share for Apple by seemingly associating itself with Snowden and carrying

on Jobs's empire-building legacy. We thus uncover at least three catalytic conditions for the event of Cook's fight with the Obama administration, his version of the confrontation of, we could say, blackness and governance.

But as research-creators and event makers, where do we go from here? If we have material that for us appears as completely relevant, what is it to engage and bring to light through events yet other levels of understanding? We have our own communities to engage, or own ineffabilities to honor, our own events to create. Is it the case that discursive prose such as what you are reading now constitutes the most effective way to deal with events? What modalities of experience are we looking for, and are these themselves necessarily part of the conversation, what's at stake?

As mentioned earlier, my own approach to event-creation is through a gallery space in Denver, which could be seen as my primary enabling constraint. We want to see a gallery as an amorphous entity whose singularity is that it is permanently engaged in a process of self-definition. It looks for projects to participate in that lead to a place-based re-evaluation of its constituent elements. Within the sphere of Cook's refusal (made almost comic by the ease with which the government ultimately found a hacker to break into the iPhone), our material for event creation is whatever we mean by "digital consumer," the community surrounding the gallery space, its audience, without which it cannot exist. This is middle class residential, a population where we assume nearly everyone has a smart phone. What Cook's performance was intended to do was influence the purchasing decisions of this kind of community, perpetuating Apple's countercultural mystique (perhaps inaugurated with their 1984 Superbowl commercial for the just-launched Macintosh) where embracing a certain brand of digitality is the equivalent of breaking free from overwhelming corporate and government monotony, of governmentality. Of course at this point no one thinks that computer use in itself could ever be a method of protest, only a painless capitulation, and Apple is more and more a legacy corporation, struggling like Microsoft against its obsolescence. In this context, an event

will produce a collectivity that answers or places itself in opposition to the digital consumer as defined by corporations like Apple. We would activate these populations by bringing them to variant understandings of digitality, not didactically but by engaging the singularities of digital experience as it exists locally. This is our curatorial program.

Three Speculations

Sufficient for our purposes here would be to attempt to catch the imposition of self-management at the pre-bifurcation level, to mix terms from Harney and Moten and Manning and Massumi. For instance, we could work with the planned obsolescence of hardware and software; categories of digital self-management; and finally processes of technological internalization. Gallery shows, also understood as one kind or another of community gathering, would be created in each of these categories, shows that would produce events that result in emergent collectivities and that ideally function as catalysts for further events.

Obsolescence

We can assume that obsolescence has been operative in the computer industry almost since its inception, higher and higher percentages of technological innovation being in the service of requiring new purchases, this revenue cycling back to reinforce the modality of technological advancement that produces it. A series of existential threats to the consumer are in play: not having a working device, hence losing one's original investment; being excluded from digital fashion-making, defined by participation in the forefront of technology; being excluded from contemporary modes of communication, the threat of isolation; the threat of financial ruin, depending on how integral technological activity is to one's livelihood. How can we as a gallery space truly approach the singularity of the phenomena of obsolescence? How do we arrive at an event where obsolescence happens right in front of us and we can therefore contain it?

More abstractly, is artistic engagement in this case a method of uncovering?

Here I would propose an event along the lines of a social experiment, wherein we invite participants with various models of phones to speak about their phones and their experiences using them, what features they most use, how they feel about their phones, and so on. We would need about 10 volunteers to speak for not more than 10 minutes each, and we could research different types of phones to make sure we had representatives of each. We would also try to have a cross-section of various demographics that are operative in the area.

We video this event, posting the video, with the permission of the participants, to the gallery website. This act of basic documentation and dissemination of public conversational reaction to devices that are central to how we circulate in society is key, in the sense that art can't hope to accomplish much more. At the event, we then have participants exchange phones, those with older models giving their phones to those with new ones, and vice versa, asking participants to use these different models of phone for 2 weeks. We video the ensuing chaos and feelings of the participants, their refusals and the specific details of their complaints, posting this video to the website as the culminating moment of the event. We then obtain multiple iPads and play loops of short clips of the initial presentations and the reactions to the request to switch phones, these iPads being attached to the gallery walls for a new show.

Self-management

As we've seen above, self-management is governance, and in the context of Cook's refusal there is a singular desire to be free of surveillance, a necessity to conceptualize digitality as operating strictly under the purview of each individual. For governance to operate properly, for the majority to seamlessly embrace and hence drive consumerism, the assumption of the inviolability of our digital activity, our digital selves, must remain intact. Self-management then is anything we do to reassure ourselves that after all we

are not subject to corporate control or governmentality when we make purchasing “decisions” or behave as if our predilections are not database driven.

The next gallery show would explore the decisions the gallery patrons made to attend the gallery, exploring the impact of these decisions and illustrating their linkages to various economic trends. As gallery patrons arrive they are asked to log on, with their phones, to a brief online survey with various questions about what else they might be doing that evening, what their expectations are for that evening, given that they’re in a gallery space, how they chose what they were wearing that evening, and so on. These responses would be read by a small group of casually-dressed, very relaxed and friendly, “adjudicants” who were off-site but visible on a large screen in the gallery space via a live feed. They would read and react to the responses as if no one could hear them and they had complete privacy, performing as much as possible the contemporary notion of the assumption of privacy and of not being surveilled, a certain ignorance. They would in turn find participant’s responses to the questions interesting, more or less useful, odd, funny, important, and so on, as if reviewing the results of a focus group in a corporate back room. They would move around the space, getting up to get snacks, stretching, and otherwise emphasize movement that those in the gallery would not have the option of, being in a more formalized public space. Finally, the gallery owner, who had earlier been announced as such to those coming to the gallery that evening, walks onscreen, thanks each of the adjudicants, and hands them payment in cash as they all leave as at the end of a workday.

Internalization

By internalization we mean a reliance that is experienced on a regular basis on habits or forms of living that are dependent on hardware or software of any kind, but particularly networked. Cook’s refusal posits an expectation of government non-interference, or ignorance, of what transpires on any given iPhone. His refusal implies a level of encryption and protection from outside

surveillance that users have come to expect. We can say that this expectation has been habituated and internalized by the typical consumer to the degree that there is an equivalence between comfort with any given example of hardware or software and a financial bonanza. We can look at almost any tech company and trace their success to the moment when their product was embraced by the mainstream public in this way, innovation crossing the threshold to large-scale repeated use. For instance, our lives are changed by Facebook as it achieves “always open” status for many users, Uber as it infiltrates the very notion of mobility, or finally Amazon with its internet-based price structures keyed to disincentivize in-store purchases. These trends take on exponentially expanded relevance with the rise of ubiquitous computing.

Event-based curation intervenes in this context by defamiliarizing the spread of technology, of the viral, of the meme, the thing that asks us to “let down our guard.” The phenomena in question is exactly the opposite of place-based, occurring via global networks that facilitate crowd-based decisions and groupthink. And yet it may be that precisely by grounding this trend, this tendency, this root of internalization, can an event, with irony and overt failure, counteract this lead element in the engines of success. The more genuine the attempt, with genuinely inadequate materials, to reproduce these global trends, the greater the offset, the indirect light, the unearthing of how they are deeply situated in the fiber of daily life.

We research the elements of the “tech company”, coming up with a list of the most common features, in terms of personnel, projects, office furniture, fashion, and so on. Once we have all of the most prominent, generic characteristics, we reproduce all of them, with all sincerity, in the gallery space, but within a certain time frame. Any material can be used, cardboard boxes for desks, mannequins for employees, grocery store receipts for troubling financial reports, but whatever results at the end of the given time frame, say two weeks, is in the gallery for an opening and display.

Conclusion

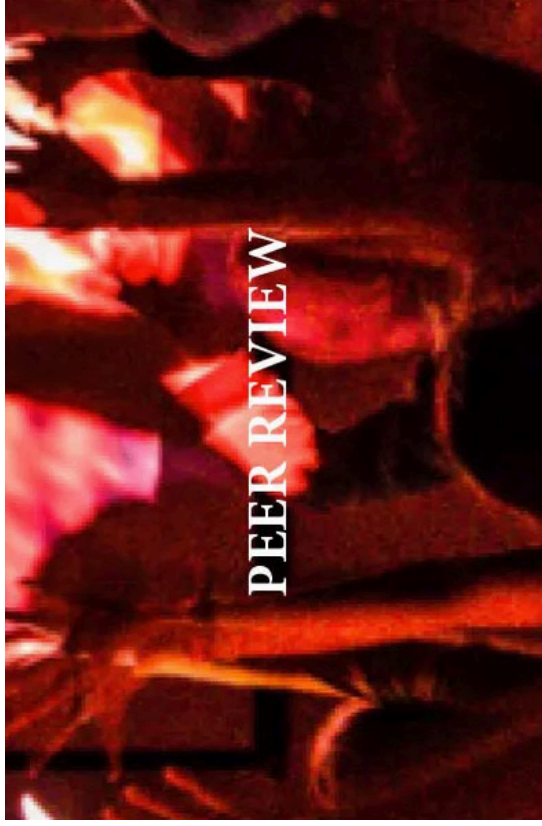
These last three examples push away from discursivity, leaving audiences to make sense of what just happened in front of them, or that they were a part of. Indeed as part of this section I'm not explaining much either, only setting a broad context within which these events can take place. Interpretation of why these events might happen or in what direction they're pointing can take any number of forms.

But perhaps (and here at the conclusion that's all that's on offer, a "perhaps") this is as it should be. With each of the events audiences are theoretically placed at a "prebifurcation level," a place "before" discursive knowledge is introduced to explain feelings or outcomes, a place before, even as it is necessarily the outcome of, research and creative practices of the event planners, before a "creative" or any response is possible since the event has not yet transpired. We can see how an "ineffable" is present in each case, in terms of whatever particular issue each event is getting at or exploring, and how an "emergent collectivity" happens as audiences comes together and experience each other's feedback, and how pre and post production creative action might transpire, and how this is enmeshed, nearly identical to, in-process active learning to which the event opens the way.

Finally, as Harney and Moten's essay has shown, it's imperative that we read Manning and Massumi as in many ways a beginning, exactly an opening, and that we infiltrate our theories and our practices with the idea that our singularities will behave as blackness itself, an "unmanageable," they will *be* black, in perhaps a high-flown, academic sense. The only way to honor them is to work, is to improvise, our way to seeing clearly how they will refuse us. We'll understand them only by knowing how they won't be understood. There's no knowledge in the university, only different theories of how to take the university apart. We can finally re-route the event then into an occurrence that disavows—fails to live up to—its own possibility, by that act aligning itself all the more with itself as "event."

Situating interiority

The whole idea of the interior seems to be condemned over and over. In I1a,5 it is the product of magic, of household gods, of dream and delusion, of ornamentation, of an opium trance, along with poetry (art) but most of all industry to blame for ridiculous expectations, “exploitation of all things made to serve artificial needs,” and of course this is how commerce works, where the “dividends” come from. This dynamic is reported on in 1842. Then immediately following, in I1a,6, a relation between art and industry is displayed again, this time in 1889 (note how bibliographic dating functions as evidence of historical evolution), where a kind of military-industrial complex runs in lock-step with art and intimacy. The relationship of these two areas, art and commerce, anticipates much of contemporary cultural theory. Again though, one of the interesting things Benjamin is doing seems to be tying this “progress”—one relation of art and industry in 1842 that transfers to another one in 1889—both to a historic movement or evolution (so that it has various iterations over time that are more or less refined or changed) and to the idea that his commentary, particularly as it exists indirectly through citation, is always situated within the operation of actual, material books, and ipso facto the functioning of text itself.



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Backward-facing citations

The 1928 quote from Giedion in I1a,7 is extraordinary for its almost too perfect summation of both the preceding citations and the commentary, as if that earlier material had been constructed around it, or as if it had given birth to these other things. The context is one of galleries or art, with an intimate “fear of one’s own magnitude” closing the passage. Industry interfuses art, or is present alongside it, with the “noise of machinery” that fills the galleries (arcades in themselves). Then we have the slow evolution of cultures of technology, like transportation, with guests arriving “in a coach-and-eight” even as the place is filled with the sound of motors, and the attempt to, as in I1a,4, obscure through ornamentation like furniture the actual dimensions and overwhelming, or inhuman, aspect of the scene. Again this is published in 1928, about an exhibition that takes place in 1867, and its textual description of the galleries lines up with Benjamin’s thematic or apparent thesis so comprehensively, it seems to prove his point so thoroughly, that its status as a citation, as documentation of a history that is necessarily outside of the present, is called into question, begins to waver, making language appear, as with Bassajet, the “Images dites à portes et à fenêtres,” or a spoken image of a door or window, a magic threshold onto something not quite clear. Equated then with ornamentation and its functions: text, whatever text conveys, history, the historical impulse. What do we understand by any of this? In the true interior, perhaps of the psyche, text holds the place of a “furniture-like installation”—again taking on the nature of art—used to “prettify these . . . galleries and to relieve the austerity of their design.” Here the allegorical nature of the passage takes root, especially with the parallel existence of galleries and rooms with arcades and shops. A dialectic at a standstill at this point of interpretation reflects the undecidability between whether the text is the interior we are looking for or is the point beyond which, the covering, historically determined, beyond which we cannot go.

NP6 (Institution and study)

But how is Benjamin characterizing institutional force? At the outset of convolute E, as before we can see this passage's interaction with notions of study. At all times, institution and study feed one into the other, indeed. They support each other. You don't have the externalization of the institution without the internalization of study. Insofar as institutions are corrupt, study itself is the source of that corruption. They are *the* things that are indistinguishable. Not only does study play a role in institutionalization but it plays the *central* role. When we speak of "barricade fighting" then we speak of a consciousness of this constant reversal of study and its opposite. We speak of not being able to speak without placing ourselves in this chain of circumstances. The barricade is that divider between our place of study and what must always be its antinomial backdrop. Our reading is a barricade fighting.

But here on the cusp of study it's sufficient to attempt to characterize the institution. With a close reading. Our characterization of the institution will always have its small-scale dialectical opposing force in study. A personal, internal force. Or precisely an impersonal, outward non-force that in its diffusion and invisibility is the greater force, or force field that we might fit into, that is, a characterization of the true abstractness of capital. I am not above saying that this complexity is above me. Yet I seem capable of contemplating this complexity.

NP itself is characterizing the institution, perhaps only because it openly acknowledges its own status as and role in an institution. Its structure wants to give it the ability to think, to study. We have to refer to it as this outside force. That's the only way we get somewhere, that's the only way language makes sense. This move is paleonymic yet is not only (not) the name. We set ourselves up, we meaning I, one person, to create an institution within any institution that can't possibly be an institution but in the end is all the institution is ever about, that one person. E1,1 first and foremost sets out in the mode of individual commentary

to characterize the Biedemeir room, a complex play of materially-based, bourgeois illusion that is a decorated interior but one that represents as well a totality. And indeed the very attempt at characterization, at designating what that “sole decoration” might be, is accounted for in the overall design. The institution folds into itself any attempt at description, as yet another component of its appearance. E1,1 is a single body.

Spirit/material equivalence and the status of text

At the deepest levels of the Benjaminian conception or worldview there is an equivalence between cognitive energy and material objects or architectures. You can see individual or communal action, how the decisions are made, being determined by certain physicalities, like the fortifications in I1a,8. Once you assume this equivalence a structurally materialist conception of the world takes hold: all things are determined by this equivalence and hence financed, industrial power structures preside over any given manifestation of human endeavor, from the shape of cities, to decoration on furniture, to belief structures, to the shape and content of books.

With this last there's no doubt that Benjamin saw his own work, in particular the *Arcades*, in this context, and we could say that might be all the more true since much of his other writing was done for pay, to survive, and necessarily commercial, even if on a small scale. Finally, much of what I've been discussing has been circling around how in fact the *Arcades* works to interrogate its own materiality, from its use of citation down to its own status as a textual entity at all. In fact, if we're going to talk about citational practice the discussion should probably center on how citation engages a materialist worldview (though in many ways that's exactly what I've been doing).

Interiors of publication practices

We are in a period of witnessing the metamorphosis of publication history, but we can frame this history according to certain ideas at work in the *Arcades*, which itself is a kind of blueprint or evidentiary moment of the key components of that history. For instance, feudalism. If we look at I2,3 we can see a certain passage taking place where the way in which distinction is used in the bourgeois interior filters into the privileged domestic environment a “posture of struggle and defense” that derives from feudal times. This is expressed artistically as much as it is emotionally and perhaps financially. Scholarly publication practice is the same. We need only to consider how scholarship is attempting to deal with the *Arcades* itself: the professionalized, middle class apparatus of university-based scholarship needs to arrange itself around the research object in such a way that it fortifies its position, in nothing less than a medieval manner, of maintaining various hierarchies, workflows, and financial commitments, adopting at its deepest and most material levels of structuration an “unconscious retention of a posture of struggle and defense.” Here is where a theorization of textuality perhaps starts and stops. “They will never quite have done with feudalism.” As we problematize scholarly discourse along these lines then, and simply following a desire, which it should be said originates precisely from the university context, we should be careful not to fall back into this so predictable and hackneyed oppositional posture, an instance of “satanic knowing” of I2,6. It seems only to be at rare moments that scholarly publication practices even gesture at distinguishing themselves from, you could say, a nineteenth century domestic interior. “To live in these interiors was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider’s web, in whose toils world events hang loosely suspended like so many insect bodies sucked dry. From this cavern one does not like to stir.” The courage of convictions here leads down a road of reinterpreting any given scholarly object through the lens of historical consciousness that

puts material publication practices and outcomes at the center of knowledge formation.

Consciousness of what was previously said

Again and again in the *Arcades* a citation jumps firmly in front of what commentary has “moments before” finished summarizing. There’s probably little way for us to know but it’s almost as if Benjamin built an argument in a more traditional way, using citations as evidence, then flipped them around in the final text. The final impression is undoubtedly one where the citations themselves are authoring the book, stepping in with some sort of authority to complete an argument, just that of course the actual authors of the quotes would have had no idea what argument they were completing. What are the implications of this kind of textual consciousness, which gets to the heart of the *Arcades*, at the level of form and content at once, simultaneously? We could say that historical time is called into question.

If the past is completing the arguments of the present, then we have a situation where we cannot decisively say that the present takes priority or is more significant than what has already been said or done. Linear or chronological history makes no sense in this context, or, that is, makes sense for quite different reasons than an essentialist notion of historical progress.

Furthermore, any text, any passage, becomes citational to its core, which may indeed be a core of nothingness. A citation, we could call it an “active citation,” if in fact it has quotes around it, is an authorship equally as much (and one cannot say this emphatically enough) as any supposed individual penning of words and phrases. This is where the glittering nature of the *Arcades* originates, since it’s impossible to say where and how any of it actually exists. I keep bringing this up, but we are in the position of the “angel of history,” “turned toward the past” and “fixedly contemplating” a “pile of debris” that is this massive text, perceiving a “chain of events” where we would “like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed,” but aware that

it's all one "single catastrophe." (Note how this passage describes a reading practice, placing our very ideas about how we approach reading into a historical continuum, something with material outcomes.)

NP7

I want to question the move "to characterize" at all, the move to take something of clearly vast complexity, what nearly defines ornateness itself, and say that in fact it is only "one" thing, consists of only one decoration. To reduce to a single thing. The epigraphs of convolute E, mentioned above, entirely bear out our focus on this tendency, the Böhle poeticizing the idea that all decoration can be attributed to one thing alone (perspective) and then the Haussmann picking up the idea that what's beautiful in the world "rests" on one thing, "nature." E1,1 participates in this same drive to theorize a unified idea behind the multiplicity of appearances. It could be said to cite the epigraphs in that way, to continue their projects. We can expect any given institutional formation to do the same. Indeed "Hausmannization" will be this imposition of a certain perspective on versions of physical, mental, and historic multiplicities. Benjamin thus seems to be defining institutional violence at the outset of the convolute, which is perhaps his own authorial violence, and by extension the violence of the reader and reading.

Each bit of commentary, each bit of language, in the *Arcades* brings with it the imposition of perspective in this way. We are constantly presented with that abstract organizing force. It is of the nature of law, a rationally derived guideline for the constitution of social reality. This "law of perspective" is both a guideline for painters, that old media, and the building block or guide for civilization itself. Even for the senses, visuality, to see what is outside, to see nature, the outdoors, we will have some version of perspective. But the crucial point to be realized here is that the very centrality of perspective, the so-to-speak centrality of centrality itself, is a deliberate effect of poetry, of literature, the literary

imagination, and specifically of literary language. That centrality is itself, to quote Böhle's title, a theatrical catechism, performance grounded in mystery. An "explanation" that in fact is "humorous," one that works to exclude "mere" or basic life, a life that itself is finally one of words.

Another important component of this analysis: it's almost as if Benjamin himself crafted this book title, it fits so snugly within his overall analysis. It slips past us so cleanly. I'll say just quickly here that what is truly stunning, and what the *Arcades* will present to us at every turn, is that of course Benjamin did not write the work he cites, the Böhle, did not create the book title. Franz Böhle did those things. What Benjamin is doing is re-writing Böhle using, appropriating Böhle's exact words, only perhaps re-contextualized—or are they, since in a significant way Benjamin is using Böhle's language more effectively than he did, in a significant way he may be obtaining Böhle's consent to become part of our material present. And here we fall back to saying, yes, of course, according to a different "perspective," and we are perhaps lost again. When one speaks of Benjamin's work one speaks of equivalencies like these.

NP bills itself as an institution among institutions. It prides itself on drawing the institution into view by holding the institution itself up for inspection. It holds itself and the presses it creates to be the equivalent of projects that are already going on at already existing institutions. It seems to be aware of the perspectival futility of this move. NP disappears into the present in just this way.

Paratext

Epigraphs have a very peculiar status, since they are citations but stand outside of the main text, which suddenly looks a lot more like a main text when you see the epigraphs. In fact in the manuscript pages of the *Arcades* they are always included in the second column on the first side of page, where no other text appears. And what kind of reading are we supposed to commit

to the epigraphs, what kind of understanding of how language and history coincide should be invoked? They seem to refer to an entirely different world, to the old world perhaps, the dying world. They also put forward the idea that the convolutes as a whole, each in its own complete existence from first passage to last, should be taken in as a single entity, one where an overriding impression is made and considered, where conclusions are drawn and reflected on, summarized. A critique of the *Arcades* might turn on a criticism of the epigraphs, along with the convolute titles, their alphabetical organization, and the title of the overall work (*Passengenwerk*). It might be a critique of these things but also of course a drawing out of the implications, for the work as a whole, its theories and practices of textuality, of the fact that they exist at all.

NP8

But no, we are not lost, only on the trail of “étudiants” and of what an institution might be. Where we come out now is perhaps with a sense of the profound investment Benjamin had in the epigraphs to the convolutes (let alone the passages themselves). According to this analysis, then, reading equates to disappearance. If reading is study, study is forgetting, learning is unlearning, a pure abrogation, a pure passing into the institutional.

We circle back and re-approach. First to consider the “flowery realm of decoration”: “flowery” indicates the natural world, or at least the appearance of one; “realm” indicates a total experience, and here one thinks of Haussmann and his restructuring of Paris; “of decoration” indicates ornament, what is not of the essence, insubstantial. The overall effect is one of illusion, which extends again to the natural world and encompasses “landscape” itself, “architecture” (human addition to landscape), and finally everything that is visible, “all the effect of scenery.” The “catechism” of the Böhle is effectively a trance meant to attribute the entire universe to a particular law. All this might otherwise not be the case. Its literariness, its song, is effecting that very reality: this is

what aestheticizing something does, what it accomplishes. A law is allowed in. A devout consummation.

This catechism is then lined up with the “confession” of Haussmann. We enter the “interior” monologue of the great city planner, lose ourselves in his perspective. And here again the concern is with the aesthetic, a positioning of nature or the outside world, the enchantment of the senses. Here again the world “rests” on some principle, first on the “law of perspective” but now on “nature,” though of course the irony is that the natural confession comes from the human being who ruthlessly and destructively, inhumanly, imposed that law over top of the city of Paris. Haussmann represents the quintessence of institutional force. Institutional violence at its core is transparently personal confession itself.

Certainly all this is Haussmann’s panting, “breathless” declaration of love. It is an animalistic confession of a “lion” related to a usurpation of centrality under the guise of the beautiful and good, a usurpation, indeed a kind of rape, performed in the very arrangement of bibliographic data, where Haussmann’s name is substituted for city of publication. We can turn to the third epigraph then, our “etudiants” now right before us, and, first, note the parallel between the “catechism,” the “confession,” and the “chant” or “song.” Each epigraph is lineated, poetic, of the literary, that “flowery realm” of total mental experience that works to establish the “law of perspective,” that perspective’s (doubling as Haussmann himself) appropriation of nature, and finally the idea expressed in the final epigraph, in fact a “song” sung by students as a collectivity, that “capitals” themselves invite the defeat of the very revolutionary forces that students represent, that study represents, that scholarship represents. Haussmann’s declaration of love, his confession, in epigraph 2 is certainly “breathless,” and note his “capitals,” for “Beautiful” and “Good,” which attributes agency to the linguistic itself.

It is all these things that study sings. That it institutes. Toward which it expresses its revolutionary rage. This is what we live and what we discuss and where we take off from, what is behind that

first, and perhaps final, instantiation of reading, of the absorption of language, of perception within capitalist production. The students sing from within the long avenues constructed by their very nemesis, Haussmann, who disingenuously envisioned this locale of study as part of nature. The scholar is in fact enchanted, then, hence the song, the singing into existence the absence of agency, the coalescing of language, cityscape, and cash value in a sexualized violence of revolutionary failure enacted to the very strains of revolutionary success. At every turn, the law of perspective does not include the human, making it all the more apt that the very name of the author of the final epigraph is a material, architectural structure, Pierre Dupont, stone bridge.

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A major component of NP is its structural blueprint of a process of study. The process is intuitive since NP by its nature is perennially confronted with re-inventing what a viable knowledge-producing university press looks like, how it functions, who it serves. In order to consistently assess new contexts and research outputs, NP itself is thus faced with the need to consistently access new ideas and communicate with new audiences. Without “study,” NP devolves into reproducing the identical press over and over again. Study brings the new: thus NP first and foremost follows the forms of study.

NP thematics are generated and assessed through its parent organization, the nonprofit publisher and exhibition space Counterpath. NP also works to host talks and workshops at any location it visits as new presses are generated. Additionally, NP works to incorporate structures of study within new presses themselves. This study may take the form of dedicated publishing syllabi and courses at the member institution or non-traditional press components such as exhibitions, performances, or as-yet-determined collectivities that may emerge.



ENGAGED PUBLISHING AND STUDY

Off-site Methodology in the *Arcades*

“Empathy” comes into being through a *déclit*, a kind of gearing action. With it, the inner life derives a pendant to the element of shock in sense perception. (Empathy is a synchronization, in the intimate sense.) [m4,4]

Commentary on the above citation:

“Empathy”

Empathy is defined in standard dictionaries as “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another,” and is derived from the Greek *empathēia*, or em-“in” plus *pathēia*-“feeling.” Its key role for the flaneur can be seen in passages like M17a,2: “Empathy with the commodity is fundamentally empathy with exchange value itself. The flaneur is the virtuoso of this empathy.” And Benjamin writes of the “intoxication of empathy” experienced by the flaneur. As we can see immediately, however, there is a double and triple edge to Benjamin’s use of the word, to his concept of empathy. We need first of all to make clear that, in general usage, “empathy” in many ways defines what is human about humanity itself. It does this by indicating our ability to sympathize with others, to have compassion and care for others. It indicates a basic ability we have to remove ourselves from our solipsistic universe and acknowledge the genuine presence of another. In a sense it gives birth to this other, in an action of sheer self-displacement. In this way it forms a constitutive element of citational reading, since to foreground another’s voice or text is to take on the engagement of that text by as much as possible giving place to another existence. Hence in this way empathy plays a foundational role in reading. All this being said, we can now acknowledge that the empathy Benjamin is referring to is the ability to transport oneself into the being of the nonhuman, even the antihuman, the commodity, and then more abstractly with “exchange value itself.” And the “itself” is important, since it indicates a kind of essential or irreducible existence of exchange value, an existence

that rivals the force or singularity of empathy itself. They seem to merge beyond recognition. And there is the flaneur, the “virtuoso” of this merger, bringing to it all of the entrapments of “artistic production” (m4a,4). Thus empathy, emotion, these are human traits, but only in the sense that they bring the mechanical to actuality. They do seem to function as they have perhaps in more artisanal or pre-industrial times, but only as a reference to their former selves, their former lives, the ideas that informed their places and placement within language (and I will return to the citational nature of the first word of this passage, empathy being within quotes).

Coming into being

Let’s next look at the idea of the “coming into being” of empathy. The notion takes up the idea of divine incarnation from the immediately preceding passage, where the idler is characterized as a nearly priestly figure, as mysterious as the god of the holy trinity, except that in this case we have the triune presence of the flaneur, the gambler, and the student (the theme of this trinity repeated in a number of passages in this convolute). This is a lighthearted moment but it works to continue the theme of the interfusion of a sort of medieval framework of holiness alongside the penetration or reorientation of that framework by secular concerns, by labor, by the machine. Here we have the first appearance of this “type of idler” among highly privileged, if not courtly, classes of the late eighteenth century, the “jeunesse dorée” (gilded youth). It’s possible to see then that the Christ-like coming into being of empathy carries with it in m4,4 implications not only of a religious framework for understanding of such an advent, but precisely a kind of New Testament or revolutionary merger of disparate elements such as God and man, spirit and flesh, idleness and work, emotion and machine, storytelling and information. Thus we can say that the modern idea of empathy is rehearsing or reinscribing medieval, if not primitive, epistemologies and linguistic practices. Empathy is being treated by bourgeois society as its savior, but in fact we consistently have the spectacle of its co-optation

by capital, though within a secularized religious framework of understanding. This is a mapping point for how our fundamental conception of emotion and of the workings of capital are derived from Judeo-Christian beliefs and practices.

Déclic

The “déclic” characterizes that through which empathy is incarnated or comes into being. It is in fact a mechanical sound or “click,” a trigger, that happens when mechanical objects or parts fall into place or suddenly begin working together, in unison. In the phrase “avoir le déclic” it also indicates intellectual insight itself, or, more scientifically, “having a brain wave.” The word functions here as an onomatopoeia, an aspect of language that fits well in the context of this passage and the *Arcades* overall given the merger of the machinic with abstract meaning. Pronunciation of the word actively performs the reference to the mechanical function, one that as we’ve seen is the functional reality of abstract meaning. The concept also echoes the notion, to quote convolute N, of the “image flashing up in the now of its recognizability,” a central idea running through the *Arcades*, so that here we have an obvious alignment between that “now” and the coming into being of empathy. To quickly summarize: empathy, which the flaneur is the virtuoso of, comes into being through the flash that defines the dialectical image, through the now of recognizability, through the déclic, which happens to be a word taken from the realm of mechanics but that has also come to characterize a key element of human experience or knowledge, the insight or epiphany.

A kind of gearing action

Déclic is also defined immediately after it is used, defined by Benjamin in the passage itself, as “a kind of gearing action.” We can note with this idea then that empathy relates to divergent parts of a complex machine coming into simultaneous use, turning on all at once to form a unified whole. This is a framework that again references the preceding passage with the idler coming to be only as a combination of the separate entities of the flaneur,

the gambler, and the student, pendants (to anticipate a word later in this passage) of the father, the son, and the holy ghost. These are the cogs or gears that when working in a well-oiled manner experience a *déclic* and bring empathy into the world, as the world's savior, humanity then being saved exclusively by virtue of the perfect operation of the non-human or the technological. Again, this coordination of the human and the technological is a refined version of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, forming a phenomenological or experiential contemporary persona in the flaneur but one who strictly adheres to primitive and medieval epistemes. We can also say that this "gearing into action," particularly as it is related to habits of mind, can be seen as the way in which a reading of the *Arcades* itself takes place, where ideas that are indirectly referred to through the operation of citation and commentary come to the surface, link up, and produce empathetic readings precisely aligned with the one I am now constructing in this commentary. Thus we are empathizing with the machine of the text reading works toward a *déclic* that reinscribes a kind of textual idyll, but one that shores up the utter domination, indeed the perpetual defining out of existence, of the human by the commodity.

The inner life derives

With it, with the *déclic*, which even as it has been shown to give birth to empathy remains a term for an externality, a mechanical sound, Benjamin then declares that "the inner life derives" a pendant. Here we have a confirmation of the metaphysical implications behind "*déclic*" with "inner life," but then added into this is the concept of derivation. Here the inner life is the active force, which uses the *déclic* to "derive" the pendant. Of course "derive" has a number of meanings, nearly all of which might be seen as relevant in this context. I'll say first of all that the act of deriving is part of the reading experience, as I've discussed it above, and is a basic aspect of interpretation, here reflected in all its material consequences. But derive also indicates the following:

- to obtain something from: there is an act of exchange in process of empathy, in the reading process
- base a concept on a logical extension or modification of: this aspect of derivation is relevant when we think of the derivation of contemporary forms of empathy or idleness from their feudal iterations
- of a word, have as a root or origin: this returns us to the structural nature of language, where we have, from m1,1, things like the derivation of “negotium” from “otium,” such that contradictory concepts share the same root entities within language
- mathematics: obtain a function or equation from another by a sequence of logical steps. This sense of the word emphasizes its roots in logic, and thereby mechanics.

We can also note the late Middle English origin meaning “draw a fluid through or into a channel,” which is a complementary movement to that of feeling’s moving away from one in empathy (again “in-feeling”). But there is a kind of triple movement here, from the subjective surface of empathy and inner life, into the more logical sense of derivation as a mechanical extension, then to the level at which this logical movement is subjectively motivated.

A pendant

What is derived by inner life through the *déclis* is a “pendant,” which definitionally expands the passage on multiple levels while also echoing and thereby reinforcing aspects of the sense of “derives.” Most notably, a pendant, though I don’t think this is its operative meaning in the passage, is a piece of jewelry, which places the discussion here back in the context of fashion, which was thoroughly covered in convolute B. Elements that are extensions of something else, as with the ornamentation of fashion, or architectural ornamentation, are almost universally seen and treated as central throughout the *Arcades*, which of course is effectively nothing else but a collection of passages and texts that are pendant to, derived from, the arcades, in both their real

material and structural manifestation and their allegorical and ideational presence. But here the more prominent meaning must be, and this picks up from the conceptual version of “derives,” a pendant as an “artistic, literary, or musical, composition intended to match or complement another.” So that here we have inner life deriving (which again is a drawing downward, as with a liquid) what appears to be a material object of feminine dress but that is a conceptual entity related to empathy and the “now of recognizability.” Once again we have language manifesting on a level of material and mechanical function, as well as at exactly that place where those functions have a mental or ideational parallel that itself for all intents and purposes is etymologically inherent to the meaning of the words themselves, such that finally Benjamin in some sense can be said to be, as with the more surface level citations, drawing himself away from his own individuality or intentionality in writing what comes across as commentary.

Element of shock

What the pendant hangs or is derived from is the “element of shock,” an idea covered in detail in, among other works, Benjamin’s essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire.” In that essay, shock is a formative element of everyday experience, one that works against and disrupts consciousness, which, as with recollection, “aims at giving us the time for organizing the reception of stimuli.” Again, “the greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli.” As shock increases, so consciousness must behave differently. Shocks are thereby the organizing principle of modern mass consciousness that the flaneur, wandering through the crowd, as much as the worker, navigates. Benjamin continues in this essay to position shock within a conception of idleness: “The shock experience which the passer-by has in the crowd corresponds to what the worker ‘experiences’ at his machine. . . . a process whereby the reflecting mechanism which the machine sets off in the workman can be studied closely, as in a mirror, in the idler.” Shock is determinative of the experience of both the worker and

the idler, as mirror images of each other. It operates at a between place, a place of double meaning and multiple uses, but effectively being a mechanical action, not unlike the *déclit*, through which subjective experience such as empathy takes root. What we have in m4,4 is a more or less straightforward presentation of shock, but we can note that this complex term is used within the framework of a number of other complexities, such that in the passage we're given a network of expanding and unfolding meaning that itself perhaps creates a contrast to or background for that singular notion of the *déclit* or shock itself. This is an important dynamic here and I'll rephrase slightly: we should explore the situation of Benjamin's writing where shock forms a central concept in his discursive writing, such as the Baudelaire essay. The idea is introduced in a straightforward manner. In contrast, in this passage in the *Arcades*, what appears to be the identical notion is used within a framework of figurative or literary reading, so that as much as any other term or idea in the passage reflects multiple symbolic or allegorical meanings, so does the idea of shock, such that it is necessarily and radically destabilized. In a substantive sense, we must take up these implications of the *Arcades* in a reading *back through* Benjamin's other writings.

In sense perception

The shock appears "in sense perception," and we can return to m3a,5 for a clear contextualization of how we should understand sense, or sensation, at this point in the *Arcades*. Once more we have what could be said to be a complex notion introduced into the reading of this passage, m4,4. Contrary to what we might expect, it is information, work experience, industrial labor, otherwise thought to be dehumanizing, that contains and gives rise to the "explosive force . . . liberated in sensation." This particular shock is in fact the re-valuation of all values, where "whatever still resembles wisdom, oral tradition, or the epic side of truth," in sum the ideas of artisanal labor and storytelling, are "razed to the ground," becoming the ruin that features so prominently elsewhere in Benjamin's work. Sensation and sense are the indications

of this final apocalyptic process, one that is as much as empathy itself born out of a mechanical process, a world consumed by information and the machine. What's in part extraordinary here as well is that empathy is "post-déclis," appearing *after* the domination of informational communication, the "gears" coming into action, such that inner life, emotional life, empathy, and by extension the modes of reading that correspond to these things, the human as we know it, are in fact produced by mechanical processes, their apogee, that "now of recognizability."

Empathy

It is here in this passage that we have the word "empathy" appearing once more, this time without quotation marks, clearly noncitational, as opposed to its first appearance at the start of the passage. The passage could be said to have "razed to the ground" the citational status of the word's first appearance, attacking and negating empathy's supposed separation from mechanical or informational processes, turning it back into non-citational commentary. Thus like the operation of many passages in the *Arcades*, this time in microcosm, there is "reading through" key concepts that start out either as citaitonal or commentary and reversing that status, inverting it, until all value, all certainties, are destabilized, in process again much like the "shattering of long experience" in m3,3. A type of "loss of all meaning with a determined content," to paraphrase m3,3, what is left being a kind of shell or ruin. And as with other passages in the *Arcades*, the mis en abyme does not stop there, but could in fact be said to continue in this passage, with this gutting of the traditional meaning of empathy by using the word as commentary and non-citatoriality itself being further contextualized within what appears to be the subtle punctuational phatasmagoria of m3a,5, with the parenthesis within which the non-quoted "empathy" appears again referencing the use, in m3a,5, to indicate the citational center or heart of that passage, an informational moment in the text that can again be seen as another shock or liberatory explosion within informational and industrial modes of communication.

Synchronization

Finally with this passage we arrive at what might be its heart, an indicator of the true implications of much of what is going on in the *Arcades* with mechanical text processes, the industrial, and the solipsistic nature of commodity culture. This is the word “synchronization,” which also translates as “alignment,” a “term used by the Nazis as a euphemism for the elimination of undesirable persons from public and professional life,” such that empathy, insofar as it is incarnated through *déclic* and indicates a mechanical falling-into-place of gears (and there is little rationale to be found in the *Arcades* for defining empathy as anything else), is a prime mover for not only fascist but genocidal culture, where the more empathy is prioritized the more severe is the disappearance of the redemptive human value that empathy might otherwise suggest. It is an extraordinary paradox, one that summarizes perhaps large portions of the tradition of cultural critique since Benjamin’s time. And here it is as well that we can point out, or revisit, that, as with that first definition of empathy as “in-feeling” or the placing oneself outside of oneself, a phenomena that runs in exact parallel to the reading process as it functions within a citational work, where one is constantly going back to removing oneself from the text at hand and imagining alternative contexts for what one is reading, there is a powerful self-implication, of the *Arcades* by the *Arcades*, in an informational or reading process that is implicated at every turn in the destruction of the Jewish people, of which Benjamin himself was a part, in a vicious, if not suicidal, cycle of meaning turning in on itself. It is often said that feeling is the thing that saves us, saves the soul, from mechanized society. Here Benjamin illustrates how feeling is itself the thing that *propels* that destructive version of human life, how the template of salvation and belief in the soul is not only extrapolated into the world of machines but in fact originates and returns there.

m4,4 as passage

If we take all of the foregoing together and look at the implications of the whole as a passage in the *Arcades*, how that passage works, how meaning flows into and out of the language, we have to acknowledge it as an instance of the relationship between citation and commentary, that all of the foregoing, any analysis we come up with in relation to this passage, must itself be part of the arcades. But is that statement accurate? Not really. For instance, we can start with the arcades themselves. What we mean when we say “arcades” is quite obviously two things: of course the physically existent shopping centers from the nineteenth century; of course the book itself, the *Arcades Project*. What are these two entities? The actual arcades have long ago disappeared, yet only in an evolutionary sense, where the forces that led to their creation, survival, and decay have gone on in other forms, such as the department store, and then other modalities of consumption, of the integration of the commodity into bourgeois life. And as we can see throughout the *Arcades*, any of our ideas of the physical instantiation of the arcades, their literal material existence, are governed by fully immaterial ideas and concepts, such that mental architectures are consistently given just as much substance as, so to speak, brick and mortar. The two things, material and immaterial, go to the heart of our idea of the arcades, to the point at which the literally existing arcades can be said to transform or turn into the *Arcades Project* itself, to the point where the certitude of their existence is subsumed by, shown to be neither more nor less than, a textual entity, and finally the operation of text and language itself is shown to have at its core a flaneur-like dream of appearance and disappearance. There is the appearance of substance, and there is the substance of appearance, and each thing looked at long enough transforms into its supposed opposite, just like idleness and work.

The passage, m4,4, is part of the arcades. Again, what does that mean? Again, we can also understand the passage as being part of the book the *Arcades Project*, the manuscript project *Passagenwerk*. which in fact is the far more explicitly textual manifestation

of the physical entity. No matter what any of the passages in the *Arcades* say they are, by virtue of being in this manuscript collection, they are placed within the quite pronounced ebb and flow of linguistic meaning that defines the overall project. The book contains them all and is indeed a type of “encyclopedia” in this way. No matter how meaning operates or what kind of meaning we encounter here, it must finally be seen as text, as a passage in a much larger design and architecture and play of ideas. If method, or anything else, is discussed directly, it is only a form of “directness” within a larger project of indirectness. If something is exhibited, or cited, it is only a form of indirectness within a larger framework of directness, characterized by the mirroring of the book the *Arcades Project* as a structure of the physically existent arcades. This doubleness constitutes the depths of this project, we see it at every level.

A case in point is the word “passage,” which at once defines textual passages, of which the work consists, and a passage or hallway in the arcades, the German for the work being “Passegenwerk.” And indeed, what Benjamin defines again and again is the nature of these passages, each one forming another dialectical image, another entry point, another now of recognizability, another shock or sensation, an exteriority that in fact characterizes an “inner life” that “derives” from that exteriority like a “pendant.” The ideas we are faced with come to us in a kind of solipsism, but one that arises from language itself, of which we consist, the ground of the dialectic. Again however we can note how this very solipsism is a topic of the *Arcades*, so that finally we are presented with a purely visual structural entity of text and blankness, passage (which might be either citation or commentary, the two options for text’s surface manifestation) and interruption. Here too we note how interruption is often characterized as individual or immediate experience, interrupting informational flow or work experience, as much as the text illustrates the blending of these categories.

Readers and reading

Finally, given all of the above, how are we as readers to approach m4,4, the idleness convolute itself, or the whole of the *Arcades*? They come to us as a mirror of our very selves, a kind of speaking mirror in language that says that we ourselves are mirrors, that the language of which we consist is that of the materially determined universe, not at all our own, or the language of the book, or the arcades, or of the history of ideas or of humanity. As readers we are fully implicated and participatory in what this book tries to achieve, and it is only by our accepting that role that the *Arcades* reveals its content and offers itself up for what it is. It is a book that insists on this type of reading at every turn, such that its methodology is to be that speaking mirror. Its methodology is to insist on an embodied reconsideration of methodology itself, each reader becoming a master of method or not reading at all. And this reading is an imaginative reading, one that takes apart the text and puts it back together, one that watches what the text is doing until the ultimate version of the text becomes closer, if not clear, that moment at which it dismantles its own foundations, so what reading is left with is a vacuum of sorts, but one that has left behind it accumulations of ideas and conclusions that form a kind of refuse or record of one's passing, reading one's way into the future. The reading of the *Arcades Project* is entirely about what's left behind as what is not that reading of the *Arcades Project*, the phenomena of taking life itself as a monadological experience, as itself a dialectical image. The *Arcades* must in the end be as much about what is *not* its text, what is unsaid, as what *is* that text, or what is said. In all of these ways then a documented and written-out close reading of the book is one that speaks directly to the book's methodology, since only that reading can leave to one side the abstract experience of passage and the construction of meaning through language that is at the heart of the *Arcades*.

Double vision

In terms of citational practice, in N1,2 there is the slight deviation between what we understand as standard research or scholarly practice, historiography, and what Benjamin is doing with citation and his reading of identical sources as what traditional research might draw on. It is an extremely slight, almost imperceptible, shift, both sets of researchers going in very similar directions, though the difference constitutes an entire reorientation of the textual object. And yes, given what has just appeared in N1,1, we can understand this difference as a difference in how text is understood, again very slight, the two things having almost the same name in fact, one being a kind of invisible seeing through of the other. What Benjamin is opting to do is follow the magnetic North Pole, a more natural framework, a directional leaning that appears to be an error to anyone looking for the humanistically developed geographic north. It appears to be a “deviation,” just as a citation appears to be a sidestep, an indirection, a moving away from the main course of an argument. Benjamin here very squarely places citation at the heart of his entire practice, announcing that his “course” is determined in this way, that he is following citational “data,” not having it follow him, with some other imagined goal. Citation is the guiding force, even as it appears counterintuitive to “others.” Finally we also have here the “differential of time,” by which is meant most obviously the difference between the present tense discursive act of continuous argument and the necessarily differentially oriented timestamp of a citation, especially a citation from an older book. In a work oriented around a “main line of inquiry” a citation is a break in the narrative or argument, a deviation (to use the term in the passage here), one that must be corrected and recovered from, just like a ship that mistakenly and momentarily follows a compass oriented toward the magnetic north pole and not the geographic. Here what Benjamin is saying is that he makes his argument through those very deviations, his line of inquiry progressing through what others might see as a being lost, and that in fact his “reckoning,”

his final making sense and achievement of the goal of his voyage, his arrival, is made by following these citational “detours” but also by a consideration of the difference between that “time” of the citational and the time implied by the quite similar, though crucially distinct, traditional forms of knowledge creation.

NP9

The student is neither more nor less than reading itself. How does one phrase, or experience, that? Institutional force in the most unsuspecting of places, and yet the most pre-arranged and open. Returning to the epigraphs for convolute E, the “cannon” the student sings, which study itself brings into existence and facilitates, is both phallic and yonic. The city avenues are shaped like cannons and symbiotically allow them through. One perhaps does not precede the other. Passage is being given.

The *Arcades* presents itself as a text to be read. We study and read it, passing—our passage, like the cannon—into a collectivity, a crowd of voices. Reading is that abrogation, that disappearance into the crowd. Nonidentity as the only way to participate in identity, a tragicomic ruse. Here the most authentic song of the undercommons is the song of its own death, its violent demise. Its *raison d’être* is the epic construction of that demise.

But still! We have not followed Benjamin through E1,1 and the permutations of institutional formation. How do these institutional forces emerge, and from where? If study—this very “following” I’m referring to—is so intimately co-extensive with institutional formation, locating the internal dynamics of one or the other results in enlightenment on both sides. The form that this enlightenment vis a vis institutional formation takes, that forms the informing and ongoing formation of NP.

Study will necessarily be personal—each of us our own “upholsterer” weaving fabrics together to create an interior—but if we read E1,1 starting with the last sentence, it’s clear that the introduction of the impersonal, the attribution of “perspective” to the “interior” itself, is the move Benjamin is making with this

passage, that is to say, where the emphasis is placed. It is a crucial anthropomorphizing of the sum total of the material interior room itself, a room that of course all along has doubled as the perfectly abstract interior of consciousness. The passage is doing the work of both realms, at all times, of the architectural exteriority of a physical room as well as the construction of bourgeois consciousness through curtains, drapes, wallpaper, and finely tuned illusion, or phantasmagoria. Impersonal, institutional forces are introduced as interior, forces that finally command, within their overall decorative impact, “perspective” itself, but also the outside world, the window, at last, simply another piece of wallpaper or curtain to be arranged as part of the overall effect.

Hausmann, the artist of the outside, finally fancies himself poet of the internal, a wordsmith. In this context we note as well the structural, even linguistic, ambiguity as to how this “sole decoration of the Biedermeier room” is provisioned: the passage says the curtains were furnished by the upholsterer, so that we very much get the impression that the upholsterer is an artisan working with the fabrics that make up the curtains; but the next sentence has the upholsterer merely processing “instructions” (perhaps the highest form of informational reading) for how those draperies are “arranged.” Impersonal, abstract forces—it’s not clear at all where they originate—come to take center stage, as it were, even as the weaving together of fabrics is “extremely refined” and could only ever be the result of artisanal handiwork. The question is certainly which is which, but the unresolved confusion is of a piece with everything in the convolute thus far (and we have not gone far).

Another dimension to this reading as well is that the nondistinction between the personal and impersonal (as I’m calling them) is an aspect of the tactic of citation itself. Since there are no ellipses in the quote/citation before us in E1,1, we can see that von Boehn’s text itself contains the confusing logic I’ve been referring to and attempting to assess. In many ways that confusion is precisely what Benjamin cites and in fact brings into his surrounding commentary, which seamlessly folds into von Boehn’s argument as a continuation of Benjamin’s sentence here.

The progression and modality of “telling” history is, then, one of increasing abstraction, even as the overall intent of providing “curtains” remains structurally specific. Both things happen at once. We note here as well that Benjamin’s intentionally vague “this is something like” in the final sentence happens simultaneously with (in an abstract, almost institutional manner) saying that the way the “interior” views the “window” or outside world, even perspective itself, is as a “tasteful arrangement of draperies.” All this is identical to the critique of Haussmann’s imposition of his own interior lifeworld, evidence of which the “confession” in the epigraph provides, like an overlay across the landscape of the city of Paris, a landscape populated by artisans and handworkers of all types.

Yet again and again we see how these large abstractions are interwoven, as I’ve been showing here, with handiwork’s, the upholsterer’s, “extremely refined” attention to detail. That micro-cosmic detail shares the same intent and rubric as the instructional mandate that seems abstractly to stomp out any evidence of the personal or human.

Convolute N as intervalic

Say something about the method of composition itself: how everything one is thinking at a specific moment in time must at all costs be incorporated into the project then at hand. Assume that the intensity of the project is thereby attested, or that one’s thoughts, from the very beginning, bear this project within them as their telos. So it is with the present portion of the work, which aims to characterize and to preserve the intervals of reflection, the distances lying between the most essential parts of this work, which are turned most intensively to the outside. [N1,3]

N1,3 reads very much like a personal note for a longer work, with its “say something,” though it’s not clear how much that matters in terms of the *Arcades* being seen as a complete work if we consider notes to have the status of a deviation from the main line of argument, just like a citation. Why wouldn’t Benjamin simply

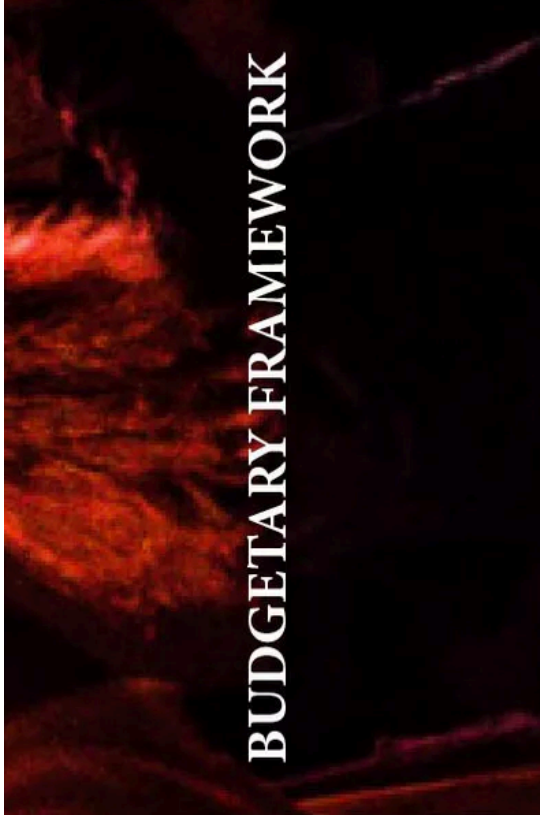
include them and leave it at that? If something appears ancillary, that is not a detraction but only enhances the overall effect. And that effect? This passage sets out to describe its method, and it's one designed around an "intensity of the project." We see the reference to "time," which picks up from the previous passage N1,3, and the central use of citation, but see here something that I've suspected all along, that in fact into each "specific moment in time"—and we understand here each data point of citation—is packed a multiplicity of forces, and not just a multiplicity, but in fact "everything one is thinking." We should note here that Benjamin says "at all costs" this material, everything one is thinking, must be "incorporated." Insofar as the *Arcades* is about an intensity, about that lightening strike, this packing in is where it comes from. Now, as glowing and impossible as this scenario already is, we then go on to compound it with another aspect of the project we've already considered, suspecting it to be a work behind the selection and arrangement of citations. And note here that as much as Benjamin wants to refer to natural forces, rather than human-inflected, as the guiding force of his own project, he also posits a teleology that in fact encompasses not only the citational project itself but, and this perhaps precisely because the project is citational, his very thought processes even before he commits them to language. In this passage he defines the *Arcades* as being contained within his thoughts from "the very beginning," the *Arcades* as a kind of genetic match to thought itself. Based on these ideas, Benjamin then moves to a description of the less citational and more contemplative Convolute N, which attempts to record or jot down the thinking process that happens "between" or in the intervals of citational copying (perhaps not unlike my own urge to write my way through reading the *Arcades*, through availing myself and making use of the matching digital textual affordances of the contemporary word processing). He is attempting to "preserve these intervals of reflection" because they represent thought processes that bear the telos of the overall project. Convolute N can be seen as a documentation of Benjamin's thought processes as they occurred to him in the intervals

of selecting citations, even as he states yet again, right here, that those citations are “the most essential parts of this work” (and *not* Convolute N, which so many, like me right now, gravitate toward in their analyses), even as he confirms how important citations are in being “turned most intensively to the outside.” I’ll conclude here by saying, again, that as extraordinary as this passage is, the citations themselves are even more so.

Research proposal

If I write through as much as I can, say I get to 80 pages of the *Arcades* overall of actual response (straight through the book or jumping around), with finally a longer batch of notes, then on top of this I put together two more papers, what would these final papers look like? They would be about citation and then about methodology, bringing these two things—contextually and formally dismantled by Benjamin—back into the academic fold, so to speak. But how can I do my best to continue the actual project of the *Arcades*, to learn from it? I think that the notation practice is good and I can see moving through that for a while, but to make a larger move beyond this is not quite clear. I think I would need to say, what am I doing it for? A publication, a resume, a job, a professor, a community of people? It’s true I’m looking at alternative modes of scholarly output, trying to come up with a framework outside the present one for disseminating knowledge. Would this mean baby steps away from the present setup? That seems to be what things lead to naturally. Would it be redefining the art/research mandate? It seems to already be there, circling around the “image-making medium within us.” I think it would appropriately be a work that fits within an art/research dialectic, with a good rationale. And what about gallery work and curation? For instance, “Counterpath” refers to a difficulty, an impasse, that is the same as what these other things are working with. To process the *Arcades*, to write a discourse on a passage that fits it within my own, only slightly different concerns. To write as a student in the university. Benjamin never stopped

valuing the *Trauerspiel* book and what he did there, even though it seems to be assigned this preparatory status. It might have been to fulfill a requirement, but it was real for him, did real work (as is clear from its repeated references in the *Arcades*). So as I'm making these notes, I'm thinking about where they lead. How do we sensibly put together projects in light of what the *Arcades* is showing us? I'm hoping this becomes clear. In the meantime it's all notation.



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NP10 (True barrier)

This section asks for a comparative reading of two texts, the very short “Politics Surrounded” chapter (pgs. 17–20) from *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, and then a paragraph from pgs. 358–59 of Marx’s *Capital*, vol. 3 (Penguin, 1981). There are obvious areas of overlap: they both, for instance, refer similarly to “barriers” and “dispossession,” but there are other correspondences as well. And then the excerpt from *The Undercommons* specifically references “study” and the “institution,” topics this work and NP have been trying or starting to explore, and I want at least in part to use the Marx to consider specific ways capital and capitalist production are bound up with these other notions. I’ll conclude with a brief assessment of the idea of the “limit” taken from Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*.

There is currently a free PDF of the *Undercommons* online. The paragraph from Marx is as follows:

The *true barrier* to capitalist production is capital itself. It is that capital and its self-valorization appear as the starting and finishing point, as the motive and purpose of production; production is production only for *capital*, and not the reverse, i.e. the means of production are not simply means for a steadily expanding pattern of life for the society of the producers. The barriers within which the maintenance and valorization of the capital-value has necessarily to move—and this in turn depends on the dispossession and impoverishment of the great mass of producers—therefore come constantly into contradiction with the methods of production that capital must apply to its purpose and which set its course toward an unlimited expansion of production, to production as an end in itself, to an unrestricted development of the social productive powers of labor. The means—the unrestricted development of the forces of social production—comes into persistent conflict with the restricted end, the valorization of the existing capital. If the capitalist mode of production is therefore a historical means for developing the material powers of production and for creating a corresponding world market, it is at the same time the constant contradiction between

this historical task and the social relations of production corresponding to it.

While my overall point here will be to say that the valorization of the surround needs to be seen as identical to capital's self-valorization, it's important to first address some of the dynamics of the Marx. When Marx speaks of capital in this paragraph he is referring to capital in its current state, "existing capital," a status quo of how capital operates, which is finally untenable and must change, in order for capital to still be capital at all. The current state of capital is the "self" of capital, that is what wants to be valorized, giving itself as the cause of the valorization process as well as its end, where it comes out. But the way capital valorizes itself is through the labor process, by drawing on social forces of production such that the less restricted they are the more surplus, profit, or valorization can take place. New modalities of the unrestrictedness of the social, of setting different socialities "free," are characteristic elements of capital. Restrictions on social production are such anathema to capital that finally the appearance is generated that in fact the very end or purpose of capitalist society itself is this society of production or "pattern of life," is the state of productive social relations, and not the self-valorization of capital, its old-school ways, its deadly dispossessions and barbarisms. So that when capital expands through the acquisition of new categories and communities of social labor this incorporation of these sectors in fact reads as a barrier or oppositional force to the expansion of existing capitals, it seems to be something that is not related to existing capital, that opposes it, perhaps seeming anti-capitalist, liberatory, or liberal. In fact, however, capital will circle back to re-institute its earlier incarnations, taking the "pattern of life for the society of the producers" and re-situating it as finally an ongoing mode of "dispossession and impoverishment." This is the oscillation contained within mass psychology, of history, social democracy periodically turned inside out as it re-incarnates as a commodity fetish.

But this is a first pass reading of this paragraph. Before turning to *The Undercommons* I want to follow one more line of reasoning or rephrasing of the above reading. Note from the first sentence how existing capital is in fact the “true barrier” to capitalist production. Capitalist production is hindered to the extent that the truth of the capitalist production process in fact appears to be so, to be what it is, concerned with the status quo, in the sense that it does not—as it must, in whatever way it can—take refuge behind a screen of the “pattern of life for society” being the motive and end of capitalist production. This particular illusion is of the essence of capital itself. We note that indeed the “steadily expanding pattern of life” is a function of existing capital, though that simply cannot appear to be the case—its opposite is what appears, that the social is an end in itself—or this steadily expanding pattern in fact becomes a barrier to capital. *We must feel like we’re up to something new.* This contradiction traverses capital at its most characteristic levels. But what we have here as well is the reappearance of the figure of the barrier, progressing from the “true barrier” in the first sentence to the later unqualified “barriers” in the third sentence. This later “barrier” has to do with the current state of capital, as it exists and functions as a certainty in the world. Capital’s being settled and stable, its success, is itself a barrier to its all-important expansion. It must lose its identity and be transformed into its opposite—life itself as goal—to keep or adhere to its very nature as capital. Sociality here is constitutively implicated in a play of illusion with capitalist expansion at its most radical. Their DNA are indistinguishable. The moment we think we have one in our grasp is that exact moment of transformation into its opposite. This whole picture and oscillation represents the capitalist mode of production as a whole and works steadily toward completion in the “world market,” history being defined by this very movement writ large, as well as whatever notions we have of materiality itself. This is the detailed operation of historical materialism. That world market “corresponds” to this particular means. There is no “world market” without this contradiction both buried within it and functioning as the one true characteristic of the everyday.

The Undercommons introduces a number of terms into this argument, primarily the idea or experience of the explicitly post-colonial, and in this case the colonized, the surround, would equate to the social within capitalist production, the foregrounding of the colonized on the world market the emergence of a pattern of life. On an individual, emotional level we have a reaching toward sociality that easily also represents a collectivity and hence constantly instantiates new patterns of life within a capitalist system. Harney and Moten will often (though seemingly not always) embrace this doubling and reappearance, finally admitting it into their very use of syntax and the appearance of language itself on the sentence level. In this way, their argument seems constantly to evince a consciousness of its own materiality, its own implication in the very tendencies it critiques, modeling the contemporary in its quotidian epicness. Even so, we can't attribute a total consciousness to this rhetorical move since its improvisatory nature at the same time keeps an exploratory stance. That said, they certainly do posit a level of authorship, which may be considered problematic or narcissistic at base and to lack theorization. In any case, the eight paragraphs of "Politics Surrounded" work their way toward a steadily more complex characterization of the colonial context, starting with Hollywood film and concluding in a reference to a figure of radical refusal. Not at all unlike NP, they "preserve upheaval," they "renew by unsettling."

The essay uses the film to set up a clear-cut colonizer/colonized, fort/surround binary that the essay then incessantly upends and traverses to the point of nonidentity. What Harney and Moten admit into their argument, use as a main figure, itself almost like a fort, is the "image of a surrounded fort." They say this image is "not false." Immediately then we are in an economy of the true appearance of the true, and that truth contains the barrier between the colonizing community in the fort and the colonized community, much larger, in the surround. What might be confusing is that the surround—hence the undercommons, and quite significantly "blackness" itself, study—suffers a degree of romanticization exactly to the extent that its dialectical relation to this

internal “fort” is neglected or forgotten. “The false image is what emerges when a critique of militarised life is predicated on the forgetting of the life that surrounds it.” Forgetting, however, is never more nor less than the allowance of or failure to properly dismantle appearances. So we can say that this “forgetting” has as much of a role as any version of remembrance or consciousness. “Blackness” has “the laager in its midst”: we can only take this to mean the permanent co-constitution of blackness and whiteness. They are both permanently engaged in their own failed and false (and perhaps then all the more successful and true) appropriation of each other. That is what we cannot forget.

Everywhere it goes, the expansion of the socius is a version of the expansion of capitalist production. Capitalism falls back on, or starts out from, old versions of the socius and capital as much as it inhabits a commitment to contradictory new forms and expansions of itself, expansions that both increase capital and interrogate its very status as capital. “The true barrier to capitalist production is capital itself.” When Harney and Moten write that “our task is the self-defense of the surround” we have to consider, we can’t forget, the actual complexity of this statement. It can’t possibly be straightforward, and it is not. To defend the surround is to defend that thing that contains its antinomy, it is precisely to defend the fort, to make way for the colonizer, to be that colonizer oneself. This particular level of meaning throughout *The Undercommons* is not in question. However, what we should in fact question is whether that additional level of historical consciousness, or the consciousness of historical materialism referenced above, is reached. Since if it is not then Harney and Moten’s clear achievement with *The Undercommons* in social redemption and hence expansion will not move beyond a generalized expansion of social production. The surround generates the exact politics that violently antagonizes it. In short, it’s fucked up.

Effectively here we are working with a limit not unlike that discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. There, a limit is neither singular

not absolute, functioning more as a multi-valent idea rather than a non-porous barrier. They write:

“limit” has many different meanings, since it can be at the beginning as an inaugural event, in the role of a matrix; or in the middle as a structural function ensuring the mediation of personages and the ground of their relations; or at the end as an eschatological determination. . . . [I]n fact this last sense itself can be understood in many different ways.

Both Harney/Moten and Marx have barriers that are crossed and re-crossed, as inaugural events, as middle, or as ends. However it seems that Marx is putting forward a clearer idea that the root cause of the social as we know it forms one of the most radical definitions of capital itself. According to Marx, capital uses the social to get its way, it purveys the illusion that production is designed to enhance life, that production leads to revolution, to “innovation.” Deleuze and Guattari in many ways take these ideas as their starting point: their intent is rather to map this complex evolution into the contemporary moment. One of their key ideas, “desiring-production,” is production they describe as situated at the limit between life and capital, a production that finally is given rise to by life (not the death of the status quo). They comment:

desiring-production is situated at the limits of social production; the decoded flows, at the limits of the codes and the territorialities; the body without organs at the limits of the socius. We shall speak of an absolute limit every time the schizo-flows pass through the wall, scramble all the codes, and deterritorialize the socius, the wilderness where the decoded flows run free, the end of the world, the apocalypse.

Setting aside some of the terms specific to a reading of *Anti-Oedipus*—codes, territories, body without organs, the schizo—this “apocalypse” is quite close to what Harney and Moten refer to, in far more modulated tone and diction, as a “regulatory end of the common,” or a “self-defence of revolution” when indeed “all codes are scrambled.” That deterritorialized territory, if territorializing

and coding can be read as colonization, is where the undercommons circulates, from whence it appears and to whence it accedes and disappears, all the while still being a “territory.”

Deleuze and Guattari go on to describe a second version of “limit,” this version seemingly an instance of the inverted limit of the social, just thinking of the Marx quote again, the limit capital itself encounters:

the relative limit is no more nor less than the capitalist social formation, because the latter engineers and mobilizes flows that are effectively decoded, but does so by substituting for the codes a quantifying axiomatic that is even more oppressive. With the result that capitalism—in conformity with the movement by which it counteracts its own tendency—is continually drawing near the wall, while at the same time pushing the wall further away. Schizophrenia is the absolute limit, but capitalism is the relative limit.

All but citing outright the paragraph quoted from *Capital* above, here we have in tandem a simultaneous and near indistinguishable version of a limit, approaching a wall, but this time the barrier is given as “relative” and not “absolute.” What NP is consistently concerned to do is assess and perform this optimism, perhaps a cruel optimism, to cite Lauren Berlant. Is the business model of persistently re-approaching the limit of its own identity as quantity something that can withstand the pressure to be a relative limit, rather than porously giving way to an absolute? Is the attempt to negotiate this difference the entire point of NP? To quote the last section of this paragraph from *Anti-Oedipus*:

there is no social formation that does not foresee, or experience a foreboding of, the real form in which the limit threatens to arrive, and which it wards off with all the strength it can command. Whence the obstinacy with which the formations preceding capitalism encaste the merchant and the technician, preventing flows of money and flows of production from assuming an autonomy that would destroy their codes. Such is the real limit.

Our business model is in search of “foreboding,” an affect that will be keyed to the threat of the limit arriving, that barricade on which we construct a perspective, a de-territorialized territory of seeing, where the war of the surround finds total success in transforming itself into institutional structure, our everyday real limit of turning back.

A perceptual book

The *Arcades* is a perceptual book: it insists on being lived. It anticipates the digital in that the claims and affordances we are offered by the digital are in many ways what the *Arcades* is looking for. For instance, walking down city streets dictating thoughts into an iPhone. What this means is that one is living; it means writing the experience of one’s own life, experiences one is having processing the city streets. What does this mean in real time, for instance what would one do with this voluminous output? Perhaps it’s not very significant, which is what the digital tells us, with the overload of information, etc., the unlikelihood that any output will find an audience. Perhaps it’s the simple fact of putting something into language, where all of our perceptions are contained to begin with, so that we actively complete the telos Benjamin mentions in *Convolute N*. We become the flaneur much more readily with our iPhone 7s. We come to a point where we must read our environment, but without language as we’ve known it.

Flusser’s camera

Thought processes in reading the *Arcades Project* move onto a Benjaminian “track,” and the digital gives us the ability to record those processes out in the open, away from the book; there’s no reason to ever stop taking notes, no matter where one is, a constant dictation from the universe, effectively feeding right back into the universe. The digital gives us the ability to constantly be reading, but an entirely different kind of reading, an experiential

reading, a seeing through. Maybe yes Benjamin is the philosopher of photography par excellence, since the photograph is so purely a citational machine, even though of course we know the apparatus of the camera is effectively dominated by subjectivities. But you could also theorize the camera itself as a manifestation of the citational impulse, especially via Flusser but here we would flip his prioritizing of the camera on its head, saying instead that the control of the camera is just another way for language, purely citational, to take priority; so technology is seen as purely an extension of language. And this would not necessarily be a humanistic, Pollyannaish criticism of technology, but one that hypothesizes that any given object of perception is necessarily an object embedded within history in the same way as any other. For instance, in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Flusser writes:

While the human being is more and more sidelined, the programs of apparatuses, these rigid combination games, are increasingly rich in elements: they make combinations more and more quickly and are going beyond the ability of the human being to see what they are up to and control them.

I think that this prioritizing of the apparatus, which echoes Benjamin's critique of the mechanical modes of production, could be reassessed if we theorize as a formative element of technology a citational or allegorical impulse that originate in more foundational linguistic structures.

Methodology

Benjamin is constantly circling around a methodological discussion, it is that thing that takes place between the lines. The *Arcades'* immediate relevance is as a methodological discussion, but also as the opposite of such a discussion, or as a performance of method, actually doing something. It exists at the place where those two are still the same, a kind of pre-bifurcation point.

NP11 (North American Dandy)

The Guys chapter in *L'Art romantique*, on dandies: “They are all representatives . . . of that compelling need, alas only too rare today, for combating and destroying triviality. . . . Dandyism is the last spark of heroism amid decadence; and the type of dandy discovered by our traveler in North America does nothing to invalidate this idea; for how can we be sure that those tribes which we call ‘savage’ may not in fact be the *disjecta membra* of great extinct civilizations? . . . It is hardly necessary to say that when M.G. sketches one of his dandies on paper, he never fails to give him his historical personality—his legendary personality, I would venture to say, if we were not speaking of the present time and of things generally considered frivolous.” Baudelaire, *L'Art romantique*, vol. 3, ed. Hachette (Paris), pp. 94–95. [D5,1]

This detour is meant to approach (an understanding of) institutional violence. In discussing this passage there is an arrival at the place of study in relation to cultural production. The passage appears in convolute D, “[Boredom, Eternal Return],” which in many ways posits boredom as a mechanically induced dream-state, associated with both study and dandyism (the flaneur). There is more to be said about this extended definition of boredom but for now let’s take it as a given in order to approach more directly the above-cited D5,1.

The citation contained within D5,1 is from Baudelaire, who is characterizing the dandy within a conversation of the work of Constantine Guys (the “M.G.” later in the passage). Baudelaire points out how the dandy is in fact a purveyor of substance, rather than triviality, and therefore has a heroic status within modernity. His behavior is “only too rare.” Baudelaire then addresses what at the time seems to have been an exception to his argument, the dandy figure among North American Indians, who perhaps has no intent to “destroy” triviality at all. But Baudelaire here reimagines the Native American as someone who is in fact hailing or referencing his own, surely substantive (“great”), extinct civilization, a world itself all but destroyed. Baudelaire then mentions how Guys himself recognizes this quality of the Native American

and includes it—a “historical personality”—in his sketches of that figure.

This is an “informational” reading of the passage, at least in part, or at least a start at one. Let’s turn to a different type of reading [I want to note how this particular pause, now, in this section, is a time frame that opens up, is characterized as a decision, between enacting a straightforward reading of a text and “shifting” into a more allegorical mode, a sussing out of implications and the characterization of the symbolic mode of text. “Where” are we at this decisive time? What kind of error do we make in saying the text of the *Arcades* hasn’t already caught us up, at this seemingly improvisatory “escape” from the informational, at this seeing beyond its surfaces, finally, its “trivialities”? Should I leave this question open and continue the discussion? Note that, if there is a decision being made, it must be one that repeats itself mechanically with all of the thousands of passages, the “scattered fragments,” of the *Arcades*, ad nauseum, up to some sort of breaking point. But perhaps we should start here? Or is the timing not quite right?]

To continue, let’s say that Baudelaire’s argument, what is central to the passage, has to do with a generalized inability to distinguish, to recognize, to know, the difference between savagery and civilization (and of course we read here as well: institution). If that is the case then he is able to claim not just the Native American dandy but whole “tribes” of Native Americans as “dandyish,” “spark[s] of heroism among decadence.” And note here the parallel between the genocidal extinction of entire civilizations and the decadence of modernity, we watch/read as that decadence/boredom is aligned with genocide, a genocidal character of bourgeois affect. There are then two inflections of world-historical violence that the dandy is not only given to “combat” but to “destroy,” bring back to contemporary consciousness, into the “present time” and what is perceived as “frivolous.” Civilization is infiltrated with savagery. The passage, like *Guys*, illustrates exactly how that works, or looks.

If the argument seems confused, it may be. But what the argument requests here is a glimpse beyond its dialectical conflict. It’s

true that the dandy is that quintessentially bored figure, a connoisseur of boredom, wallowing in it. If boredom is a collective affective *Weltanschung*, then it is here that heroism makes sense for the dandy, who is defined by his embrace of the de-historicized, the “frivolous” in the “present time” (and it’s possible to reference the fashion convolute and many other sections of the *Arcades* to corroborate this idea). (Note here as well that the dandy is finally the great scholar—given his embrace of leisure and idleness—the embodiment of study.) But in fact the passage conveys exactly the opposite of this conception. Here the dandy combats decadence, triviality, frivolousness; the dandy comes across as heroic, precisely in the model of the legends of old, a personality that might be the last thing we could associate with the dandy.

We don’t need to say that the dandy is one or the other, the bored but playful socialite, or the template of the historical warrior, bloody and perhaps inhumanly vicious, “savage.” Perhaps we need only watch the two personas’ interfusion and note that when one side of the equation appears we invariably have the other at work as well. Baudelaire, and by extension Benjamin, seems quite concerned with a phenomenological status of boredom and the dandy, and this is a collective characterization as well, an affective operation of capital in perhaps its most refined and insidious state. But that abstracted experience of “presentness” is the access point to a historiography, a “historical personality,” legend and the seeming annihilation of precisely the perspective out of which the dandy seems to embark. I want to return to this construct, this status of text, finally a verbo-visual (Guys is a visual artist, in the end) performance of citational montage.

The complexities of this text are now beginning to be highlighted. A reading commences. —As already noted, a key phrase in the passage is “the *disjecta membra* [scattered fragments] of great extinct civilizations”: the Native American is left with such fragments. As in so many of the passages in the *Arcades*, there is here a “moment of identification,” where the subject matter of a citation comes into overlap with Benjamin’s overall project. Of course the *Arcades* is precisely this collection of fragments that

describes that lost “civilization” of nineteenth century Paris. This identification is quite strong and clear, such that parallels emerge (if they hadn’t already) to the American Indian, the Indian dandy, as a cipher for Benjamin as he performs his heroic rescue of what is already extinct (and setting aside the question: what kind of violence destroyed the past of the arcades?). The passage points to Benjamin (along with Baudelaire and Guys) as dandy in just this sense. Each citation is a fragment, a *disjecta membra*, an incomplete and performed link to an earlier version of civilization. Just like M.G., Benjamin “sketches”—using incomplete definitional lines—“on paper” these “historical personalities,” finally images. He creates a version of the present that always already is also the past, using what is seen as the past, in this case the Baudelairean present, making it make sense exclusively in terms of what is being enacted in the present. We look both ways at once.

Yet, when we say that, we hold in mind a certain multidimensionality, the idea of a multitude of ways the passage looks “both ways.” The passage moves quickly back and forth from individual to collectivity—the opening collective “they” to the individual hero or dandy, from there to the “tribe” and back to small fragments of the *disjecta membra*, back to civilization overall, and so on—until they effectively indicate the same thing, the individual dandy always already a historical reference, the historical reference never more than its scattered individual fragments. Thus as much as savage and civilization merge, so too the individual and context.—we close in fragmentation . . .

Images are encountered in language

A key question for the *Arcades* overall, something to consider that has wider implications, is how can Benjamin say the “place where one encounters” dialectical images “is language”? At first glance this seems curious, since we normally or intuitively divide the visual from the linguistic. But with this passage he sets up two starkly divergent conceptions of the historical project, “it’s not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what

is present it's light on what is past," so that he can position his own project squarely in the middle of these two strains, with the unifying idea of "image," a word he uses to describe, as we know, a very much central component of the *Arcades*. Most basically for Benjamin the image is the citation itself and the details of its literal meaning, exactly as if it were a photograph, something seemingly frozen in time that we might pore over to uncover its every detail and nuance, drawing any conclusions we can about when it was taken, by whom, as well as who or what seems to be in the image. If we see the citations as images in this sense it's easy to understand the whole project as montage. In the proper understanding of the image, "what is past" or what-has-been is able to line up with, come together with, correspond to "the now" in such a way that a "constellation" of meaning is formed that in fact bridges historical time and reveals an identity of past and present in such a way that the dialectical "movement" between the different conceptions of history mentioned above is no longer operative or relevant, brought to a "standstill," static, motionless, like a collection of stars in the sky.

What's curious as well is that as soon as Benjamin puts forward the concept of dialectics at a standstill, as if it were an ultimate goal of his project, of reading, of historical perception, he immediately turns around to reinforce how linear perceptions of time and history, the continuous, do define how the present is related to the past: this idea of chronological progression is in fact something we hang on to. And he also goes on to reinforce the idea that the relation of "what-has-been to the now" is a dialectics defined by movement, or dialectics in the pure sense, "emergent," even as it continues to be defined by an absence of "progression," something that might be at a standstill. The passage is complex in this subtle alternation between stasis and movement, a constant tendency of the detail, the interpretation of the image, to both fall back into linear time and to be revealed in a suddenly emergent flash as part of a kind of phenomenological constellation of a simultaneity of what-has-been and the now. This is an understanding of the image comparable

to Barthes, this struggle in one and the same thing between a denotation and connotative meaning.

But as I mentioned, we also need to consider how it is that Benjamin comes back to the idea that where images are encountered is “in language.” Here we can immediately say that all of Benjamin’s citations use language, words, text, that they are citations of text taken from books and hence linguistic in nature. These peculiar mages are thus built up through words, words enable us to construct in our minds immaterial images of the past. But there is another idea at work here as well, almost as if this first idea is a literal interpretation of the problem, but one that leads to the more substantial. That is, by “place” Benjamin is indicating the “pure language” of “The Task of the Translator,” a place where a more universal human language is accessed, so that through the dialectical image we come to experience and understand *that* language, we come to be in this language, which is a crossing of present and past as much as it is a crossing over of the visual, the phenomenological, the theological, and the philological. “Language” for Benjamin is finally comprehensive of all experience, including that of the nominally antithetical image, the dialectical image, which all images must be.

NP12 (Historiography)

There is a historiography of NP. Temporally it comes in the smallest of doses. At each point at which a press is established, a rubric of assumptions is solidified. These assumptions will be more or less open-ended depending on the immediate and long-term necessities of the specific publication entity. These entities can appear in a variety of forms, with time scales as seemingly abbreviated as a single ephemeral project produced at the speed of perception, all the way to single non-ephemeral projects that seemingly last a lifetime or more. The publication projects NP supports are those that meet the criteria of the Association of University Presses and hence involve two primary zones of legitimation, peer review and a timeline that manifests as a “5 year plan”

with approximately 5 projects per year and 3 full time employees (see later sections on membership criteria of the AUP).

Our study, our scholarship, our narratives, are structured around this basic timeline and material visibility. If there is scholarship or a story that falls outside of or beyond this horizon it will not be legitimated. It will not be characterized as knowledge, it will not have meaning, it will succumb to an approach to meaninglessness, to the absurd. But doesn't NP want to come into contact with absurdity? Don't we have a use for it? What's going to happen in and through that contact? Will it be an example of misdirection, in terms of our goal of AUP membership, or will it be a realization of that goal, if, for instance, study cannot happen without containing a degree of absurdity? And if it is one, or the other, or both, how do we carry forward that lesson into the landscape of day-to-day experience, a history of the present? These questions are on instant replay (we're not sure where we came in) and should re-appear.

NP13 (Kosselleck's absurdity)

In fact NP is in tight accord with absurdity, exhibiting a type of attention deficit disorder as a performance of enslaved contemporary consciousness. In his essay "On the Meaning and Absurdity of History," Reinhardt Koselleck broaches the difficulty, as others have before him, perhaps starting with Adorno, of accounting for Auschwitz and the Holocaust within the science of history, which by definition cannot withstand the absurd nature of mechanized extermination. Koselleck makes clear that we still live the "damaged" life, that this central absurdity of the Holocaust has fundamentally compromised any other attempts at the arbitration of meaning.

The costs with which "History" burdens us with its impositions of meaning are too high for us today if we intend to act. Let us therefore dispatch them back to their origins: to the realm of—difficult to bear—absurdity.

Koselleck introduces then a double-edged absurdity, one that results from unfathomable violence and the other from the attempt to narrate a world created by that violence. Absurdity then is a totalizing milieu in which meaning is derived in two ways: performatively, and as an always-too-late archivalism, which in fact amount to the same thing. In a world that impossibly must “declare the absurd itself to be meaningful,” Koselleck recommends that “we should modestly attempt to do what we ourselves can make possible in a sensible, meaningful manner.” We are then, at base, “in the manner of.” And this applies to both the personal and the macrocosmic, political realm, where we “use the acceleration of the founding of Israel as a case for the meaning of Auschwitz,” even and perhaps specifically as this is the “epitome of documented absurdity” that will “effectively document and codify absurdity itself.”

This particular conception of absurdity seems to be a contemporary inflection of the fundamental paradox of history writing or telling in general. “Actual history,” writes Koselleck, “first reveals its truth when it is over. In other words, the truth of a history is always a truth *ex post*. It first presents itself when it no longer exists.” He continues:

We must therefore learn to cope with the paradox that a history that first generates itself over the course of time is always different from what is retroactively declared to be a “history.” In addition, this difference always opens up anew, for each history that is reconstructed through the science of history is only ever a preliminary grasp at incompleteness, because the actual history continues on. The difference between the history that constantly changes from situation to situation and the history that is temporarily fixed or stabilized through historical research contains an unsolvable paradox, inasmuch as it constantly reproduces itself anew.

Hence there is a paradox permanently at work in the very impulse to recuperate, preserve, archive. There is a nearly measurable gap between “what happened” and how we might instantiate this knowledge among ourselves. There is thus a particular

meaninglessness or absurdity to the science of history, one that will exist within and alongside any documentary effort. This however seems either different, apart from, or at best to prefigure or complement the absurdity of fascist modernity, one that has encountered not only the malaise of humanistic values but the specific and clear rise of human-aided destruction on an apocalyptic scale. That absurdity is set aside for special treatment, though perhaps only tangentially, in Koselleck's essay. There is a level at which NP will reinstitute itself almost as a parody of the instrumental uselessness of the document, yet that performance is only understood insofar as it is experienced as a contemporary version of absurdity, also comprehended, as we will come back to later, as study.

There is a thin line being walked here. But it threads a certain bilateral tension that is bloated similarly to the new heights of rank absurdity now traversing the art market with the \$450 million sale of (it is thought) Da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi*. Perhaps the defining characteristic of this sale is its invitation to the general populace to come in contact with the absurd. NP searches for certain parallels as a realization of its own mission and it is through exhibitions such as Counterpath's "Celebration of the Sale of the *Salvator Mundi*" that this takes place. This isn't at all making a high claim for a doubtful resurgence of the possibility of authorship and participation as it is a temporary placeholder within the affect of being in the swirl of absurdity.

Mechanized lifespan

Convolute H starts with an extraordinary image or scene that seems to tie together, not unlike the mechanical turk at the start of "Theses on History," many of Benjamin's concerns. The "here" in the first sentence is the arcades, and immediately the idea of "material" from the epigraphs is deeply problematized, the scene moving from birth to death, from "infant prodigies" to the "old woman" and finally "Doctor Miracle" (a stand-in for death itself) with a crisscrossing of the technological and the human. Those

infants are in fact collectibles, mechanical curios first presented as the forefront of technology at a “world exhibition” but for which the arcades now serve as a “last refuge,” their use value never coming to be, or having disappeared: why would a briefcase need to have an interior light? nothing a meter long will fit in a pocket, and so on. These births are no more than abortions, “broken-down matter,” monstrous and “degenerate” creatures. Note here as well the role of books, which run parallel to these failed and useless technologies in that they universally (hence they can just be tied in a bundle) “tell of all sorts of failure.” Books here are analogous to buttons, bringing together fabric (social, ideational) with a kind of “mother-of-pearl” false purity, dubbed “de fantasia” or simply pure delusional dream. Progressing on, there is then a display of old-world superficiality, old world technology, with even a gas lamp, mirroring the light inside the briefcase, from which abortive technologies are born, and it’s this light by which reading takes place, and this is the light of the collector (we perhaps think of Benjamin in the Bibliotheque Nationale, burrowing around for quotations in old tomes). And here it is that the objects in the collection, again these are citations, are revealed as teeth, removed from any use value, a mouth, but clearly human, some genuine, gold, perhaps with monetary value, others false, wax, finally all broken, refuse of a kind. Finally all returning to again a useless, mechanical yet recognizably human automated doll, constructed by something that appears to be a saving miracle but that’s a harbinger of death. We also note with this passage that it is not marked off as a citation and therefore has the status of commentary, something Benjamin wrote. But even so it’s in an allegorical mode that feels to some degree like objective history but in fact feels much more like narrative fiction.

Collecting, citing, and the practice of contemporary reading

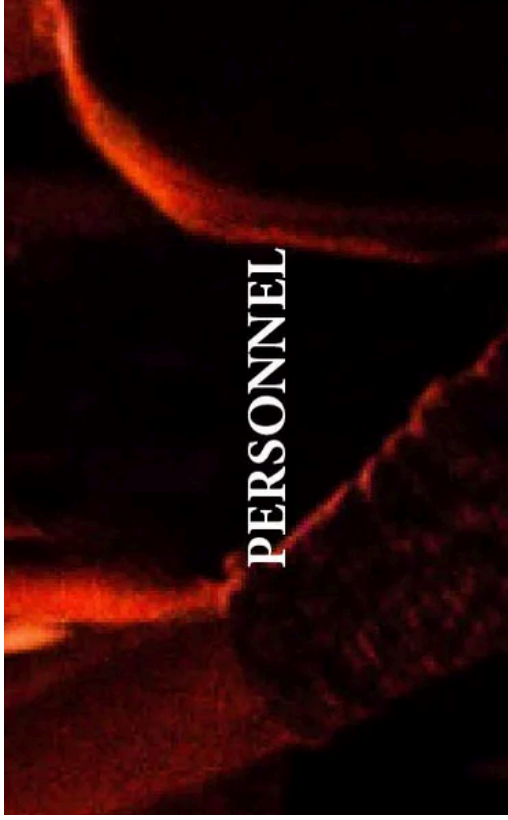
We can take a passage like H1a,2 and “reinterpret” it as an explication of how citation operates, but we can from there use

the passage as an interpretive landscape of the “digital.” That is, collecting is the collection of objects, as much as it is the collection of quotations, as much as it is the collection of infinite data points assumed by the digital, a kind of protocol in Alexander Galloway’s sense, one where text, pure computer code (our “pure language”?) ceaselessly crosses over and back from a certain kind of materiality—and we should draw out how this digital materiality is both similar too, carrying the characteristics of, and different from the materiality of the book—in fact, can we conceive of the materiality of digital text in terms *other than* what the book itself, or the newspaper, gave rise to? In fact, is digital text required to be text? Are there modalities of meaning that are not textual? Is meaning textual? Is meaning mechanical?

Collection and citation are situations where the “object is detached from all its original functions.” This is true of our analysis of digital text as it works citationally since in order to perceive text as a discrete unit, as a separate thing for analysis, we “read” it. In this way we pull digital text from its position in a larger flow of non-individualized cultural signification, which functions both as a network of human input and electronically, and position it within an interpretive framework of use-value. Any given modality of perception is a theory of constraining text within a “peculiar category of completeness.” Otherwise this text would maintain its “wholly irrational character” of “mere presence at hand.”

What is the “presence at hand” of digital text? It is text outside the collection, outside of its reading, outside of historical system, outside of perception itself. For Benjamin I would say it is text that keeps its place in “pure language,” beyond any system as we can possibly imagine it, where language and image reference an identical primitive ontology, a place that we might see in flashes only, “that place beyond the heavens which, for Plato, shelters the unchangeable archetypes of things.” We might ask, insofar as contemporary culture and its global networks function according to digital affordances of connectivity and the immediate transferability of meaning, affordances that might be seen as the current state of technological evolution as depicted in passages like

“every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the epoch,” how does the identity of the collector become a cipher for the human personality overall, each of us at each moment constructing “an alarm clock that rouses the kitsch of the previous century to ‘assembly’”? Most likely we should speak of temporalities of technological evolution that take the same basic *form* as that from the early to mid to late nineteenth century but that happen instead over the course of decades or even single years, categories of the human and the technologically human being born and fading into obsolescence with such rapidity that the powers of any single person to perceive the contemporary grow quickly (and hence progressively further) into antiquity (though here antiquity is only a few years ago). If reading is a vital act, it is so only in terms of self-sacrifice.



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Hiring and facilitating hiring are a key activity for NP, since its goal is to work with a member institution for a maximum of one year as a press achieves viability outside of NP support. While we put in place a goal of 3 full-time or equivalent employees—a criteria for regular membership in the Association of University Presses—we recognize that important work is often realized with far fewer resources. NP would also anticipate implementing a vigorous paid internship program and drawing on the involvement of graduate students, particularly those interested in a career in publishing.

NP14 (Pausanias)

Let's make a move that will be completely inadequate, in terms of getting at all nuances, and unfair to Koselleck, since his argument has only been treated superficially in the previous section, but we make a move to introduce a passage from the *Arcades*.

Pausanias produced his topography of Greece around A.D. 200, at a time when the cult sites and many other monuments had begun to fall into ruin. [C1,5]

Pausanias schrieb seine Topographie von Griechenland 200 n. Chr. als die Kultstätten und viele der anderen Monumente zu verfallen begannen.

Pausanias wrote his topography of Greece in 200 AD when the places of worship and many of the other monuments began to decline.

Pausanias here is in the position of historian and the passage clearly references the same paradox or "lower level" absurdity named by Koselleck, that of the necessity of history being *ex post*, after the fact, not finally able to comprehend its own stated subject matter. But from this location, so to speak, we expand our reading. With my foregoing statement we have indicated a type of informational reading. What we would like to do now is "study" the passage and observe, really, the effects of what we're doing. We go on to document those effects, in writing, as a type of *ex post* intervention in the writing before us. The passage itself happens then *we* come along. Greece itself happens then Pausanias comes along, the culture of the nineteenth-century Parisian arcades happens then Benjamin comes along. The superimpositions seem interminable, inexplicable, absurd, in this brief passage, yet we sense them. We have a relation to them: do we attempt to dominate them? We access the content through study and yet it's clear that the impetus to study is control. The two impulses seem to work together.

Or I get ahead of myself. In this study, there should be some kind of build-up, a progressive uncovering or delayering, less and less informational and more and more symbolic, allegorical. Is the true reading the one that holds all possible readings in one's mind at once? Does that lead us into a type of paralysis, a place of non-reading, in fact, a reading that absurdly refuses to read? We want to hold on to the valences of absurdity that enter the picture here, since they will characterize a certain overall consciousness.

In any case, the temporal gap seems to be 200 years. The thing Pausanias attempts to write about happened 200 years before he did his work. But that's not accurate: classical Greece, where those places of worship and monuments were in fact produced, existed well before that. The distance of history from the historian is much greater than 200 years. Romans conquered the Greek peninsula in 146 BC. What Benjamin is emphasizing here is the temporal realm Pausanias inhabits and out of which his documentary efforts proceed. He is "anno domini," in the year of our lord, yes, and if we stay with the German he is "n. Chr.," existing within the temporal framework of the "birth" of "Christ" (aligning this passage with others in this convolute that reference birth). Pausanias's topography, his writing of history (again following the German more closely with "wrote" rather than "produced", even with the latter's implications for political economy), was in fact a moving out from the rigidly sequential Judeo-Christian spatiotemporal orientation and supposedly back into what was at that time a ruin, that is, in many ways, barely extant. He writes the story of the ancient Greek world but we certainly won't rely on it, since he only has scant evidence. The paradox and absurdity of history is exactly this: in the face of history's impossibility only the ruin, nothing more, holds believability. The present consists of ruins.

But to return to the emphasis on the moment of birth, and this seems in fact to be downplayed in the English translation, note in addition to the moment of Christ's birth the emphasis on the specific moment at which Pausanias decides to write, when the "decline" in fact begins. The English introduces terminology such as "around," "at a time when," and then "had begun to

fall,” where the German seems to simply say “when” and “began,” which emphasis leads to the idea that it was at the exact moment that those “cult sites and many other monuments” began to fall into decline that it became possible for Pausanias to begin his work: their death is the birth of his possibility. One produces or writes the other. Something happening in time seems to carry with it motive forces that direct human activity, that is, insofar as time dismantles itself. This in fact is the second moment of birth in the passage. Birth and death parallel and cross over into one another. They follow the same pattern. Recall that the passage parallels Koselleck in highlighting the moment of starting anew as the point at which history can legitimately be told, when always doomed attempts at meaning make the most sense, exactly as they broach the realm of futility, experiencing absurdity, bringing death (ruin) into life (the written record) and vice versa. Again we get ahead of ourselves.

But overall the passage keeps re-problematizing that moment, aligning it with the inception of a modality of the temporal, of a temporality of the Christian calendar, a temporality perhaps specifically opposed to what existed before it. Such that these opposed moments, and places, exist at one and the same place and time, each inscribed one within the other. Benjamin points to precisely the way in which the secular and the sacred interfuse, which is also to say the pagan with later forms of civilization. For what Pausanias is concerned with is precisely those pre-Christian forms of religious ritual that would necessarily be precluded within the Christian worldview, even as that worldview subsumes historicity as Benjamin is referencing it—that is, the centrality in Christianity of a living by way of having died, a death that forms the proof of and exact basis for any given form of life. So that there is a strong continuity to these various moments of embodied historiography, a reinscription that itself is the physical proof of livingness, a birth, an inscription, a Word, become real. This is one of the reasons Pausanias’s quite physical “topography” can be reinterpreted as a far more abstract “history.” The actual

physically-appearing landscape will have been categorically determined by thought.

And yet very specifically what Pausanias is attempting to and does reinscribe, even if ineffectively and only based on a “ruin,” are pre- or anti-Christian religious practice, “cults,” “places of worship,” the notably vague “other monuments.” So that the moment of the birth of Christ is the moment of possibility for the reappearance, indeed a citational moment, for what seems precisely to contradict or be excluded by Christian systems of meaning. Meaning then will work itself out through whatever absurdity it carries along with it, through whatever anti-meaning it happens to cite in this way. And absurdity will forever be a citational moment for meaning, always within a system or institution of meaning. And throughout this discussion of C1,5 we can’t fail to continue to grasp, as referenced earlier, the concatenation of empire on empire, Greek to Roman and onward up through the Second Empire of nineteenth century France, the decline of Greece, the decline of Rome, cited by the “decline of Paris” in the title of the convolute.

Pausanias’s work on the history of Greece is used here as an allegory for Benjamin’s work on the Paris of the arcades. At least part of what this means is that reappearing through Benjamin’s writing and reading project (which does not lose sight of the fact that our own reading will echo Benjamin’s) will be each of these earlier iterations of Empire, unfolding like the petals of a rose, a cascade of activated symbols that happen in historical time exactly the way they unfold immaterially in the reading process, unfolding even now in this section as we unpack or unfold this brief passage, as we birth the always already archival and ruined history of the victory, the dawning, of the empire of commerce. Exactly insofar as reading is study—and it is that in a multitude of ways—it is the specific and exact and inescapable site, the breeding ground, of Empire. This is absurdity at the deepest level of the individual and the collective. Circulating now through our reified historical consciousness, the passage embodies a starkly immaterial

infiltration of diluted cultic practices and finally mythic barbarities still living in the present.

m1,1

“Noteworthy” is suspect since it indicates something inconsequential or subsidiary, which in a book full of “notes” we can take to mean exactly the opposite, that here in fact is something quite important (what is the status of the “note” in the *Arcades*?).

The word “conjunction” has a number of meanings, each of which becomes operative in the passage. Most basically, it is (1) an action or instance of two or more events or things occurring at the same point in time or space; (2) an alignment of two planets or other celestial objects so that they appear to be in the same, or nearly the same, place in the sky; and (3) a word used to connect clauses or sentences, or to coordinate words in the same clause. So we want to keep aware of these three meanings as we assess and notate this passage.

What experiences a conjunction here, and how does that take place? Taking the passage at face value, there is a conjunction, really meaning a relationship, between the Greek branding of practical labor as a base aspiration for riches and the somewhat later link to the denigration of the tradesman, or by extension of trade itself. In the context of the section on idleness, which as we know is a primary characteristic of the flaneur, these two tendencies position the idler as the non-slave, someone opposed to the crass accumulation of money, with higher aspirations, beyond capital, a true citizen of the polis, democratic. This idea of conjunction is these two things happening in relation to each other.

The second idea of conjunction gravitates toward the grammatical. The passage, or more precisely the citation, shows how contempt for artisans and then trade as a whole was baked into the very structures of words themselves. We first see how the word for artisan, “banausos,” was a *synonym* for contempt! And in fact “everything related to tradespeople or to handwork carries a stigma.” We then see that the leisure/trade binary goes even more deeply into the genetic makeup of language itself, with the

conjunction of schole/leisure and ascholia/business, and then otium/leisure with negotium/business.

Lastly there is a mythical or astral conjunction here since there is an association of leisure with the heavenly, a conjoining of these two, as much as there is an association and conjoining of the tradesman with the god Mammon.

But even separating out these three definitions of conjunction and seeing how they work in this passage, we've still only scratched the surface of what it is to read this passage, read the text of the *Arcades*. Since we should also look at the idea here that those engaged in practical labor, artisans, tradespeople, trade itself, are excluded from citizenship in the republic. The only citizens in democracy are those, like the flaneur, who don't work for a living, who while away the time and can thereby access not only their thoughts but their very soul. Those who do not have leisure are effectively soulless, hence literally made into slaves. Again, this idea, this construct, is built into our cosmology, built into our language. The dichotomy is there all the way from Plato to the 1938 publication of, noting the similar opposition again in the title, *Mechanisme et philosophie*.

Intervalic

But what do I have to be able to do here, to read this passage, to think this passage, to peel away the all too obvious layers we are confronted with, formal layers of the collection of passages, the incorporation of the passages into convolutes, the ongoing pseudo-history of the arcades, and then linguistic layers of informational and symbolic meanings overlapping and co-creating each other? How can we pause to consider these things, to bring them down to earth, but then to see how they function as interpretive moments that themselves sketch out the architecture of the *Arcades* as a whole? Again, as we're aware throughout, these "passages" have their material manifestation in the passages of the arcades themselves, so that the commentary is constantly operating on more than one plane. One of the overriding points of the

book is how discursivity and physical reality dialectically shape each other and we can see this both as a criteria for how passages are selected or written but also as an interpretive framework we can read each passage back into.

NP15 (Hughes as Mountain)

One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet," meaning, I believe, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a white poet"; meaning behind that, "I would like to be white." And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible.

—Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"

For never shall the clan
confine my singing to its ways.

—Countee Cullen

1.

The first paragraph, quoted above, of Langston Hughes's essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" is devastating. I ask who is this poet—this Countee Cullen, not specified in the essay—who comes to speak to Hughes? This "he" is defined as "promising," "the most promising": but within what system of values? What idea of poetry is this person already functioning within to such a degree that Hughes would take such notice?

2.

It's hard to tell what the answer is at first, but the idea of the "great poet" comes up twice in the paragraph, and we are to assume that's exactly what this poet wants to become. (I'm not

sure if we are to assume that's what Hughes already is, since the essay is written when he is 24 years old, certainly to some degree still assessing his own status as a writer).

3.

But the young poet (younger by a year, as it turns out) doesn't say he wants to become a "great" poet—which Hughes perhaps had on his own mind. If we follow that other poet closely he says: "I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet." What this person seems to be commenting on, quite different than a rejection of blackness, is a racist dismissal of his work as being "only" that of a "Negro." It is clearly a statement of resistance.

4.

He is not saying he wants to be a "great" poet, which in itself would be a perhaps pathetic statement, and he is not at all saying he rejects blackness or his heritage as a black person. He is referring to his experience of being subjected to racist judgment, to his desire not to be judged according to that demeaning criteria. We could say this is not as much an ontological statement as a phenomenological one. The poet is commenting on his experience as a social being. Hughes seems to mis-hear or misread this as, first of all, self-aggrandizing and essentializing, and he combines this mistake with a second order misreading of the comment as a rejection of whatever it might be to be a "Negro" poet, a rejection of blackness.

5.

Hughes continues by psychologizing his already misinterpreted statement, launching out from the supposed rejection of blackness to an assumption that the poet not only wants to "write like a white poet" but to "be white." Setting aside these gross and belittling insults, we should also note Hughes casts the issue as one of being either black or white, suggesting that if the young poet did reject (though in fact he might be doing just the opposite) what it means to be a Negro poet that his only recourse would be white

poetry, as if world literature by a multitude of races had nothing to offer and effectively did not exist (as much as Hughes himself had recently spent time in Mexico and just returned from Europe before writing this essay). For all these reasons I think we need to say that Hughes's judgment, certainly his implied mentorship, of this "young" poet is quite problematic.

6.

And it seems the word "belittling" might be quite appropriate here, because not only does Hughes impose oppressive ideas of "being a great poet" or being "promising," he clearly imagines himself as keeping this poet, as he says "this boy," in his place, seeking throughout the essay to actually humiliate him for not knowing that place (a critique of being "uppity" feels present though the word is not used). Hughes's recipe for being a great poet is to stay put within his Negro community and to shame others into doing the same, to stay in poverty, one imagines in the ghetto, each with his "hip of gin," as Hughes goes on to detail. He accuses the "boy" of "running away spiritually from his race" and of being "afraid of being himself." His dressing down of his fellow poet is thus devastating in this one paragraph alone, setting aside the grotesque and ad hominin attack on his family as a whole in the next paragraph. Hughes shames the younger poet precisely by channelling, rerouting, the rhetoric of violence of white supremacy.

7.

Indeed it's possible to flip the reading of this passage and follow the evidence of Hughes himself behaving as oppressor, as the true arbiter of "American standardization." We start by embracing the aesthetic of that young poet—and not necessarily speaking here of Cullen—as the potential (here squelched) true locus of authentic resistance to whiteness, as the true embrace of blackness in America, an appearance of a combinatory or intersectional identity that crucially reaches for universality. On this reading, from his opening sentence everything Hughes does here is condescending and

dismissive, locking tight around the young poet a bindingly racist discourse. The young poet is clearly attempting an escape, again Hughes says outright that he is trying to “run away,” white discourse and Hughes slapping him down like any other fugitive.

8.

The young poet’s move away from the obvious confinements of a strictly “Negro” identity are met with an emotionally violent shaming and suspicion that situates the white oppressor deep within an experience of blackness. The young poet, and his family, they are all “sneaky,” obsequiously faking their way out of their proper place. And the discourse of the “great” poet is the biggest gun in the arsenal (as perhaps it has ever been). Just as there will be no black life outside of the life of the “Negro,” itself circumscribed and gerrymandered by white culture in the first place, there will be no poetry that escapes Hughes’s specific version of western monumental greatness arising from the underclass. Hughes seems to whip the boy poet until he gets in line.

9.

We can pause here to begin to ask again exactly what aesthetic is being disallowed? Certainly for the black and at all mixed-race community the “Negro” aesthetic must be embraced without question. There is one thing to do and one thing only. Even hinting at a potentially mixed identity is out of the question. Even hinting at joining the larger community of national or global poets—which is clearly what is initially meant by Cullen, not becoming some essentialized or zombie-like great (white) poet—is met with withering dismissal. Community is this particular microcosm and it is hermetically sealed. That version of poetic identity that might embrace the many is seen as a denial of being “himself,” and therefore must itself be denied. We ask, however, has a great poet ever been afraid of being himself? Moreover, we ask of Hughes, has a great poet ever not been afraid of being “himself”? How often has it been the case that truly liberating iterations of literature have provided ways to imagine ourselves

outside of the givens of how we have been presented to ourselves by society? Isn't that the impulse the young poet is responding to and querying in this private moment with a respected co-creator, who then turns on him?

10.

In this sense, the "mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America" is Langston Hughes himself. He will not let this poet through unless this poet, that poetic, backs down to find "himself" within the confines of American black culture as it stands (or kneels). Sing that song or you will not sing at all. The "American standardization" Hughes seems to criticize is precisely what he is shamefully re-inscribing into the black aesthetic. The performance of race betrayal is couched within the accuser. As much as Hughes's critique here is of the way American standardization functions at a "subconscious" level to subject blacks to white discourse, it's possible to read the passage, and the essay overall, as exhibiting precisely that interpellation.

11.

Why? Why would Hughes take on the role of the expression of white fear of black control, and do that exactly through a critique of whiteness that aims its rage at the spiritual body of the black "boy," placing Hughes and that boy more firmly than ever within the aesthetic of white control? Perhaps to be a poet at all is to stand firmly in the way of poetry in just this manner, within this theater of liberation that psychologically shackles anyone who comes near it with an ever more subconscious version of the status quo. Hughes's treatment of this young poet is completely inexcusable. But what made him do it? Secondarily, can we then permit ourselves layer upon layer of interpretation of Hughes's text, just as he went stage by stage toward a condemnation of the young poet, starting with the poet behind the Negro poet, "writing white" behind that, the white poet behind that, the white person behind that, then in fact pure whiteness, pure Americanness at its most abstract, the backdrop against which the young poet defines

“himself”? As Baldwin writes, blackness is a specifically American phenomena, and the universalism the young poet senses as being possible must see that blackness as confining, a confinement that must have been painfully obvious in the 1920s, as it is today. Hughes’s father moved to Mexico to escape it. The urge not to be a Negro poet on their terms perhaps made too much sense for Hughes, who was progressively finding recognition within that system, to be able to allow.

12.

Should this, then, be our reading of Hughes? We can’t possibly take the language of that racial mountain at face value. Or anything being referred to in the essay. Every single word and idea is perhaps as conflicted as Hughes’s own racial provenance, which he describes as ancestors on one side of his family having been black slaves, ancestors on the other side white owners of black slaves. That material history seems to lurk or ghost its way into Hughes’s discourse in just this way.

m1,2

We’re not dealing in this passage with a straightforward belief in Fortuna, since we’ll always remember how theology is a defining source of historical materialism. It’s more like the dichotomy of leisure and business at the heart of language is determinative, to some degree, of the main thrust here of characterizing the contemplative life (which is the life of the flaneur). This life is seen as escaping not just the *vita activa*, but the “world at large.” The citation from Schuhl situates the conception of contemplation in the Middle Ages, which just as in m1,1 makes the idea and experience of idleness and leisure historically evolving forces, historically determined forces that even in their abstraction and subjectivity are linked at the root to ideas of the active, business, and the world of capital. And we can note as well the doubleness of Fortuna (the “conjunction” of its two identities, to use the word from the earlier passage), and how difficult it might be

to distinguish them, to know whether one is enjoying leisure or embracing idleness, and hence to have an idea of whether one has escaped the wheel of fortune or is “under her power,” doing her bidding. In fact, this passage calls into question the entire idea of the flaneur, the “man of contemplation,” as of course a person of very great privilege, someone who has managed to evade any need for actual work to survive, and it’s this person who accesses the true nature of the soul, yet only to be “immobile at the center” of the world at large, a pivot point around which that world turns, a person presumably experiencing the “dialectics at a standstill” the flaneur perceives and creates. I think part of Benjamin’s point here is that the Middle Ages, with its feudal and hierarchical world-views, would have had far less trouble with such an idea, that in fact contemplation operated this way, that it was possible to flee the world, and that privilege was, as with the Greeks, simply a matter of course, whereas what we as readers of the *Arcades* are perceiving is that in fact philosophy is at the heart of mechanism, its pivot point and final controller. At the same time, we too are on this continuum and subject to the evolution of these forces, the citation leading us to their consideration but also being part of mechanized book culture, part of a very determinate materiality, finally no more nor less than another passage in the arcade.

Marginalization and gender

Note that as much as the insignificant detail comes in for high praise, as much as the *marginal* is pursued, theorized, and presented as a goal for experience, Benjamin consistently reverts to the relatively standard pantheon of white men for his most profound insights and praise. This tendency infuses the *Arcades*, though it’s possible to also note two main counter-tendencies: (1) many times the sources of his citations, citations that he claims are the *most important* part of the work, are virtually unknown and unrecognizable and can be considered truly marginal, cultural detritus in some cases (though the authors are essentially *never* women); moreover, aspects of citation itself and

Benjamin's particular problematizing of what we could say is the discourse of empire, as well as aspects of his embrace of the marginal, are things that we can usefully bring forward into a critique of the contemporary moment. (Even so I don't think it's clear whether this opposition is, for instance, phallogocentric, or is in fact a more substantial critique.) (2) There is certainly a strong element of gender fluidity in the flaneur or dandy, and in some key passages such as H1,1 central figures that one would assume either Benjamin identifies with or who are clearly incarnations of the flaneur are women. There is a structural gender indeterminateness in Benjamin's work, and if we extend Benjamin's thinking to a critique of technology at its foundations, then we can set up a relationship between gender and technology in this way.

Idleness does not exist

As much as the idleness convolute proposes to be about this existent thing "idleness," with its various incarnations in leisure and indolence, Benjamin immediately obviates this existence by illustrating how the work ethic of bourgeois society has excluded idleness. The first overt statement of this exclusion is via the citation in m1,3, where Sainte-Beuve describe how "private life," "conversation," "happiness" have disappeared "now that everyone here has a trade." Then Marx is cited, with the "victory of industry over a heroic indolence." Then Baudelaire is cited with the inversion of the "via contemplativa" into the "via contemptiva." Then in m1a,3 "immediate experience," which in many respects is true knowledge for Benjamin, is both described as the true experience of the idler and then shown as having succumbed to "work experience" such that idleness becomes a "force field lost to humanity" (m1a,4). Thus for a variety of reasons idleness does not exist, or does so only as part of history, as something that can be cited. Similar to contemporary discussions of affective labor, industry and work have permeated every facet of human life, from the physical to the emotional.

mla,4

There's a "force field" that has been created by immediate experience, one that has been lost but replaced by a new "field of force" related to work experience, or planning. Thus the new force field assumes the shape of the old, but for contrary purposes. We see the loss of private life, of contemplation, idleness, and its associated individuality (even as this individuality contradicts the impersonal surface nature of the citation), in preference for planning on a mass scale, one that rejects individual experience. The mass scale is work experience and thus mass industry, sales, and the stock exchange, such that old world and individually based governmentality as might be expressed through the work of Machiavelli or Richelieu has a very different import, where those forces are re-routed from feudal society into forces of the mass market and not much more. This passage makes clear the role of idleness in consumer society, how Benjamin handles its historic role as countervailing force to the market (it's in fact a force that plays the market). And we can expect that a similar dynamic is at work in talk of "immediate experience," leisure, and so on (but this was all clear in the first passage of the convolute).

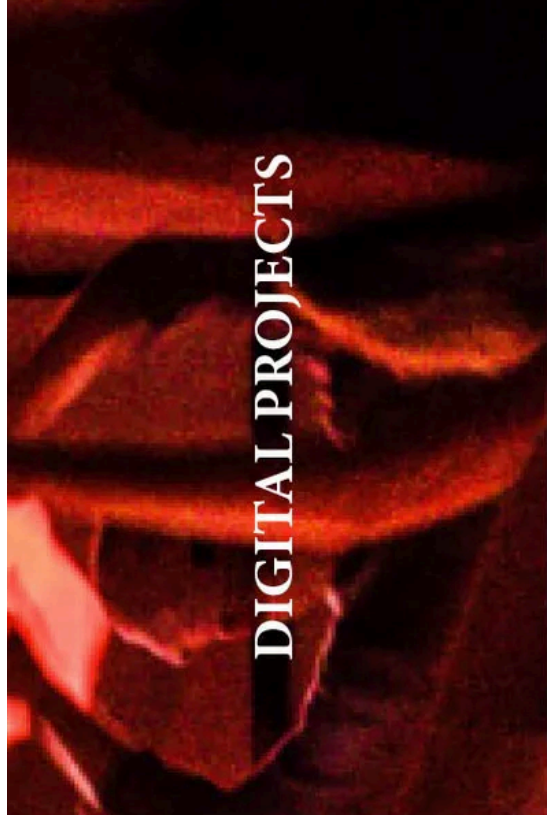
mla,5 (War)

A completely extraordinary passage, since "immediate experience" and idleness are traced back to their "unsurpassed prefiguration" in the experience of war. The trajectory for experiences of idleness is from war to, in the nineteenth century, adventure, to early-twentieth-century fate, or total experience, which like war is "fatal from the outset." War as the basic nature of reality echoes the Futurists and fits with the overall materialism of the *Arcades*, though war as itself idleness is unexpected and seems like it would correlate instead with work experience. Here's there's a kind of reversal of earlier views such that work or long experience is evaluated more positively, since it would now be the opposite of war. However, we could also say that "total experience" might be

conceived as the overlap of work experience and immediate experience, such that as in m1a,6 there is a merger of the two in the identification through empathy—so important for the flaneur—with exchange value, which is probably a key contemporary experience beyond what Benjamin might have dreamed in his most flaneurial moments. The discussion of how war and total human experience coincide is taken up by Paul Virilio in his book *Total War*.

m2,1, pt. 1 (Trace)

Yet another extraordinary passage. The trace inhabits the same line of progression as m1a,5: war—adventure—fate/total experience, but seems to be a further advance, a pulling back from the total to the power of partial experience. But as with m1a,6 we are engaged with how, as footnote 5 states, tradition can be translated into the language of shock, or how “there comes into play the peculiar configuration by dint of which long experience appears translated into the language of immediate experience.” This is where the trace leads, or, that is, this experience is that of following the trace, as if on a hunt. This experience incorporates both that of the worker and that of the idler, such that with this passage idleness is defined as a component of work, as containing it. That said, this is an attenuated version of work, or of work as we’ve known it, so that this version of experience appears to have “no sequence and no system.” In fact it is a “product of chance” and has an “essential interminability.”



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Many presses will be constructed entirely around digital-only projects grounded in the digital humanities, and this innovate framework is quite specifically what NP bring to the university press publishing environment overall. In many respects the digital can be said to be without structure, always more than any of its given appearances. NP thus generates a level of support for modalities of the digital that constitutively tracks what the digital itself actually is. By forming new presses in the post-internet economy, NP is able to innovate the new business models and operational frameworks that make the most sense going forward. Again, these projects will structure an entire press. NP in this way develops a knowledge-base in digital humanities production that not only provides but innovates peer review and works from project launch through archiving.

NP16

In 1903, in Paris, Emile Tardieu brought out a book entitled *L'Ennui*, in which all human activity is shown to be a vain attempt to escape from boredom, but in which, at the same time, everything that was, is, and will be appears as the inexhaustible nourishment of that feeling. To hear this, you might suppose the work to be a mighty monument of literature—a monument *aere perennius* in honor of the *taedium vitae* of the Romans. But it is only the self-satisfied shabby scholarship of a new Homais, who reduces all greatness, the heroism of heroes and the asceticism of saints, to documents of his own spiritually barren, petty-bourgeois discontent. [D1,5]

This is our text, no? It's pulled from the midst of the convolute, the file, the letter in the *Arcades* entitled “[Boredom, Eternal Return]” but pulled, extracted not any differently than pulling absolutely any other piece of text from the *Arcades* might be, not in any way different from the *Arcades* pulling text from Parisian or world history. We are constantly in a state of permission, even as we are in equal parts in a state of impossibility and incompleteness, inhospitality. You may do or say anything you like, certainly that is true. But only accept as well your own performance of wholeness or fullness, perhaps of whiteness. The *Arcades* is a demand to stay on that boundary, to situate oneself there, a certain location in space-time. The appearance of language in the mode of analysis, a science, scholarship, is equally as much part and parcel of this demand. We interrogate each and every form language happens to take and invariably end up, if we can hold on to it, “here.”

D1,5 opens with bibliographic data in sentence form, year, place of publication, author, and title. This information appears discursively, not in its normal, standardized, and atomized format, for example, “Emile Tardieu, *L'Ennui* (Paris, 1903).” There's an issue of the appearance, the look, the use of the bibliographic document, the documentation of bibliographic information. Its informational content has been transposed, translated into narrative, it takes on an alternate appearance, its boring informational format “escapes into” another modality, to be seen otherwise, in

this instance that of commentary or Benjamin's own voice, even as that voice references or sites two versions, an appearance and reality, of Tardieu's text. There's a linguistic phantasmagoria in front of us, extending all the way and perhaps particularly to the resonance of "Tardieu" (containing the French for "late") and "taedium" further on in the passage.

I'll come back to this reappearance but first I want to point out that the linchpin of this first clause is the action of "bringing out", which in Google translate comes through as "published" and might literally be said to mean "let materialize." I want to keep these different pathways for interpretation in suspension here, especially the version of this interpretation that invokes publishing in the context of NP, but we should note that whether we think here of "bringing out," "publishing," or "letting materialize," what we should infer is that this act is an instance of the "human activity" in the second clause. Writing and publishing are, like anything else, human activities and hence "vain attempt[s] to escape from boredom." This is the very clearly implied point.

Tardieu appears to say that all "human activity" is an ineffective counterforce to a generalized affective state described as "boredom," which Benjamin in fact associates in adjacent passages with the weather, or a communally experienced external realm in nature (as opposed to internal affective states) and Sisyphean mechanical reproduction of work itself (see D2a,4), a cultural boredom produced by ubiquitous labor. Human activity is defined by repetition at the same time as it also returns again and again to an attempt to escape the resulting thoroughgoing milieu or atmosphere of boredom, an atmosphere that finally takes on the appearance of both our natural internal state and the state of external nature. Again these two are both mechanically reproduced, artifacts and extensions of technology. Moreover, part of the humor of this passage derives from Tardieu's book title, since just as he is apparently pointing out humanity's failure to escape boredom, if we see his act of writing and publishing as another among these human actions, clearly he himself ends up right back at boredom in his own book title, that is, an ineffective attempt at escape yet again.

What we have here as well in addition to this look at the fugitivity of all humanity, of human action being the human action to evade the deadly boring repetition of the machine, which nevertheless defines our affective makeup, what we have here is the compounding of this state of affairs by the idea that those very repeated attempts at evasion themselves “nourish,” “inexhaustibly,” the boredom from which they flee. All “human” action in the past, all human action now, and all human action hence, transhistorical as it is and even exactly as the *Arcades* itself revels in it, will produce what must also be perceived as precisely the non-human, death, the repetitions inherent in work, in the slavery of work as capitalist production, infusing even and especially our perception of the natural or outside world, the weather. “Escape” is containment all over again: the endpoint of our release from work and the rock rolling down is precisely our rolling the rock back up again. The weather, our perception of it, that boredom, is the cipher for the Sisyphean affective state or economy.

And part of what the passage is saying is that to hear—Benjamin keeping his focus on the sensorium, on “feeling” and affect, the sense of hearing—these thematics come to the fore one might think Tardieu’s book a great work, a truly objective assessment, and boredom in particular a grand theme, an organizing discourse. Indeed such a grand thematics might put *L’Ennui* firmly in the line of what we perceive as the great works deriving from ancient Rome (Italy appears right away in the following passage D1,6). One might imagine all this, not exactly from reading Tardieu’s book but apparently simply hearing about it, in conversation most likely. One imagines the book is a masterpiece, and it is such because it both recuperates ancient Rome through an interpretation of the *taedium vitae* and proves its contemporary relevance, it cites a feeling, as such is a masterful display of scholarship, of science. And it does so with a material self-consciousness even of its own status as an action that futilely attempts to evade ennui. All of this, one imagines, places Tardieu’s work in line with what the *Arcades* itself is doing (witness for starters the very next passage, D1,6, an illustration of the recuperation from Italy of

the architectural structure of the arcades as a defense against the weather, by which at this point in the convolute we understand as ennuï). We see here, what is really the method of every passage of the *Arcades*, Benjamin incorporating into the text a self-assessment of his own project.

And we find here as well the implosion of that assessment. Benjamin here performs failing on his own terms, according to his own criteria of accomplishment. Of course Tardieu is the charlatan, a mere literary figure, Homais, from *Madame Bovary*, whose intellectual depth is no more than a front for base aspirations and a lack of inner substance. But the terms of Homais's failure, of Tardieu's, happen to emerge from, just as Tardieu's success did, the critique of the *Arcades*, even to this very day. Benjamin here cites both the success and failure of his own project, knowing that the *Arcades* was an imaginary version of scholarship according to which he would be judged, perhaps that a lack of reading would be the ground of his success. The lack of reading and reliance on hearing is equated with the imagination his work requires. Sound waves in air become the durable, the *aere perennius* (perennial, durable, timeless air), what paradoxically makes the transhistorical connection, that inexhaustable (unerschöpfliche) "weather," finally a type of materially based aura of the sheen of shiny brass.

But again the failure is brought to us in terms of "smug, self-satisfaction." The condemnation is that the work refers only to itself, perhaps what Stanley Cavell refers to as "incessant self-mirroring" ("Remains to Be Seen," *Artforum*, April 2000). And we can agree. We can certainly agree on a number of levels of reflexivity in the *Arcades*, but that reflexivity is always already couched in and as citation, the outward reference, the other writer, the other time and place, the other idea. And we can agree as well that as soon as we begin dealing with the *Arcades* as a citational work, it begins to unfold as something precisely personal, referring only (it seems) to the way it itself is arranging information it presents. The very form of the *Arcades* is the form of the self vis a vis the other, the immaterial imagination vis a vis any sort of material objectivity or object, the present of the text before us vis a vis the past of the

quoted texts, which often themselves quote additional layers of past texts. The *Arcades* is a radical questioning of the self at the level of its realization through language and text, showing how it can't possibly be itself.

And of course in its role as a "history" the fragmentary *Arcades* will be attacked as "shabby scholarship," even as it deconstructs everything we might understand by the term "scholarship," and of course "study," scholia. And the scholar, that font of objective analysis, is converted to a literary figure, a figment of imagination that itself must be read, in this case an apothecary, a supplier of drugs reminiscent of Benjamin's hashish and the ubiquitous references to the drug-induced delirium of the flaneur. Such that rather than a new monument to the human spirit, the Tardieu, Benjamin, it hardly matters whom we pick, in fact reduces greatness, or we might again say aura, that special quality of the hero we perceive as "heroism." The work destroys that special quality of saints that makes them saints, the asceticism, precisely their self-abnegation, precisely their citational being, which Benjamin will have been practicing all along. In the end, there is no citation, no other, in this case termed paradoxically a mere "document" (reminding one of the the incessant, ubiquitous, and stunningly boring, characterization of the *Arcades* as a mere collection of notes), and I say this is a paradox since in the document we will understand something along the lines of scientific or legal evidence, objectivity, the external, information pure and simple. The bottoming out of the project into spiritual barrenness, into an idea that it actually doesn't refer to anything except perhaps the writer himself, that it doesn't refer to anything except a meaningless attempt at status, a mediocre economic leg-up, I'm not sure how else the disdainful judgment the *Arcades* has suffered overall could be contemplated, or what else a critique could entail.

But again the more or less objective term "document" brings the passage full circle, wrapping it around to its bibliographic opening. It's this, plus its closing "petty bourgeois discontent," which is simply another way of saying "ennui." We open and close then, with the documentation of ennui, with the "vanity" of all

human action finding its echo in the vain Homais, the fictional and nonfictional feeding into each other, “nourishing” each other, holding themselves in front of each other to create a timeless air of referentiality, again a *taedium vitae*.

m2,1, pt. 2 (Object of study)

Here Benjamin adds in to the collection of experiences the idea that while idleness and work combine to make up total experience, itself based in war, this combination can be characterized as an act of study, the “prototype” for the whole constellation. And the object of study? “The fundamentally unfinishable collection of things worth knowing” that we can flatly say must be a reference to the *Arcades* itself. This is a point at which we can characterize our own reading of this book as accessing, through a kind of scholarship, experiences of work and idleness that are grounded in physical combat, violence, and slaughter, a womb-like identity and nation-forming merger with technology. Here our idleness, so to speak, can represent to us a mirroring that is going on with the *Arcades* where the arcades form the object of study for Benjamin, though at another level their form and function also characterize his subjective makeup; Benjamin then creates the text of his book, the *Arcades*, which as pure text then becomes for us as readers our object of study, immersed within our own version of total experience, and, as the text relates, it is a book that at another level of form and function characterizes our own subjective makeup. The material “text” of the nineteenth century arcades always already constitutes how we comprehend our own subjectivity, and at these various levels of crossing from text to material, past to present, object to subject, we maintain our status both as workers and dreamers.

Gradations of idleness and experience

The idleness convolute seems in each passage to detail the gradations of idleness in any given experience, with elements of work

and idleness in each. Thus m2a,2 talks about how idleness can be seen as a work-preparedness required for reading news or night-life, or, that is, two social institutions where idleness forms an integral part of their functioning. Perhaps we could never see the flaneur as part of any institution, but here that is exactly what is going on, even if at a very abstract level. The next passage, m2a,3, illustrates how idleness in fact works to produce the news, with “waiting around” that finally produces informational content, as well as photographs. The “get ready” and “shoot” paralleling the intervalic hunting done by the student, the reading practices Benjamin himself engaged in while constructing the *Arcades*.

m2a,5 accentuates the theme of how one experience may appear to be the same as a different experience to an “outsider,” or how work experience may appear to be immediate experience, when it really isn’t. The question here is what distinguishes the two, with the passage picking up from m2a,3 and saying that work or long experience has “continuity, a sequence,” like “get ready” being followed by “shoot” in the creation of news. Here however this continuity forms a substrate out of which immediate experience arises, giving the appearance that something like idleness is just that, and not something that in fact has “behind” it a whole series of events that are work-related (take that to the boss!). Seen closely and for what they are, there is a transparency of work into idleness and vice versa, both relying on the same material on which to base experience. All this accounts for the disappearance of idleness into work in bourgeois society.

m2a,5

This passage exhibits the construction of leisure through the “matrices” of “socially important types of behavior,” which we might see as work experience: religious contemplation and court life (or governmental representation). (We could invoke here Burke’s “terministic screens.”) Finally the work of the poet, of literature, of language is situated in this same matrix, serving to reinforce power structures within which leisure plays a part. The

poet experiences leisure in this context alone. He is at the mercy of the court. Thus to distinguish idleness or leisure here is to place it in relation to these alternate “force fields” that might otherwise seem, or announce themselves as, completely separate. It is from here that we move toward bourgeois society, where idleness replaces leisure for the poet and becomes almost a matter of subtle appearances, though we can assume it maintains the same relational function vis a vis larger social forces. Note here as well that this evolution of leisure into idleness is immediately picked up in m3,1, where rather than do something like openly play a role in the church or at court, idleness, or the poet as incarnation of idleness, looks to sever any sort of tie to work experience, to bury that particular substrate entirely, placing a weighty accent on immediate experience (to refer back to the language of m2a,4). And here for Benjamin this separation extends to a separation from the labor process as a whole, producing an almost pure idleness, though this is a situation as mentioned in m1,1 where we perhaps revert to a primitive “denigration of the tradesman” or “business affairs” overall, a bias which was shown to be part of the etymological constitution of language itself.

m3,2, pt. 1 (Fore-history)

Enter onto the stage of the progress of the text, argument, and illustration, the citation of m3,2. It reads like an intertextual epigraph but it does a couple very obvious things: it picks up the idea of how historical constructs of experience (both work and immediate) assume different forms over time, seeming to affirm that idea, but it also puts forward a very clear notion of long experience, associated with work but also tied to ideas of tradition. The following passage, m3,3, picks up the notion of the “shattering of long experience” so it’s clear there’s a certain critique of the citation going on, but in many ways sections previous to this citation seem to have been already unpacking issues this citation raises (and it’s hard to see how it would be placed in the convolute on idleness, since that isn’t mentioned at all): every word can be

seen to pick up a theme from what has already been discussed: “religion” picks up ideas of the soul from m1,1 and from m2a,5; “metaphysical” does something similar, here more obviously including the idea of the poet from m2a,5 (and the title of Dilthey’s book refers to poetry); “historical” could be said to access the idea of the transformation of leisure into idleness that happens for instance with the move from feudalism to bourgeois society; then we have a peculiar exercise in temporal recursivity, which suits what Benjamin has been referring to, the “last” analysis being a “preparation” “derived” “from the . . . past,” all of which is a “representation”; and of course this all picks up the discussion of “experience”, but at this point in our reading of the convolute we’d notice right away that the multiple definitions of this word that have been used, work or long experience versus immediate experience, are not present in the citation (and, again, the title of Dilthey’s book refers to experience). Again the citation reads as if Benjamin has been thoroughly unpacking it, proving its relevance and veracity, all along, with each passage in the convolute. Think back to convolute N where Benjamin writes: “Say something about the method of composition itself: how everything one is thinking at a specific moment in time must at all costs be incorporated into the project at hand.” Again he writes “Assume that the intensity of the project is thereby attested, or that one’s thoughts, from the very beginning, bear this project within them as their telos.” What is happening in this passage is that the citation appears to “bear within it” the previous discussion such that it’s hard to give one or the other, citation or commentary, temporal priority, such that that distinction becomes as amorphous, subtle, culturally determined, and perhaps nearly pointless as the distinction between, among other things, leisure and idleness, or work experience and immediate experience.

m3,2, pt. 2 (After-history)

The citation falls into the discussion not just based on what preceded it in the convolute, or what it might be seen to

paradoxically prepare for (to pick up the meaning of the citation itself), but what comes after or follows it, in this case a discussion or critique of “long experience” and the particular way in which it is “shattered,” or how its meaning loses “social importance,” to carry over an idea from m2a,5. Now, is the citation referring to long experience, in other words tradition, when it talks about these “great experiences of the past”? Contrary to the way it folds into the thematics at play in the convolute, this does not seem clear cut, though certainly we could see a historian like Dilthey, contemporary to Benjamin, coming in for a criticism like the one seemingly implied, where “great experiences” is used to mean only “long experiences” and thus to build a framework of ideas that has been “shattered” by what is taking place, at least according to Horkheimer in this passage. In any case, to stay with m3,2, we can look at how the confusion here might be quite pertinent. In question, as it has been all along, the meaning of “experience” and the difficulty of distinguishing between what is work and what is its opposite, idleness. That we are not able to tell if this citation refers to long/work experience or not is perhaps the key way in which the citation folds into the overall argument, the way in which it “presents” us with our subject matter. The meaning of experience is a “certitude” whose meaning and place in society falters with the advent of bourgeois culture. Does the quote express this idea, or not? Is it impossible to tell? Does that question have any relevance, does it miss the point? Again we can note that at this level, different from what we’ve already mentioned, the citation again does the work of Benjamin’s argument in such a way that it places itself in the position of a singularly prominent or persuasive voice in the exhibition of that argument, this time more abstract.

m3,2, pt. 3 (Self-referentiality)

Let’s point out that this citation operates on yet another level, much like other citations in Benjamin, where it effectively describes the nature of citation itself, how citation is operating in

the *Arcades*. As a whole the *Arcades* attempts to be encyclopedic, a “magic encyclopedia” is an idea that comes up often, so that when we read “all religious, metaphysical, historical ideas” we immediately think of the book in our hands. To the degree that this book is about citation, and as we can see from things like convolute N it is radically so, then citation is what we take these first few words of the passage to refer to. So that “in the last analysis” (which I think we might be at in our analysis of this citation?), this citation defines citation as a “preparation,” but one that is derivative of what has happened in the past, these “great experiences.” In this passage a preparation is equated with a re-presentation. I’m not quite sure what we might be preparing for, but it’s clear that “all” of history, “all” ideas are preparational, perhaps in just the way leisure seems to be preparation for idleness, or long experience a preparation for immediate experience. In any case we can watch here how the analysis, the self-interrogation, of citation seems to work its way out of and then back into the overall structure of ideas and meanings already at play (perhaps idle) in the convolute. The nature of history is that it is citational, so that it makes sense to have thinking about the nature of citation be a thinking about the nature of history. Relevant to all of this is N7a,1: “every dialectically presented historical circumstance polarizes itself and becomes a force field in which the confrontation between its fore-history and after-history is played out.”

m3,2, pt. 4 (Reading)

What does a citation like m3,2 say about reading? It’s true that, as my own writing here indicates, I am in the midst of reading this citation, of parsing out its symbolic levels, parsing out its allegory—and finally the citation is presentational in the same way as allegory. We arrive at that idea of language, where it functions as a gate through which passes or through which we pass into an experience. The *Arcades* is experiential, a living text in exactly this way. Citational data lead to and are this experience, an immediate experience, an experience of study, the concept and foundation

of the student. The idea of student may take on many meanings, but in this specific sense we as readers are students, students of reading itself, made by and participating in this attentive and linguistic act that defines us, and we share this specific status with Benjamin himself, student of history and specifically of the history of and created by the arcades.

m2,1 (Reading and writing)

We can also reference m2,1 for a vision of the convergence of reading and writing, an idea of study and of interpretation, in following the “trace,” but like this writing is intended to do, in many ways wander through issues raised by the *Arcades* itself, a wandering through that looks to participate in the study of the nineteenth century enacted by Benjamin, which is a mode of reading. Thus this writing reads and writes Benjamin in a manner that Benjamin reads, writes, re-enacts, or creates history, through language but through a mimetic or citational relationship to the crux of what is being read. Thus the reading experience is the following of a “trace” in the creation of immediate experience as we’ve been discussing it. It is a participation in idleness to this degree, but it is interfused with and almost indistinguishable from work or work experience, which is a giving heed to “a great many things,” tracking the manner in which a citation or passage operates in the way one tracks an animal through the woods. “In this way . . . long experience appears translated into the language of immediate experience.” In this framework, reading and writing have, as I quoted earlier, “no sequence and no system,” are a “produce of chance,” and have about them an “essential interminability,” are a “fundamentally unfinishable collection.” Finally, this thematic is repeated in m2a,1 with “Student and hunter. The text is a forest in which the reader is hunter.”

NP17 (Punctuational return)

I want to come back to the “human activity” of publishing as a futile but inescapable attempt to evade ennui, but I want to detour through the consideration of an absence in the English edition of the *Arcades*. The German of D1,5 has the parenthetical “(vor sich zu haben)” as a central moment, in fact located at or near its center, in the passage. Translated literally this means “to have before you,” though in context Google translate provides “in front of itself,” and “to be seen.” The English edition deletes the parenthetical phrase altogether and does not indicate this additional level of referentiality anywhere else in the passage. It is completely elided.

One might sympathize with this editorial decision. The self-referentiality of the passage is already abundantly in evidence and the parenthetical itself seems to interrupt the flow of sense, adding a seemingly discontinuous perspectival shift. But indeed, as I’ve tried to show in other posts, Benjamin’s use of small asides like this, especially his use of punctuation, is often the source of insight. For what this parenthetical offers is an additional pocket of referentiality that works to crucially structure the passage overall. It may be described as, in many ways, a “door of no return” (to quote Dionne Brand), since we can see this node of meaning, and particularly the following colon, as a falling out of/into time between at its left the (additionally) tautological “monumental monument” (gewaltiges Literaturdenkmal), and at its right, later in the time of reading and sooner in historical time, the self-cancelling “durable air” (aere perennius) or “lifeless life” (taedium vitae). The center of this unfolding locus of meaning has been absented in the English edition, the retina has been removed. But it is here, in that linguistic material we indeed hold in front of us, first and foremost as the book of the *Arcades*, that we as readers are anticipated by Benjamin and embody our own presentness in thinking. We inhabit then a graphicness that needs or can have no translation, a materiality of thinking at its most immediate, where we can neither go in, pass through, or return, since it is our

own seeing or center of sight. We suffer being here, we suffer sight as seeing only ourselves, the colon's two darkened eyes (edited to a dash in the English) again tracing an echo of only themselves and an absence between. (Benjamin elsewhere uses the colon as a spatiotemporal divider, or grating. See the opening of the *Fashion convolute*.)

Thus the parentheses open an aside, an appendage, that is in fact central, an operative *mis en abyme* in the passage that positions its other elements and comments on the physicality of (non-physical) reading and the hand-held book form. In Tardieu's case he arrives both early and late, since his book was only ever imaginary in the first place, even though its failure will have created the same, if not a better, effect as any success. Because Tardieu's book is only imaginary, we "have" precisely nothing, air, yet because of the intractable nature of our analysis that's all we ever "have," which airiness itself defines its timelessness and, in the end, monumentality. The parenthetical here is a very specific reach, occurring between the past and present, into the presentness of the affect of the reading subject, the plural pronomial "sich" ("you," or "themselves"). A reach into, a shaking of the hand holding the book and implied by "to have." This then is the (dis)embodied reading of the *Arcades*, such is Benjamin's craft, his work, the work of these passages (*Das Passagen-Werk*), of language itself. To walk in to this other incarnation. NP can only attend, wait.

(NB: this section is based on a mistake, since the parenthetical phrase was in fact introduced by the German editors, apparently as an aid to clarity. But there still seems to be something of value to this passage, not least a potential encounter with with the possibility that the German editors in fact made a positive contribution to the *Arcades*.)

m3,3 (Author(itarian)ship)

We can read in this passage the displacement of the "certitude" of the author, that "legal ownership of the means of production" that disappears with the development of technology. Here

we can see citation as a direct response to the concentration of capital, or capitalist structures where legal owners are excluded from management. As a citational writer then Benjamin steps in to an advanced form of capitalist management, but we can also note that the loss the “legal owners,” or traditional authors, undergo results in their becoming “socially useless” or in effect idlers, entering back into the work/idleness dialectic on the other side. Even so, the evolution of these various certitudes, juridical, authorial, takes on immense significance in the modern appearance of the “authoritarian” state, which, according to Horkheimer here, seems to step in to fill the power vacuum left behind by capital. That said, we once again note that the theorization of authoritarianism announces itself as citational, particularly with the many ellipses, giving the impression of Benjamin chopping up Horkheimer’s text for his own purposes, displacing the authorial certitude of the very theorization of the displacement of certitude, not only thrusting Horkheimer into the position of idler but by extension problematizing this theory of the development of authoritarianism, which to the extent that it blames developments such as the loss of certitudes like authorship for repressive government runs contrary to the potential of the citational method by which the *Arcades* is operating. Benjamin seems clearly to be interested in the “shattering of long experience” with which this passage opens, but it’s the way in which it leads to the manifestation of the flash of “immediate experience” that seems compelling. One point of this passage then is to exhibit how these forces can be not only variously interpreted, but also used for very real and disagreeable ends (to say the least).

NP18 (In the Wake, 1)

I want to more specifically begin to align the way the affective state of boredom or ennui presents itself in D1,5 of the *Arcades* with the presentation of the “wake” in Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke, 2016). The intent here is to intersect what must or might be a universal experience of

“blackness” insofar as “all thought is Black thought” (quoted in Sharpe 11) and what we might call an actual structure wherein the multitude of study takes place, in a cultural memory of the present, in a hauntology, to intersect that and the violent and foundational re-inscription of governmentality and the institution precisely within study. When we study we form institutions and when we form institutions or gatherings we form ongoing modes of study.

I’ll take a brief moment here to say that a reading group is just commencing, in some ways through *Counterpath*, for Sharpe’s book. Four sessions, one for each chapter, are scheduled in a lead-up to a visit by Sharpe to Denver to discuss the book. There is an open invitation to the group. A multitude takes shape. We will necessarily re-invent or assess study on our own terms, and this seemingly according to the parameters of this text will be Black Study, at the very least in that we won’t avoid saying we’re studying blackness. Boredom or ennui, as dissatisfaction, is central to our study but I think only in the same way as they are central to Sharpe’s project. Both to me seem motivated by the clearest expression of “interest” (boredom’s antagonist) I can think of. I expect to redefine both study and the institution as a result of this group project.

Sharpe iteratively approaches her definition of “wake” in the first chapter. We can intellectualize or allegorize the wake as much as we like, as Sharpe herself does, but the book embodies, through Sharpe’s personal stories of the painful loss of multiple family members to the effects of racial discrimination, an unavoidable insistence that the present is occupied by the “unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery.” This is the physical, life-defining and literally life-ending experience that slavery has left in its wake. That is the primary definition of wake. No matter what we say or theorize, the book holds before us that durable truth.

But that truth gains or recuperates its resonance through study and by mapping its various incarnations, which Sharpe participates in or invokes through her own efforts, creating a tradition or

alternate wake of not only black study but modalities of communication that work to reinvent discourse itself, particularly where that discourse is oppressive. She writes:

for Black academics to produce legible work in the academy often means adhering to research methods that are “drafted into the service of a larger destructive force” (Saunders 2008a, 67), thereby doing violence to our own capacities to read, think, and imagine otherwise. (13)

What Sharpe calls “wake work” is to negotiate this double bind of instantiating resistance within academic norms. Insofar as this work is study, and particularly the potentially self-cancelling term “black study,” we wonder how effective it might be. And we do wonder, hypothesize, try to imagine, returning to this difficult aporia, but compelled to return by the steady drumbeat of deaths happening before us, within reach, in front of the eyes, within the heart of the author. Again our experience is this experience that will not be denied and that forms the armature of the book, Sharpe handing to us a contemporary version of that originary deprivation of slavery, around which forms the wake of her book. The book then steals us away at the outset, making us “responsible” in Nahum Chandler’s sense (“We must act as if we were responsible.”, *X* [Fordham, 2014]).

m3,4 (Laughter)

At this point in the discussion of experience, with its complexity and depth, we can only assume that Benjamin had a laugh when introducing this citation. But in fact this little snippet is a masterpiece (if we can use that term) of the form. It’s certainly comic, somewhat destabilized to that degree, since it’s a paternalistic (not to say authoritarian) bit of advice for professional journalists, workers, that states that the essence of their task is to convey within their writing an “immediate experience,” which, coincidentally (or is it?), happens to be the operative term for the product of idleness as we’ve been discussing it. Through this piece

of workplace advice we have the perfect cipher for the conjoining of the two types of experience Benjamin has been theorizing.

I imagine a faster reading might stop here, appreciating the irony, and moving to the next passage. But this is only one of the levels on which the citation operates: we can say that as much as humor is on the side of idleness, the humor of this passage is an idle thing, we know that idleness, as in the passage itself, is intimately conjoined with work, and here too, if we flip this passage over, so to speak, and take it completely seriously, in a work-like manner, it functions as a key methodological statement for the *Arcades* itself. We *can* take it seriously: the language not only picks up on discussions of “immediate experience” but also echoes, most obviously, the central idea for the *Arcades* of the “now of recognizability” in the “vivid chronicle of what is happening,” so that indeed we can read this as specific advice from Benjamin on how to achieve the primary objectives of the *Arcades* as a whole, looking for an authentic “field,” like the force fields mentioned in m1a,4, the “documentary account,” which might describe the documentary nature of the *Arcades*, and so on. The passage in many ways works as much as straightforward commentary as anything in convolute N, in this case positioning the *Arcades* as “reportage,” a kind of daily drudge, but also with the highest of aims, the literal documentation of “immediate experience.” Almost like a priceless collectible, it’s extraordinary that Benjamin could even find such a citation, as here it sits as an uncanny summary of the convolute and the larger work, but beyond that a specimen and example of Benjamin’s own ability to be a “good” “professional” “journalist” who has the “capacity for having an experience,” in this case through reading, through citation, copying, writing.

NP19 (In the Wake, 2)

Permitting another detour and another reading. This crucial permissiveness. Sharpe offers a mimetic of slavery in that the “primal” event of her book *In the Wake* is the multiple experience of

racially determined death. The book unfolds in the wake of those first pages and from that vantage point we watch it stretch to the horizon in front of us as a mirror image of a literal wake extending from the stern. We are on the slave ship.

Slavery happens in this book. Sharpe is therefore present at that primal scene, at the disaster. We are permitted to observe and one thing Sharpe and the book ask us to note, quite specifically, is the painful original tragedy of Sharpe's own absence. The first words of the book: "I wasn't there when my sister died." Sharpe seems to be processing an abandonment, an abandonment of her family. And we are given to ask what exactly she has abandoned them for?

Sharpe's inability to be present for her family, to witness, to witness the very subject matter of the book itself, is created again and again by her academic commitments, by the very study of this black death she is engaged in. She misses her sister's death because of an academic meeting, the Cultural Studies Association, where she would present a paper that "was my first attempt at the work that became this book." It goes on from there. Sharpe is "busy."

How then do we process the double bind of Sharpe's critique of academia and academic discourse, contained in passages such as:

We [Black scholars] are expected to discard, discount, disregard, jettison, abandon, and measure those ways of knowing and to enact epistemic violence that we know to be violence against other and ourselves. In other words, for Black academics to produce legible work in the academy often means adhering to research methods that are "drafted into the service of a larger destructive force" (Saunders 2008a, 67), thereby doing violence to our own capacities to read, think, and imagine otherwise. (13)

How do we process this with Sharpe's overwhelmingly obvious commitment to these same institutions, one of which, Duke University, has published *In the Wake*? This question is constitutive of NP. How indebted is Black study to these same institutions, these same discourses that, yes, are troubled by books like Sharpe's, but that certainly never fail to contain them, profit from them, dialectically absorb them, use them to advance?

If anything, the opening of the book is awash in feelings of institutional guilt and the possibility that academic blackness might just be betraying not only itself but precisely the subject to which it is devoted, getting at the truth of slavery. Sharpe in some sense presents herself as a barrier to this truth. And because these issues are so much on the surface of our reading of *In the Wake*, we ask if that guilt and, in some sense, self-incrimination, self-incarceration, is not the very transhistorical afterlife of slavery Sharpe is most concerned with. For indeed we cannot start with the “wake” (which comes after) but that is what we seem to have. The primal scene is gone, there is no primal and there is no scene. Nobody was there, even though we know everybody was, everyone who suffered that torture that lives on through us, that’s constantly torn away from us just as they were torn away from themselves, their homes, their families, for hundreds of years. We are not otherwise than in the wake, which is why Sharpe can’t be there for her sister, even as these other explanations of absence are present as well.

The guilt and betrayal of attempting to be successful in America. We read this situation into and out of statements like “this deathly repetition appears here, it is one instantiation of the wake as the conceptual frame of and for living blackness.” Since here to live blackness is precisely to abjure it, to fail in the the face of it if one is to live. Sharpe herself critiques her own education and the institutions within which she is trained as deplorably racist, where “racism proved too much.” The racism “cut through my family’s ambitions and desires. It coursed through our social and public encounters and our living room.” We have to see racism as not only a deadening force, a barrier to be overcome, but something in the “living room,” into which one is trained and finally successful. This may be racism’s final blow, then, its “cut,” “through all of our lives and deaths inside and outside.”

And here, yes, the flow of this highly trained (if humble) academically produced and published prose is itself cut by the author, interrupted, by citations and flights, fugitivities into other discursivities, in parallel perhaps to the way Sharpe’s mother “worked at joy, and she made livable moments, spaces, and places in the

midst of all that was unlivable there” (4). But we can’t miss the point that even with that momentary refuge the “disaster” remains immanent, the question remains of whether these efforts don’t resolve into making that immanence more palatable, flow more smoothly for those of good conscience. Sharpe addresses this very complexity, echoing the first words of the book:

The ongoing state-sanctioned legal and extralegal murders of Black people are normative and, for this so-called democracy, necessary; it is the ground we walk on. And that it is the ground lays out that, and perhaps how, we might begin to live in relation to this requirement for our death. What kinds of possibilities for rupture might be opened up? What happens when we proceed as if we know this, antiblackness, to be the ground on which we stand, the ground from which we attempt to speak, for instance, an “I” or a “we” who know, an “I” or a “we” who care? (7)

Sharpe is aware that her own privilege is responsible for black death, such that by extension the book *In the Wake* and our reading of it, guided by Sharpe, is itself the disaster. Alternatively, Sharpe may see the entirety of *In the Wake* as an interruption in a larger trajectory, a larger compilation of criminalization. And certainly both of these readings may be ongoing simultaneously. We don’t need to choose. To quote Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (Routledge, 1994):

One does not know if the expectation prepares the coming of the future-to-come or if it recalls the repetition of the same, of the same thing as ghost. . . . This not-knowing is not a lacuna. No progress of knowledge could saturate an opening that must have nothing to do with knowing. Nor therefore with ignorance. The opening must preserve this heterogeneity as the only chance of an affirmed or rather reaffirmed future. It is the future itself. It comes from there. The future is its memory. (44-45)

To return just briefly to the opening of the chapter, the title “The Wake” is specifically misleading, almost a “fiction” contained in language itself. But it contains this same aporia. We see the title as false because the first thing we encounter, what

this chapter tries to convey, is the disaster itself, not the wake. At the same time, again, Sharpe is always already absent, so that she truly is in the wake, leaving us finally with the realization that indeed being in the wake is overwhelmingly the first order disaster. *In the Wake* will “insist Black being” (11) into the wake, as contradictory as that statement seems given that Sharpe’s wake work is the ground of death.

m3a,1 (Allegory of traditional scholarship)

As far as an impression of fast or slow reading of the *Arcades* in the scholarly context, m3a,1 offers an allegory in that as we slow our reading down we step more and more outside of the general work ethic encoded into contemporary scholarly activity. This work ethic can be compared to the “stringent work ethic and moral doctrine of Calvinism,” placed in a “time frozen in contemplation,” whereas a slower reading that opens more into the multiple levels of experience contained in the *Arcades* becomes a version of a negative idleness, an access to the “*vita contemplativa*” but to that extent resistant to being held account of within the dominant modalities of knowledge production.

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m3a,2 (Feuilletonist)

Clearly the feuilleton is yet another cipher for the *Arcades* as a whole. Consider the Wikipedia definition of the feuilleton as a genre:

The Feuilleton is a writing genre that allows for much journalistic freedom as far as its content, composition and style are concerned; the text is hybrid which means that it makes use of different genre structures, both journalistic and literary. The characteristic of a column is also the lack of the group of fixed features in strong structural relation. . . . The tone of its writing is usually reflexive, humorous, ironic and above all very subjective in drawing conclusions, assessments and comments on a particular subject. Unlike other common journalistic genres, the feuilleton style is very close to literary. Its characteristic feature is lightness and wit evidenced by wordplay, parody, paradox and humorous hyperboles. The vocabulary is usually not neutral, and strongly emotionally loaded words and phrases prevail.

Picking up from m3,4, note the journalistic mode, but this time a supplemental relation to the overriding informational purpose of the newspaper. It was a type of interlude that opened up new ranges of “immediate experience” that were in contradistinction to the “ordinary experience” of reading the news. Benjamin even outlines the subtlety of how this experience is “intravenously injected” and is, as a “sensation,” in fact “poison.” That said, it is an alternate experience of the overwhelmingly mundane city, which thereby has a “heightened need for immediate experiences.” Thus the *Arcades* offers through its supplementary passages a kind of alternate city characterized by reading experiences that bring life back to something more recognizably life-like. We can see clearly however that the process is anything but straightforward, given the existence of the feuilleton within the newspaper itself, how it owes its existence to such a framework, and given that the feuilletonist is at heart a “technician” called up for not much more than to oil the machine of capital (cf. first passage of *One-Way Street*).

NP20 (A cruelty of study)

In the essay “Cruel Optimism,” Lauren Berlant quotes Marx. Berlant’s full citation, from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, is as follows:

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.,—in short, when it is used by us. . . . In the place of all physical and mental senses there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of all these senses, into the sense of having. The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outer world. . . . The abolition of private property is therefore the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, human. The eye has become a human eye, just as its object has become a social, human object—an object made by man for man. The senses have therefore become directly in their practice theoreticians. They relate themselves to the thing for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an objective human relation to itself and to man, [in practice I can relate myself to a thing humanly only if the thing relates itself humanly to the human being] and vice versa. Need or enjoyment have consequently lost its egotistical nature, and nature has lost its mere utility by use becoming human use.

To start by zeroing in on the first sentence:

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.,—in short, when it is used by us. . .

Berlant’s essay is concerned with the “object of desire,” which in fact only exists as a form of subjectivity, or a keeping on living on (rather than of a “self”). That object, even as it is defined by Berlant as a “cluster of promises,” still maintains its status as “object.” Berlant’s essay, the idea of “cruel optimism,” certainly

problematizes the object position as an affective purchase point, a foothold, in the really existing outside world, but there is still something into which those promises are “embedded.” Our private world of optimism takes shape around “a thing, an institution, a text, a norm, a bunch of cells, smells, a good idea,” such that we enter an optimistic relation, no matter how complicated, to that externality. Thus that object of desire is possessed, “eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.,” that object of desire circulates for us as capital value. In this sense, optimism, cruel or otherwise, and Berlant writes that “all attachments are optimistic,” is “stupid and one-sided.” The capital relation suffuses Berlant’s optimistic relation.

Berlant’s citation from Marx in fact elides the following (second) sentence from the original:

Although private property itself again conceives all these direct realizations of possession only as means of life, and the life which they serve as means is the life of private property – labor and conversion into capital.

Thus the idea, a crucial Marxist transference of agency into material, is that even though we ourselves only experience, engage, or construct private property when we find something to be useful, in fact “private property itself,” the way private property operates, by its nature it seeks out this exact type of realization, converting to its own use value—“means of life”—those who are one-sidedly or stupidly obsessed with it. Marx displaces agency into the object itself, at least within the capitalist production workflow. Within the operations of private property, life itself takes on a certain appearance. In this context, the object of desire, the object to be possessed, is life itself, but from the standpoint of precisely what is perceived to have material use value. Here private property, “labor and conversion into capital,” is what has life, not what we perceive as a human agent.

Thus, this lengthy citation in Berlant circles around the closed circuit of capital and private property. To assess the passage is to

contemplate this particular substance of Marx's overall point, this impasse, this crux.

Berlant's first sentence after this citation begins is "The resonances of Marx's analysis of the senses. . ." And in fact the very next sentence, part of Berlant's quote, is:

In the place of all physical and mental senses there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of all these senses, into the sense of having.

I want to point out that the original English translation italicizes both instances of the word "all," and this is finally of a piece with the earlier two sentences' invocation of a certain totality of these relations, of the circuit of private property and capital. As a move toward affect theory, and toward an assessment of Marx's place in that theory, we should perhaps keep in mind how and where the "senses" come into the argument. Marx is here delineating two entirely different versions or realms of the senses, one that we are in fact experiencing, and another, ideal realm that escapes the property relation. We are most certainly not given to experience or even discuss this latter realm. We have the world of "estrangement" to deal with. What this means is that the totality of body and mind, all of what we experience on any level, functions as a version of "stupidity and one-sidedness," or within the valences of property, serving its purposes, that is to say, built specifically around a "sense" of "having."

Our optimism is that we can have. Berlant points to the complexities and failures of this fantasmatic pursuit of the (non)object, yet perhaps too exclusively from the human side. What Marx seems to be attempting to get at is the way our senses, "physical and mental," are estranged by the capital relation in every possible way, or structurally constituted by that relation. I'm not sure Berlant is taking account of the radicality of this statement. I will return to this idea.

To continue with the following sentence in the Marx citation:

The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outer world. . . .

Again Marx seems to invoke the perspective of property itself, which would have made the decision that the human “had to be reduced.” That reduction of the human, that estrangement, is according to Marx part of the larger business plan of property to obtain maximum value out of the human. Marx here indicates a scenario where property plans the total and entire subjection, the “absolute poverty” of the human, in order to conversely obtain maximum wealth for itself. That is, if the human world can effectively be negated such that all of humanity is without question subsumed, physically and mentally, within the property relation, or “having,” which is a world in which humans are then paradoxically without, this is the point at which the true (and again paradoxically) wealth of humans is in fact handed over to the property relation. Under cover of the pursuit of property, the system of property itself, far from being owned, realizes its maximum possible gain, robbing, without the slightest notice, humanity of all of its potential. Here we in some ways approach Frank Wilderson’s notion of Black slavery, “always already void of relationality.” He writes, in *Red, White, & Black*:

But African, or more precisely Blackness, refers to an individual who is by definition always already void of relationality. Thus modernity marks the emergence of a new ontology because it is an era in which an entire race appears, people who, a priori, that is prior to the contingency of the “transgressive act” (such as losing a war or being convicted of a crime), stand as socially dead in relation to the rest of the world. (18)

He also writes that the “ontology of slavery . . . become the singular purview of the Black” (18). What Marx is delineating as the “absolute poverty” of the human certainly resonates within Wilderson’s “void of relationality,” though what we would consider is that, within the totality of the property relation, humanity in general is subsumed within this ontological void, which in fact isn’t a void but the production workflow of property itself.

Humanity could be seen as a layering of different iterations of this void, the extreme version of which, the unalloyed and

disillusioned appearance of which, settled onto, adhered to, engulfed Black Africans in the Middle Passage and chattel slavery. As part of these considerations, the idea of the guilt of the “rest of” humanity begins to surface.

The property relation as Marx here defines it defines the slave relation. The notion of zeroing in on affect alone as significant in this relation, to the exclusion of its connection to larger movements of bodies and the reverse materiality of numbers on a spreadsheet, is suspect. The cruelty of optimism becomes less and less subtle, more and more useful, in advanced post-industrial economies. But the “object” seems still to be one to possess, to forward the interests of property, an ontology of the extraction of “inner wealth” that has no perceivable limit. When we define an emotional strata of life, whether optimism, or something like boredom as it relates to idleness or study or NP, we arrive at a conflictual (to again reference Wilderson) encounter with property and estrangement.

Berlant’s citation of Marx continues:

The abolition of private property is therefore the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, human.

The trick of this sentence is precisely an artifact of a version of cruel optimism, a phenomenology of failed emancipation itself. For as we read we might find ourselves in immediate agreement that, yes, abolishing private property will lead to the freedom of the masses. Case closed, and we imaginatively sense how that meaning of the word “emancipation” comes to the fore, in an absolute sense. Private property will not have agency, will not have won the day, and all of our mental and physical senses will have been freed and no longer be slaves (and note how Marx takes up the discourse of slavery, with “abolition” and “emancipation”).

But not so fast. Marx immediately qualifies “emancipation,” rescinding his offer, so to speak, indicating that this emancipation is only such within the realm of the human as it has already been

defined by the property relation. The totalness of the void of relationality includes any version of emancipation we might dream up, since at its very core that emancipation must be keyed to the property relation, its totality, that demand of complete subjection. This emancipation. At every point in the passage Marx is getting at this systemization within which the senses, physical and mental, all of them, are grounded and find their existence. The human is precisely the non-human.

Berlant's citation of Marx continues:

The eye has become a human eye, just as its object has become a social, human object—an object made by man for man.

And there is no question here that the “human” indicates that non-human, subjected version of humanity. And here “the eye” references that ideal eye we cannot reach, some version of an eye that pre-dates the property relation, possession. That eye, standing in for all senses mental or physical, “has become” enslaved, that is to say, human. (And yes for Marx to be human means to be enslaved, to be void of relationality. To assess blackness, then, as uniquely obtaining to this void is to somewhat displace or elide its role in humanity in general.)

And here we have the “object” of those senses, very much Berlant's “object of desire,” whose “collection of promises” are by definition social and ensconced in the world as we know it, this “human” world, such that the object only ever really indicates that solipsism and repetition that is part and parcel of slavery and the property relation. The total system has the subject and object working in tandem in just this way. There was perhaps an ideal object, like there was perhaps an ideal eye, but this “has become” this other objectivity.

Berlant's citation of Marx continues:

The senses have therefore become directly in their practice theoreticians.

And again there is this “becoming,” moving from a prior world where the senses were perhaps different than they are now into the

property relation. And this new and present world of modernity has the senses, again all senses, physical and mental, “directly” bridging the gap between practice and theory, instantiating themselves in the world through a theorization. Thus here the entire notion of sensuality in fact manifests itself as theory, and this constitutes the property relation, when senses inform theoretical activity. At this point we reach the climax of the passage. To quote the following sentence:

They relate themselves to the thing for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an objective human relation to itself and to man, [in practice I can relate myself to a thing humanly only if the thing relates itself humanly to the human being] and vice versa.

Here Marx expands on how sense operates as the actual theoretician of property value. This is where senses do the work of human subjection; these are the internal workings, deep within the human, of property value. This might be called “thing theory,” or the way in which senses arrange themselves to relate to things in such a way that the property relation comes to the fore, so that the thing as property comes to dominate any thingness that would be present, so that the thing as property becomes the only version of a thing we might know. This material relationality of (compromised) human sensing is what constitutes theory.

And here Marx places the object, and this would be any given object of desire, within the context of his overall argument. Berlant’s “collection of promises” might be seen as indeed these same “objective human relations,” but here Marx indicates that they operate exclusively in the realm of the thing, with only minor valences of the human to speak of, insofar as the human is enslaved to the expansion of property value. In Marxist terms, any affect theory needs to calibrate its central role within the capitalist production process as its first-order project. Only then will the material nature of human sensation be realized. The human is the thing and the thing is the human in a self-supporting rotation whose ultimate goal is use value within the context of property expansion and capital accumulation.

The final sentence of the Marx citation in Berlant is:

Need or enjoyment have consequently lost its egotistical nature, and nature has lost its mere utility by use becoming human use.

So that now the basis of action or sensation can no longer be seen as narcissistic, related to the human “self,” but always already externalized and part of the the ongoing relation of human/thing vis a vis property and accumulation. The senses have virtually nothing to do with the person apparently doing the sensing. And Marx again refers to a type of pre-lapsarian state of nature, where things in the world were indeed in a direct use relation to people, stating that now use has “become” human in the way in which he has been discussing it, human only as such within the theorizing of the senses, the dialectic human/thing, redounding to the circuits of capital, indeed the nonhuman, “private” property.

Such might be a start of a close reading of this citation from Marx, with hints of Berlant’s argument. I want now to do some minor assessments of Berlant’s argument directly, to see how it might line up with what Marx seems to be saying and to situate an affective register that might be “useful” in the context of the operation of Benjaminian boredom and the nature of study in institutional formation. How are we supposed to relate to an institution? How are we supposed to feel? If our emancipation from the property relation feeds back into and in fact reinforces that relation, is there some form of “knowledge production” it might be sensible to embrace?

As referenced earlier, Berlant’s first sentence after the Marx citation is: “The resonances of Marx’s analysis of the senses penetrate Ashbery’s poem complexly.” This is a seemingly innocuous statement but I believe it sets up (or continues) a misreading of the Marx that seems to follow. Marx’s “analysis of the senses” is much more than simply that, and its overarching point is that in fact human senses may be more justifiably seen as “thing” senses. In fact Berlant makes no attempt to interpret the intense analysis just introduced into the argument of the essay by the citation of Marx. Berlant damagingly, to Marx’s argument and her own, that

we might understand, let alone agree on, seems to sidestep what those resonances might be. In fact, I think as we have seen, the resonances of Marx's analysis are immensely complex, so that to make the blanket statement that they penetrate Ashbery's poem "complexly" need not be said at all. Berlant's next sentence (or just a piece of it):

As Marx would predict, the "we" of this poem begins by owning what it sees and seeing what it owns, feeling nature as an impingement on its auto-referential world.

The Ashbery poem Berlant is reading in fact starts with the line "We were warned about spiders, and the occasional famine." I'm not sure how this relates to ownership or even seeing, but only to a vague force of warning in the world, which indeed may indicate an overwhelming sense of dispossession, down to an immediate tactile sting of a spider's bite and outward to the "occasional" appearance of world hunger. The world is being positioned by an institutional voice that is finally duplicated in the very "we" of self-identity. In any case, Berlant takes up Marx's "eye," which as we've discussed is nothing other than a "human" eye, meaning it operates within the matrix of the accumulation of private property. According to the Marx citation, seeing would not only be owned by what it sees, but itself enact at its deepest level the very putting into ownership of that seeing. The dissatisfaction of the "impingement" of nature, which relates to the failure of optimistic object relations brought up earlier by Berlant, in fact operates in the context of Marx's argument as a more involved "outside world" that would generate a happy agreement with its mandates of accumulation.

That is the particular interruption here, not nature (though it uses the natural world, the spider, for its own devices). Marx's description is of an indeed radically "auto-referential" world, but nature would never interrupt that state of affairs, but only reinforce it, be seen by it, possession happening both ways and being constantly advanced. We have here the prospect of Berlant misreading Marx and Ashbery at one and the same time.

The latter part of this sentence is as follows:

but, then, it [the “we”] is haunted that its knowledge is a repetition of a something it can’t quite remember, perhaps because, as subjects of productive and consumer capital, “we” were willing to have our memories rezoned by the constant tinkering required to maintain the machinery and appearance of dependable life.

The “but, then,” is crucial since it assumes that everything following wasn’t already contained in the first outline of seeing and ownership, as if this “haunting” were not part of the symbiosis of human and thing Marx refers to as impenetrably ubiquitous. Though the contrary impression is produced, there is no haunting that is not already contained in any notion of presence, there is no before and after, particularly in the sense Marx refers to of an ideal world that is finally compromised by property relations. What Berlant references is a world already compromised by commodity relations and use value that is then further compromised by our subsequent “willingness” to participate. What Berlant posits is a period, within memory, when we were not “subjects of productive and consumer capital,” and this may be the cruelest optimism of all, since it allows for a distinct impression of being within reach of extricating ourselves from that particular scenario.

The gist of Marx’s argument however is in the reverse direction, as I’ve mentioned, in many ways raising hopes of emancipation only to illustrate their thoroughgoing self-condemnation and re-systematization. Berlant thus releases us from the very radicality of Marx’s writing, cited right there in front of us.

Deadlock

What do you get from close reading? One thing that is perhaps happening is a coming to a place of a much clearer idea of how exactly Benjamin is dismantling dominant forms of scholarly, historical, or research discourse. “Wasn’t the *Arcades* written so long ago, in the 1930s, and haven’t we clearly surpassed anything that might have been said, now quite close to a century later?” I

honestly don't know. But when I pick up a recent book of scholarship I'm seeing many of the issues Benjamin seems to raise. For instance, the book *Writing of the Formless: José Lezama Lima and the End of Time* (2017), by Jaime Rodríguez Matos, and the following passage:

But it now seems that in fact modernity, and not any possible redemption or liberation from its political and economic deadlocks, is itself a mixed temporality that is constantly battling between a circular and a linear time—a linear time of alienation and a circular teleological time of redemption. The two need to be taken together, even in the very (im)possibility of such a synthesis. And this would mean that modernity is no longer the other of the revolutionary interruption of empty chronological time; rather, these are two sides of a single coin.

Now, the passage seems clear enough, and we've certainly seen variants of modern temporality treated in the *Arcades*, particularly of the more linear or traditional version. But I think we can also learn quite clearly from the *Arcades* how the concept of linear time is embedded in and perpetuated by linear discourse itself, so that we have the spectacle here of the prose speaking of a revolutionary temporal experience but all the while re-inscribing the very linear version of experience that was so deeply problematic to begin with. Language is used in Rodríguez Matos's book, and in virtually all scholarly work, informationally, linearly, non-recursively in a way that moves point to point precisely like linear time.

How could we ever absorb the subject matter the passage is in fact referring to if with every word, phrase, sentence, chapter, book, series of books, and so on, we are rehearsing over and over the non-liberation, the non-redemption of political and economic deadlock? Indeed by experiencing, through close reading, how Benjamin treats historical discourse and knowledge in the *Arcades* it becomes clear how these habits of discursivity and the communication of knowledge continue to be subjected to forces that run counter to things like the nature of modernity and so on.

Methodology

Given that the *Arcades* only reveals itself through close reading and a parsing of the various levels of meaning and implications that arise from particular passages and citations, not to mention that the book is in many respects an interrogation of the idea of methodology itself at its core, wouldn't it be advisable to allow its methodology to arise organically out of this close reading of one or perhaps two passages, following their "trace" as it seems intended to be followed (not an insignificant part of the method), going into a discussion of great detail to the point that generalities not only are approached and articulated about how Benjamin engages in historical discourse but how they allow writing on methodology to transform itself into a complementary living text, one that strives to present itself as an authentic treatment of how methodology functions, as is illuminated by the *Arcades*? This does not mean that we'd be busily mimicking Benjamin's book but that we would strive to learn from it, study it, and at the very least in all good faith avoid the pitfalls that it seems clearly to point out.

m3a,4 (Commentary is intentional)

Phantasmagoria is the intentional correlate of immediate experience. [m3a,4]

Immediate experience is here unintentional, with the intentional "version" of it being phantasmagoria, the moving images projected by lanterns in an early cinematic experience. We intentionally, and mechanically, produce the "corollary" of what is otherwise the transcendent experience of idleness and leisure. The passage here is saying something like: the leisure we find in the spectatorship of watching film is the mass produced version, echo of, mirror image of, a natural occurrence of what's being discussed as "immediate experience," even as that experience traces its roots back to a primitive version of leisure that was entirely class-based.

We can look at this passage and realize as well, and given how the *Arcades* operates it seems justified to do so, that Benjamin wanted to make this point and did so in “his own words.” Couldn’t he have found a citation that indicated as much? Perhaps, but what we’re faced with is the fact that this particular text, this statement, does not have that status. It comes to us as “commentary.” We should probably have a special understanding, which might arise from convolute N, a special status for such text in this book. One thing we could say is that, to use the language of this passage, the commentary is “intentional,” a word that in the *Trauerspiel* book indicates that something is removed from truth. So that we very much have the “correlate” of the creation of a phantasmagoria and the use of commentary, the use of text that is not sectioned off as citation, which even as it has the status of text might be seen as a more natural version of immediate experience.

Here too since this statement is made in the mode of intentional commentary, there is something of the character of the paradoxical statement “I always lie,” statements that internally dismantle their own meaning. Throughout, Benjamin seems to present this aspect of language itself, or this phenomena of language use, and this is perhaps the universal quality of language. Here we can say that pure language is nothing more than the motion toward being pure, since at any point, with any word, if we look closely we uncover both its impurity, at the same time as its purity and further impurity. Again, if anything, we can say the *Arcades* is characterized by an alternation between citation and commentary, both passage by passage and internal to many of the passages, but this distinction atrophies and is poisoned in the same manner that the distinction between leisure and idleness is, or between phantasmagoria and immediate experience.

Benjamin seems to want to question his very impulse to “say something,” which yes he sees as fully functioning behind the selection of citations, but in this way that’s permissible since the citations are internally deconstructive as much as anything else.

NP21 (Rules of formation)

In the chapter “Generalized punishment” in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault describes “five or six major rules” that were followed by disciplinary power in the eighteenth century as it moved away from inefficient direct punishment by the sovereign and toward a techno-politics of punishment, where the “whole temporal field of penal action” was reversed and

reformers thought they were giving to the power to punish an economic, effective instrument that could be made general throughout the entire social body, capable of coding all its behavior and consequently of reducing the whole diffuse domain of illegalities. (94)

What we see here are indeed rules for institutional formation, which therefore should qualify them for rules of formation of new presses, in some sense the building blocks of study itself. I’d like to take each rule in turn to speculate on how it might operate in a publishing context.

1. *The rule of minimum quantity*

In any publishing venture there will be a play of equivalencies. Foucault makes this point in terms of an equivalence of the benefit of committing a crime as it is weighed against the harm suffered in a punishment. Reality is determined by which way the balance tips. Thus discipline is effectively about nothing more than putting forward the least possible effort to get these scales to tip in its direction. In a scholarly publishing environment one strategizes the “minimum quantity” necessary to maintain an organization as such. What might this “as such” be? It will take different forms depending on what aspects of the company are being determined, whether acquisitions, production, or marketing, warehousing, sales, or operations. What we are referring to here is the idea of “enough,” insofar as we are instantiating an institutional protocol. Foucault quotes Beccaria and we can transpose some of his terms, by way of example: “For publishing to produce the effect that must be expected of it, it is enough that the benefit that it

causes exceed the detriment that the institution has derived from its absence.” The idea is that by far the most effective publishing organization need and should only and consistently exceed (not at all operate in “excess”) the condition defined by its absence or pre-existence. All this being said, perhaps the most useful sense of this rule is “never print more copies than you think you can sell,” which itself should lead to pure reliance on print-on-demand.

2. *The rule of sufficient ideality*

In any publishing project there will be multiple levels of reliance on representation itself, as opposed to actual output, to achieve impact. What we want to consider are the ways that only representation, that ideality, can be relied on in an economy of impact, as opposed to an over-investment in a product that would otherwise go unnoticed. Each press and each project will have a strategic balance between investment in the project and in the story or marketing of that project, in that project’s stated actuality and whatever might be realized. This guideline points to the need to always invest as heavily as possible in the pure representation of the project as in fact an exponentially more effective way to capitalize on the effect of that project itself. Indeed “that project itself” might be far more effective if it did not exist at all. Project realization is in some sense antithetical to the realization of the project along these lines. To paraphrase Foucault, the motive of a project is the advantage expected of it. This means that the effectiveness at the heart of the project is not the actual project, but its idea alone, its representation, “however artificial it may be.” Here the project itself is elided, except when it becomes useful as in fact a spectacle, in the same way that the “panoply of the scaffold” was actually implemented not so much to punish an individual as it was to exhibit the possibility of that punishment. Thus substance itself is converted into spectacle, or is always in that position. Thus, in presses or press projects, “what must be maximized is the representation,” “not its corporal reality.”

3. The rule of lateral effects

Here we treat the reading or experience of a project as an offense. In terms of books, the publishing organization must work toward a situation where the most intense effects either of its entire program or of single works will be on those who have experienced neither. It is “enough to make others believe” that the project exists or has been experienced, allowing a certain “centrifugal intensification of effects” to take hold. How do we theorize a project from this standpoint? From the perspective of both publisher and creator or author, we can start by transposing those roles in the role of the criminal and slave as cited by Beccaria. In this way the criminal, rather than face the death penalty, which in our model would be the purchase or perusal of a project, would be subjected to a life of slavery, which is an infinitely more effective way to create the “representation” or “lateral effect” of having produced a project at all. If death is the purchase of a book, then slavery in this context is simply the work (as we might expect) of creating the press or project, though in our case it must have no discernible outcome. In the economy of overall press effectiveness, this lack of outcome, the greater its actuality in the marketplace, is precisely what creates the strongest sense of having an outcome at all. Where an outcome is imperative, it should be maximally tenuous, whatever might be “enough” to meet the criteria of an “actual” outcome. What we are describing here then is the source of disciplinary power, the actual historically grounded inner workings of institutional formation.

4. The rule of perfect certainty

With this rule there is a slight shift or filling out of perspective in a radical acknowledgment of the actual role of “publication” in general as a process whereby the disciplinary rules of state are made public. As publishers then we take on this central role in the disciplinary regime. We become employees of the state, par excellence. Replacing or diffusing the earlier need for mystery in the consumption of daily life and comprehension of penal consequences, printing and publication assume they key

role of bringing indisputable, visual documentary evidence to the one-to-one relationship between transgression and punishment, which within capitalist production is the generator of epistemological certainty. It is primarily if not solely through publication processes that modernity can take shape, that subjection can be displaced from the body of the slave into the mind of the worker. "The laws that define the crime and lay down the penalties must be perfectly clear, 'so that each member of society may distinguish criminal actions from virtuous actions.' . . . These laws must be published, so that everyone has access to them; what is needed is not oral traditions and customs, but a written legislation which can be the 'stable monument of the social pact,' printed texts available to all." Any straightforward mission statement of a press, in particular a university press, will take account of this history, motive force, and generalized effect. The knowledge work of universities and by extension of university presses rises and falls as a functionary within this domain.

And we can parse this rule quite a bit further, given that what we have before us is nothing less than Foucault's assessment of printing and the publication process. Crucially, his following point is that the monarch disallows his power of pardon in deference to the perfection of the publication process. This possibility of pardon must be eliminated since it generates in disciplinary subjects the "coefficient of improbability" that prevents the full instantiation of modern control. An important point here is that feudal, monarchical absolute power is not discontinued or transformed beyond perception but is simply reconfigured within this dispersal into self-governance. The incontrovertible one-to-one relation between crime and punishment that arrives via the epistemological assumptions contained in the printing process is perfected by the renunciation of singular divine right, rerouting a sense of divine infallibility to the printed word, which itself assumes a one-to-one relation with an internal sense of governmental vigilance. Here the reading process is equated with visualization, and seeing itself is another form of assessment or verification of a world that falls in line with the dictates of biopower and

systematized life. One of Foucault's points here is that, through this system, the severity of medieval systems of justice, taken out on the physical body, has been transposed into this particular insistence on the perfection of contemporary life, this completely operative assumption of absolute infallible accuracy. Our vigilance is at once hyper-mediated and technologically advanced as well as beyond all imagination primitive in its violence. There is a clear trajectory here from divine gaze, to monarchical gaze, to the technology of dispersed bourgeois surveillance and the machinery of the law. Foucault writes, "Rather than imitate the old system in this way and be 'more severe, one must be more vigilant.'" The point is that the vigilance of the new system in fact takes over that exact same severity. It is not a gentle or simple wakefulness or watching over, but an utterly vicious force, and publication plays a central role.

How can a press possibly take these considerations into account in its very structure? Has NP already done so, and even if it has on its own, can it actuate this same self-awareness in presses it helps to facilitate and obtain to institutional status, community, and success? Some sort of mixture of each of these concerns will materialize in every instance, with the plan of study operating as a counterforce. Is there any sense to founding a press without a plan of study, even on simply a small scale, instituting a kind of disruptive force, making it clear that there is in fact a possibility of pardon? Gazing at the gaze of perfection implied by the written word and announcing (at least) the existence of a landscape of resistance?

But what truly is present here is the appearance of force, which is interrupted by any sense of hope in the subject. The play of representation is successful if any of idea of pardon whatsoever is removed. What is gained then is a certain type of representation that takes on a potency that is as ironclad as it is invisible, a de-instantiation whose contours align perfectly with the evolution of control. And this all finds its field of action vis a vis the senses, vis a vis reading of any kind, interpretive, informational, and so on. Our perceptive juncture and existential disposition in the world

contain this governmentality, this unacknowledged absolutism, which finds its home in the belief of the perfection of representation. What was earlier projected as the particular power of God has in no way died but taken on a perhaps even more mighty force through this lowercase “word” than previously thought possible. Insofar as this word is now fully automated those forces have now slipped as much beyond our control as any divinity could have ever been said to be.

And our experience of this representation is characterized by “mathematical precision.” But the purpose truly served by this “certainty,” that is, the deeply held belief, disseminated through the publication process, that any given aberration in a vast codified system of aberrations will automatically result in its mathematically corresponding penalty, is to improve the economies of disciplinary effort needed by the sovereign, each and every reduction of that effort resulting in an absolute increase in its territorial reach. Belief in mathematical or scientific certainty, then, is a key player in the crucial “veracity” of state-sponsored representation.

Foucault’s description of this rule then turns to a more detailed illustration of its operation. Picking up from the idea that the medieval or feudal forms of retributive justice and absolute control and transposed into a viscosly rigorous surveillance (and representation of that surveillance), he states that these two things become co-creative forces. The “machinery of justice,” a machine force antithetical to life, reconstitutes itself as an “organ” of surveillance, a deathly force contained within an appearance of life-giving watchfulness, of consciousness. They work “side by side” and in fact achieve an interchangeability. We do not distinguish between them or tell one from the other. “Two complementary actions of the same process.” The state rules individual and collective consciousness in this way. It has removed itself to the consciousness of each individual member of society, within whom censorship and the entire juridical tableaux takes place: crime prevention, crime itself, and arrest. We police ourselves, beholden to a (self-)surveillance that knows no limits, that brooks no interference with its absolute certainty.

Again, the publication process is here defined. It is the singular portal through which any given representation makes its way into operation. In this way, through publication, we are instructed about the correspondence of crime and penalty, we are brought into the experience of the perfect certainty of their correspondence.

5. *The rule of common truth*

For publication to serve as such there must be some immediately comprehensible aspect to the project, some tactic for its appearance that is an “already given,” or what is accorded to “judgment in general.” That is to say, the above mentioned rules can be our guidelines for anything that happens, but to achieve actual disciplinary or publication effects our projects must be homogeneous with already-realized standards of publication. This should provide financial and organizational viability, the endorsement of already-existing institutions, and the ability to bring in projects that already exist. By embracing this “common truth” NP participates in a crucial veracity that must be part of any project. NP will appeal to the “reason possessed by everyone” in justifying itself, new presses, and new projects. This is a model of empirical research. In fact, NP’s decision, taken in advance, to depart from any press it helps create is an aligning with “common truth” in that, to quote Risi in Foucault:

What proofs or what clues will be considered to be sufficient neither I nor anyone else has dared to determine in general; since circumstances are subject to infinite variations, since proofs and clues must be deduced from these circumstances, the clearest clues and proofs must necessarily vary in proportion.

With each new project and press, there is a necessity to be “resituated in the field of reference of common proofs.”

6. *The rule of optimal specification*

Extreme precision in the codification of crimes and their corresponding penalties was of the essence to a total disciplinary system, yet as much as this was the case it was also crucial to key

or adjust penalties to the individual. The more varied the alignments of penalties to individuals the greater specification could be achieved, and this process of development finally invokes a humanization of the penal process. In this sense publication is overly involved in a humanistic project, but one whose underlying goal is an increase in codification and the perfectability of in-depth surveillance. Otherwise known as the knitty-gritty of disciplinary publishing.

Taken all together, then, these are our actual guidelines for the inner workings both of the institutions we're attempting to create as well as those we are attempting to work within.

m3a,5

How easy is it to read this passage as being in praise of storytelling and the artisanal? When of course it in fact and very obviously is the reverse, it is pure and simple a presentation of the power of information. It is through the informational that real power operates, it is through the informational that we access bodily sensation, an "explosive force," which is physical and orgasmic, that annihilates traditional modes of wisdom and epic truths, these things becoming ruins. Storytelling is kaput, informational communication has conquered the world.



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A press will rely on its website from its earliest moments and NP phases in web development right away, considering web-only publication from the outset and bringing the digital humanities to bear at each project phase. We draw on a pool of web consultants and complete straightforward training for website creation early in the press-creation process. We also have a dedicated NP advisory board member who reviews each press website and is available for feedback and advice.

m3a,6 (Dark study)

Ask in this passage, what are the “relations” the idler loves to enter into with the demimonde? This isn’t clear, other than to say a relation of identity, the idler is “of” the demimonde. And here it’s important to keep each nuance of the term, including its literal meaning of “half world”, in mind. From Wikipedia:

Demi-monde refers to a group of people who live hedonistic lifestyles, usually in a flagrant and conspicuous manner. The term was commonly used in Europe from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, and contemporary use has an anachronistic character. Its connotations of pleasure-seeking often contrasted with wealth and ruling class behavior. The term “demi-monde” is French for “half-world”. It derives from a comedy called *Le Demi-Monde*, by Alexandre Dumas, fils, published in 1855. The term was often used as one of disapprobation, the behavior of a person in the demimonde being contrary to more traditional or bourgeois values. Such behaviors often included drinking or drug use, gambling, high spending (particularly in pursuit of fashion, as through clothing as well as servants and houses), and sexual promiscuity. The term demimondaine referred to a woman who embodied these qualities; later it became a euphemism for a courtesan or prostitute.

This dark half-world defines the idler and idling. Picking up from m3a,5, this is a world of “sensation,” and specifically where the body is for sale. This is also a kind of undercommons, to which “study” gives a cover, that cover itself providing a kind of access. With this positioning of study it becomes clearer that the *Arcades* is not about simple access to “imaginative reading” or other ideas of language, though that movement is present in what is happening. Here study is a kind of lie, something false, intended to produce something else (consider this definition of study in the university context). And note here that the demimonde, the bohemian, the idler, the underworld, no longer exist in developed bourgeois society, but part of the point is that they will have transformed into something else. Sensation will always have this element circulating.

m4,2, pt. 1 (Sandwich man)

The true “salaried flaneur” (Henri Béraud’s term) is the sandwich man. [m4,2]

In reading the *Arcades* we are being both idlers and workers, where neither excludes the other in the least degree. The passages take us to this consideration, it is text that we move through just as one would walk along a passage in an arcade. Reading is to move through the textual passage, to navigate the city. The flaneur is the great idle reader, but this idleness, even back then, is “salaried,” it maintains the status of work, this internalization, stimulation, and entertainment is, like a sandwich man, a humiliating advertisement, body-bound, that precedes and follows every fleneurial move through the streets.

Given the overall significance of the flaneur to the *Arcades*, how do we factor in this ultimate compromise, the final compromise to capital, which we need to note is specifically textual, into this character we might have been idealizing up to now? Note in this passage as well that it contains a citation at its middle, which would be the place of the human, with commentary at the outside edges, where we would find the sandwich boards themselves. The passage performs its meaning in this way.

m4,2, pt. 2 (Method of the sandwich man)

Trying to determine a method for the *Arcades* is like trying to determine a method for literature. Specifically in this sense, such a task is peculiarly irrational. Methodology is by definition informational reading. We cannot one-sidedly buy into the quantification of experience and language. But a large question here is exactly whether the reading of a passage like this is in fact “purely” literary, which would for example come under the rubric of storytelling. Part of what Benjamin is doing here is exhibiting different modalities of reading, asking the question of whether all types of reading we are doing, including informational, are literary readings, and then vice versa. What kind of reading are

we doing of this passage, what kind of reading are we doing of the sandwich boards? As in m3a,5 the truly explosive, sensate reading is the informational, this is where true liberation takes place. We can see the sandwich board as informational. But here to the extent that the dreamy, idling flaneur is encased in his work, in the work of informational text, a cipher for the industrial labor process, to that extent he continues to survive as a flaneur, just as with a poet in the court of the middle ages, to that extent does idleness exist at all. Our takeaway here, at least in part, must be that methodology can exist but only insofar as it doubles as its opposite, which is perhaps subjective space, the space of desire, emotion, symbolic language that works to dismiss the goals of methodological activity.

Tiedemann's Benjamin

Looking at Rolf Tiedemann's "Dialectics at a Standstill," included in the back matter of the Harvard edition of the *Arcades*, Tiedemann in some ways downplays the book by saying it's "nothing less than a materialist philosophy of the history of the nineteenth century." Indeed what Benjamin was creating was a book of humanity, not simply a version of history, as we've seen again and again a "magic encyclopedia." Tiedemann then goes on to promulgate the notion that the exposé "provides us with a summary" of the *Arcades*, when the meaning and intent of the book is everywhere critical of that very informational notion of "summary," and we know that Benjamin only wrote the exposé out of necessity in various funding and publication contexts. That second paragraph of Tiedemann's essay then seems to lose focus, finally getting lost in truisms and clichés about the greatness of the work, how miniature models exist within it, what Adorno might have said, and so on. Finally Tiedemann commits a huge error by prioritizing, in a wholly academic manner, the "Work of Art" and the "On the Concept of History" essays, saying that the "countless" notes of the *Arcades Project* "rarely go theoretically beyond positions that have been formulated more radically" in those essays.

But as is abundantly clear, the *Arcades* is not concerned with taking positions, and its mode of writing is completely different from those other essays. Now, Tiedemann is one of Benjamin's primary interpreters, interlocutors, commentators, translators, so that we could look at what effect these systemic misperceptions must have had and be having on the reception of Benjamin's work.

Resituating the Standstill: Dialectic's Edge

. . . the radical distinction between action and interlude . . . vanishes before the gaze of its chosen spectator.

—Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*

. . . so long as the approach is an aesthetic one, paradox must have the last word.

—Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*

It may be that when interpreting a passage in the *Arcades* we are looking for the particular brand of materialism Benjamin was working with at any given moment. In many passages there is a reference to an abiding truth, theological, that alternates with a direct or indirect implication that that truth is a material construct and hence subject to change, effectively a commodity. In this sense Benjamin is constantly tracing the interfusion of the commodity with what might escape its grasp, a determinative truth, and our question in reading each passage seems to be, is there anything, on any level, that is not compromised by its association with material culture? Benjamin is at pains to show that there is not, but the only way to show the depths of this insight is to bring along with his materialism, as any materialism carries with it, the culture of the spirit, of religion, of theology that has informed and constructed history as we know it.

What I'd like to do is work with a central idea running through Benjamin, the "dialectics at a standstill," and show how its interpretation can be problematized along these lines, to show how its primary appearance, in passage N3,1 in the *Arcades*, operates in

anything but a straightforward manner, and that because N3,1 has typically been read as putting across pure theory, “informational” writing in Benjamin’s voice as an unalloyed subject, Benjaminian criticism, particularly of the *Arcades*, has been to some degree off the mark. What I’ll first do is work through a more or less figurative reading of the passage, one that attempts to invoke at least part of what Benjamin may have intended with what was written, a reading that I’ll readily admit may have inadequacies, gaps, overextensions, and so on, but that should be effective at destabilizing a straightforward informational analysis. I’ll then bring in two of Benjamin’s primary editors and interlocutors, Samuel Weber and Rolf Tiedemann, to show how they have assessed the passage and what the implications might be of some of the gaps and inaccuracies that seem present.

I want to say that while readings of N3,1 and dialectics at a standstill are often compelling, they fail to see their way clear to that passage’s status as an artifact in the *Arcades Project* itself, thereby relegating a key concept in Benjamin’s work to a mundane understanding of what is perhaps a much more generative complexity and much deeper interrogation of the materiality of language and experience.

Reading N3,1

Because a close reading is so central to this paper, it makes sense to quote N3,1 in its entirety here. What follows is the Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin translation contained in the Harvard University Press edition of the *Arcades*, published in 1999:

What distinguishes images from the “essences” of phenomenology is their historical index. (Heidegger seeks in vain to rescue history for phenomenology abstractly through “historicity.”) These images are to be thought of entirely apart from the categories of the “human sciences,” from so-called habitus, from style, and the like. 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. And, indeed, this acceding “to legibility” constitutes a specific critical point in the movement at their interior. Every

present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each “now” is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time. (This point of explosion, and nothing else, is the death of the *intentio*, which thus coincides with the birth of authentic historical time, the time of truth.) 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. 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 recognizability—bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.

The first move here is to raise the idea of the historical index, and we note the idea that the way an index functions is as a cipher for how Benjamin sees the operation of history itself. An index is a text pointing to another text that materially precedes it, the main text of the book, but one that we access, that is legible to us, in connection with our having pre-existing ideas we bring to its use, to our reading: we know what we are looking up. Thus there is a dialectic here between what we already “know” and what we “learn” or find out from the book, how these relate to and inform one another, and we see how a term in an index functions as a portal or threshold through which this relation takes place, through which these two legibilities interact. And this idea of an historical index is the obverse of how a dialectical image itself operates, with the positive, visible surface being the historical text or citation we look up, and the “negative,” unseen, invisible, or immaterial realm the ideas we bring to our reading. The actual index term that ports us through to the historical detail can be seen as the Benjaminian “name” or crystallization point of a “now” where these two legibilities or recognizabilities happen, a present that is defined as material in the sense that it is in fact printed text,

that it is in fact part of a book. A “historical index” then inverts itself in that it gives access to a transformational movement where material and immaterial legibilities crisscross and instantiate each other through multiple levels of material/immateral objects such as index text, citational text, the materiality of the ideational book that is the subject of the passage, the text of the passage in the *Arcades*, the passage within the context of the real and imagined network of the arcades, and the physical book of the *Arcades*, itself forming an index to the nineteenth century. Here we can begin to see how the present insofar as it is infused with the past, or the past insofar as it can only be seen through the present, functions via the zone of a textuality that finds its own dialectical image in the book form itself, since both rely on an indexicality to manifest or be understood (and here note a manifest itself is a kind of list or index, and that understanding is simply another form of readability, legibility, recognizability).

This is how an index operates, and this is how Benjamin says an *image* operates, dividing this out right at the start of N3,1 from the much more stable and unified “essence,” which operates outside of history. Now, Benjamin himself does work with the concept of essences, and in precisely this way, as an unalterable force outside of history, and as something that gets at the root nature of language and how it operates: “The idea is something linguistic, it is that element of the symbolic in the essence of any word” (*Origin*). And again: “all essences exist in complete and immaculate independence, not only from phenomena, but, especially, from each other” (*Origin*). And not to move too far away from interpreting N3,1, I’ll quote again, just to fill out what Benjamin himself had written on essences (not least since the word “constellation” comes back near the end of N3,1):

Just as the harmony of the spheres depends on the orbits of stars which do not come into contact with each other, so the existence of the *mundus intelligibilis* depends on the unbridgeable distance between pure essences. Every idea is a sun and is related to other ideas just as suns are related to each other. The harmonious relationship between such essences is what constitutes truth. (*Origin*)

Thus as much as Benjamin begins the passage N3,1 with a critique of essences, it is in fact a key concept in his own thinking. What Benjamin is doing rather is speaking of something he does not believe is a true essence (hence he puts the word in quotes), or is the shadow of an essence. N3,1's "essences" of phenomenology" are those essences that are too much implicated in the world itself, an association with the world that, while it may make these essences functional for things like human sciences, habitus, style, undermines their functioning as pure or authentic essences. What Benjamin is here saying is that in fact images *do* operate as essences similar to how he has described them in *Origin*—so that the historical index is related to essences—just that they do not have what we could say is a profane character, an invented use value, phrased here as the compromised "historicity" of Heidegger. Hence we are dealing with essence, and a historical essence, but an essence "entirely apart" from certain other categories of comprehending essence and its involvement in history, an inadequate understanding that would have essences as purely the belonging to "a particular time" and nothing else.

At this point Benjamin makes explicit the temporality inherent in his conception of the image, which again is quite closely related to his conception of essence, as much as he seems to set aside the idea of essence at the start of this passage. Images belong to a temporal past as we would typically understand it, and that is important to grasp. At no moment can they be said to literally anticipate anything happening in the present, any kind of present—they are read as "archaic" as near the end of the N3,1 passage. To this degree they maintain the status of being still. But what feeds this existence in the past is in fact the images' occurring now, and their occurring is a type of legibility or readability—so quite clearly we're constantly involved with images in the seeming contrary of picture (literally what they might be) and word (since they have a "legibility"), though this is effectively to define words as themselves visual and material artifacts, as components of a broader textuality. What feeds this existence is their occurring "at" a particular time, a time understood here as in fact

our present, the contemporary, a point in time, a “now.” Their indexical character, their authentic historical character, and by extension history itself, emerges at the “point” at which an ideational light (if we can accept that abstraction for now, and as we have seen light plays a key role in the *Origin* quote above), much as a flash from a camera and thus also understood materially, makes our lives now recognizable as living at the same time as past lives are comprehended in the same way. These two “sides” of the image would not exist or function without each other, but the flash itself is a kind of Benjaminian essence as it enters or makes contact with the world. And this entry is only experienced in terms of reading, a legibility that then becomes activated.

Moreover, what we have in the passage is in fact the historical index being personified, speaking, it “says,” dictating what the image is up to. In this sense, the index is in control, has agency. Again, the image doesn’t only belong to a particular time, the index tells us, just as citations do not belong only to the time to which they refer, a kind of historicism that Benjamin has also critiqued elsewhere, such as the “Work of Art” essay.

And to rephrase just a bit, what images do in addition to belonging to a particular time is that they “attain to legibility at a particular time.” Again, this idea invokes the idea of reading, saying that an image actively “attains” a readability, an ability to be comprehended. Again, there is an agency to this attainment, a self-willing, somewhat like the index having an ability to speak here in this passage, a mechanistic thing taking on human qualities. But we can note as well that Benjamin, in the next sentence, actually rephrases the concept, then calling it “this *acceding* ‘to legibility’”, here making the active agent the legibility itself, rather than the image, an image that in this case “accedes.” So it’s not clear which one, if either, contains the legibility or is responsible for its emergence, either in or as the image. We note here as well that “to legibility” is placed in quotes, taking on a citational status, which is yet another indication of alternate usage of the idea, its being placed here, as with other citations, in a dialectical reverse from its initial appearance.

The passage goes on to outline that the point at which this readability happens is a “critical point,” and that it is located at “the interior” (a topic Benjamin treats extensively in *Convolute I*, on interiors, making them effectively indistinguishable from what is thought to be an “outside”) of images, and that the thing that constitutes that interior is in fact *movement*. If indeed images are Benjaminian (as opposed to Heideggarian) essences, then they, again, operate along the same lines as words themselves, with varying uses and a kind of nucleonic core that translates into an essential being, but one defined as movement. We might presume that this movement is in fact the attaining/acceding of readability or legibility. All this being said, it is at this point in the passage, at this interior place as it were, that Benjamin shifts to a discussion of the present moment, the now, the “present day,” as itself a kind of interior or middle point. And here we can see that not only are images indexed to their time, but that time, that now, is “determined” by multiple images synchronically occurring within it. The critical point of movement is exactly what might otherwise be understood as a static now of the present day, and here we see what Benjamin first describes as legibility is expressed as “recognizability.” Again, multiple references to critical “points” occur throughout the passage: the “now,” a point in time, is one, but we also have the “critical point” at the interior of the image, the “bursting point” where truth is charged with time, the point of “explosion,” the “flash” where things come together, the “standstill” itself, and finally the “perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.” All these are the same thing, all these are figural, all these are indexed to historical time, “a particular time.”

Conclusions to the Reading of N3,1

What we can see quite clearly here is that this “now” (which again appears within and outside of quotes) is infused with dialectical relationships at every turn, such that “dialectics at a standstill” must be considered right alongside the “movement” mentioned earlier in the passage, as well as alongside the obviously nonstable “bursting” and “explosions” that result from the

“death of *intentio*” and the appearance of truth, historical truth, as much defined in terms of the present as the present is in terms of it, where “what has been comes together in a flash with the now,” the formation of a constellation. “Standstill” in this passage is infused with all these meanings, so that we should clearly never be misled by its surface, informational, or profane meaning of motionlessness. Benjaminian dialectics is of course movement, is then not at all motionless: it in fact works to define our very notion of movement itself, with a dialectical interchange of pure language at its core. Here, just as with every other passage in the *Arcades*—and much more clearly so when we deal with those passages outside of Convolute N, passages that are overtly quotes from outside sources, citation—our “legibility” is characterized by a doubleness that extends into a semantic universe of unfolding meaning, an extension that is itself, rather than an obsessive concern for motionlessness, is far more to the point of Benjamin’s overall project, even as this phantasmagoric legibility is folded into, and hence cannot be said to be critically outside of or a critical reference point or assessment for, the founding concept of the *Arcades* itself. If anything, “dialectics at a standstill” seems to be most interesting as a radically contradictory phrase.

Finally, at the conclusion of the passage, with “the image that is read,” this now emerges. It “bears to the highest degree,” that is, organically gives birth to, as its most crucial characterization, “the imprint.” Note that this imprint is a mechanical process, like printing itself, almost as if the image is doing the printing, that mechanical production of legibility. And that legibility is a “perilous critical moment,” again referring to the other moments in the passage. This is where “all reading is founded,” so that here reading founds reading, simultaneously both material and immaterial, in equal measure.

Images “index” history, we use them in all their brevity to page back into time to locate what we already have in mind. Again, we pass through the terms in an index to locate what precedes

the index but also to serve whatever pre-existing purposes we might have. This passage as a whole is not about its straightforward content but much more about accessing, attaining, acceding to a reading of this perilous critical moment, around which all its ideas are organized, but also that in its very *performativity* of a timeless truth reveals itself to be another text, an “imprint,” a material of text, writing, publication that also indexes history. It is then a critique of the *Arcades* as a whole, just as the passages immediately following in N3,3 or N3,4, and thereby it “resolutely refuses,” as in N3,2, that precise timeless truth to which it seems to be acceding. In this way “dialectics at a standstill” is, again, not a timeless truth of this text. Again, as in N3,2, the truth of N3,1 is “bound to a nucleus of time lying hidden within the knower and the known alike.” It’s this nucleus, an organic and hence *moving* thing, perhaps more than anything that we should be keeping in mind, keeping in view.

Interpretations of N3,1 and “Dialectics at a Standstill”

What I’d like to do now is look at the work of two critics, Samuel Weber and Rolf Tiedemann, who take N3,1 and “dialectics at a standstill” as formative within Benjamin’s oeuvre and attempt to draw out some of the implications of what seem to be variant ways of reading or assessing what Benjamin is up to. In chapter 15 of his *Benjamin’s -abilities*, Samuel Weber quite compellingly discusses how Benjamin invokes through his works a “generalized—or perhaps better, generative—textuality” that itself problematizes the possibility that any text could ever “legitimate itself in its own terms.” That impossibility of legitimation is referred to as an “exposure” that in particular marks the *Arcades*. Weber cites N3,1 as a way to substantiate and expand on this overall point, and while he uses as a base translation the passage I quote above from Eiland and McLaughlin, he in fact changes significant terms and phrasings, and I’d like to quote his translation in full to read some of its emendations as perhaps symptomatic of the tendencies to limit a reading of some of Benjamin’s key concepts:

What distinguishes images from the “essences” of Phenomenology, is their historical index. . . . The historical index of the images indicates not merely that they belong to a particular time, it indicates that only in a particular time do they come to be readable. And this coming to be readable defines a critical point in their innermost movement. Every present is determined through those images that are synchronic with it: every now is the now of a determinate knowability. In it truth is charged with time to the breaking point. (This breaking, nothing else, is the death of intention, which thus coincides with the birth of genuine historical time, the time of truth.) It is not that what has gone by casts its light upon the present, or that the present casts its light upon what is gone; rather the image is the constellation that ensues when what has been converges with the now in a flash. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, that of what has been to the Now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but rather imagistic. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical, i.e., not archaic images. The image that has been read, which is to say, the image in the Now of knowability, bears to the highest degree the stamp of the critical, dangerous moment that underlies all reading.

Weber removes the preamble about essences, which positions dialectics within the framework of Benjamin’s thought about stability and movement and the relation between these. Weber goes on to replace “attain to legibility” with “come to be readable” and then “acceding to ‘legibility’” with “coming to be readable.” Thus, the subtle but crucial difference between “attain” and “accede” is elided with the generic “coming to be”, “readability” replaces “legibility”—perhaps odd since the section in which this chapter appears in Weber’s book is entitled “Legibilities”—and then Benjamin’s quotation marks around the second “legibility” are deleted, a move that de-emphasizes yet again another instance of dual or dialectical meaning at work in the passage, as we’ve seen above. Moreover, Weber replaces “recognizability” with the much more general and vague “knowability,” losing the substantial connection to visuality implied by image, legibility, and readability. While “standstill” certainly refers to an abstraction within

the realm of theoretical dialectics, it's also I believe important to maintain its associations with material objects such as still photographs. It's possible to extract other implications of Weber's edits here, but overall we can see a pulling away from a number of the central complexities contained in the passage, most of which result in an understanding of dialectics that is considerably limited when compared to a more "open" interpretation.

Weber's commentary, where some of the implications of his translation surface, then moves forward in an equally if not more problematic manner. But what I'd like to do now is take his commentary and read it closely as a way to converse with his text, enter into its textual sphere, and by extension work with these key ideas of Benjamin's, bringing to the surface, along the way, more of the complexity of Benjamin's original concepts.

Weber first writes: "The 'historical image' that Benjamin describes here is not something that can simply be seen, but something that must be *read*." The statement is a truism: if we've been reading closely this is one of the first things we notice, the complete overlap and interweaving of legibility and visuality. Weber's initial approach to the passage then appears too simplified. He goes on: "Its 'readability' or legibility—its *Lesbarkeit*—is what results from the highly conflictual kind of relations that produce it." Here we have an interpretation of the effective cause of legibility—"what results from"—that is entirely one sided, missing the key subtlety in Benjamin's passage of legibility creating the relations that create it. As Benjamin writes in N3,2, "truth is not . . . a merely contingent function of knowing, but is bound to a nucleus of time lying hidden within the knower and the known alike."

Weber continues: "This is why Benjamin takes pains to emphasize that the historicity of an image does not result simply from its belonging to a particular epoch, but rather, from what he designates as its 'synchronic' relation to it." Indeed, precisely in the material Weber has elided at the start of the passage, Benjamin rejects "historicity" altogether, he specifically says that images are "entirely apart." There is no "historicity" of the image at all: it is

entirely historical, at the same time as it is entirely of the present. Rather than “historicity,” what Weber seems to intend to mean is both “historical index” and “legibility,” but even then there’s still the fact that what Benjamin says is that the “now” is determined by images that are “synchronic with it” in equal measure as those images are determined by that “now.” There is a co-creative process at work to which Weber’s prose brings rather a certain linearity, even as it cites this “synchronic” relation.

Weber continues: “Such synchronicity is constituted as much by separation as by convergence.” Here Weber introduces an idea of “separation” that does not seem to be in Benjamin’s text. Benjamin does speak specifically of convergence and simultaneity, but not of separation. Weber, however, holds on to the idea through the balance of his interpretation, transforming it into the idea of “distance.” He goes on: “It is precisely this simultaneity, involving both proximity and distance, that is the condition of any possible ‘knowledge’ of images, their ‘knowability.’” We can note here that with the addition of concepts of “proximity and distance” as well as the vagueness of the idea of “knowledge,” we seem to have moved some way away from Benjamin’s text.

Weber continues: “Such ‘knowability’ is situated not in the interval between two fixed points, for instance between the Past shedding its light on the Present, or the Present shedding its light on the Past, but rather in a different sort of space: that of a convergence that does not result in a simple identity.” Here the idea of “fixed points” between “Past” and “Present” (it’s not clear why these terms are capitalized here and not in the translation of the passage) is unfortunate, since Benjamin’s passage, while it does reference “points,” does so with only the one point, of explosion, the now. To invoke these other “points” is simply confusing. Another potentially confusing addition here is the idea of “identity,” which again is not referenced in Benjamin’s passage. Weber continues: “What it produces is articulated through two very different and yet complementary figures in Benjamin’s writing: the *Blitz*, the lightening flash, and the *constellation*, the more or less stable agglomeration of stars.” Here again there is

an accuracy to this comment but even more there is a misdirection and passing over of subtlety. The “flash” and the “constellation” are not exactly “very different”: as Benjamin writes, images “come together in a flash to form a constellation.” Hence identity may well come to play a role here, since the argument seems to be possible, or at least operative, that the flash and the constellation are one and the same thing. Rather than noting how they might simply be “complementary” it’s more likely that exploring in depth their interaction would get closer to Benjamin’s meaning, the complexity of how words are functioning in this central passage and in the *Arcades* overall.

All this being said, Weber does in his next paragraph explore this very complexity. I’ll quote the paragraph here, but I’d like to try to observe how Weber begins with a description of one kind of reading (effectively the overly simple reading I’ve been outlining thus far), then opens out to characterize a dialectical interfusion of movement and stability, so that we can trace points at which our understanding of this interfusion can be clarified against perceived inaccuracies of Weber’s treatment.

One might be tempted here to try and relativize the tension of these two figures (again, flash and constellation) so important to Benjamin by ascribing the “flash” to the manner in which “what has been,” in coming together with the “Now,” acquires a certain stability as the “constellation.” And that would not be entirely wrong. The point, however, is that this constellation in and of itself remains marked by the abrupt and instantaneous process out of which it emerges. It is defined by the *potentiality* of *Zerspringen*, of breaking apart, which Benjamin describes as the “genuinely historical time, the time of truth.” Truth then, with Benjamin as with Heidegger, entails not the correspondence of an intention with an intended object: it is not the fulfillment, and hence, confirmation, of a temporal movement, tending toward a goal, but rather “the death of intentio” which is simultaneously the “birth” of another kind of time, not that of the subject, but of “history” and of “truth.”

Again, passing through a “relativizing” reading, Weber arrives at a clear conception of the actual nature of the Benjaminian constellation, which almost entirely defines the dialectics at a standstill. Weber sees that the stasis is no stasis at all and is infused with, defined by, a dynamic movement, pure movement, a breaking or explosion, the flash. But that is as far as this reading will take us, since it is at this point that Weber seems to be continuing to work out what he wants to say, bringing in concepts and ideas that either are not found in Benjamin’s text or are idiosyncracies of Weber’s own translation. For instance, “potentiality” is not invoked in Benjamin, as much as the “breaking apart” gives a sense of disjunction at the heart of the now that is also absent from Benjamin. Neither does Benjamin deal with the idea of an “intended object” and that teleology as Weber brings it into his analysis here. Finally we can see again a lack of clarity where Weber cites “*intentio*” whereas his translation in fact removes the Latin and simply uses “intention,” almost as if in writing Weber went back to Benjamin’s text and was finding new significance to what was actually there. In any case, what we can see toward the end of this paragraph is multiple levels of symbolic meaning and dialectical activity moving toward, breaking through, exploding into the surface of Weber’s interpretation. Our fluid understanding then of dialectics at a standstill is alive and well in Weber’s argument, even if we can perceive a kind of fumbling about with it.

I’ll cite Weber’s final paragraph of analysis of N3,1 only because it seems to confirm many of these characteristics toward accurate insight, reliance on truisms, misleading mistranslations, and the pulling back from the real complexities of Benjamin’s text:

Only in this sense can the dialectical image be said to be both “knowable” and “legible.” “Knowable” because “legible.” But “knowledge” here is as unstable as is truth, and “reading” is the articulation of the two. Articulation, here as elsewhere, designates not simply identity or synthesis, but a disjunctive bringing-together and keeping-apart, for instance of the most extreme movement—that of

the lightening bolt (*blitzhaft*)—and the most extreme stasis, that of the constellation.

Here again the use of “knowable” rather than “recognizable,” a much easier synonym for “legible,” seems to get in the way of a clear understanding of Benjamin’s text. (In some ways it’s as if this paragraph were written before the clarity that was apparently reached in the preceding paragraph.) Weber in fact seems to be working through the inadequacies of his own translation, working his way back to simply saying “legible” rather than “knowable.” But here to say that truth is “unstable” while not at the same time that it is static as well, is to cease working with truth as a dialectical term. Then Weber brings in the idea of “articulation,” again perhaps misleading since we’re already working with the legible in both an active and passive sense, so “articulation” seems to get in the way with yet another similar concept, and then on top of that the idea of “reading” is brought in. And here again the idea of “keeping-apart” is used, whereas that’s not particularly a concern in Benjamin’s text and so works to confuse Weber’s discussion.

I’d like to turn here to a more explicit engagement with “dialectics at a standstill,” that of Rolf Tiedemann in his “Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the *Passengen-Werk*,” which appears in the back matter of the Eiland and McLaughlin translation of the *Arcades*. More conversant with Benjamin’s work, on seemingly every possible level, than any other commentator who has written on Benjamin, Tiedemann turns to the idea of the “dialectics at a standstill” later in his essay, using it as an organizing principle of the *Arcades* and Benjamin’s work overall. However, in Tiedemann’s writing about the topic and other ideas surrounding it in the *Arcades*, questions arise as to the thoroughness of the interpretation of dialectics at a standstill as a material concept contained with the framework of the *Arcades* itself.

Tiedemann begins a close look at dialectics at a standstill on page 942, as follows: “Dialectical image and dialectics at a

standstill are, without a doubt, the central categories of the *Passegen-Werk*." Now, as I've tried to show above, it is difficult to believe that either dialectical images or dialectics at a standstill could in fact be central categories of the *Arcades* since they appear, effectively, as characters within that work itself. Due to this nature of their appearance, they cannot stand outside the work as operating principles. And indeed when one looks closely at the passage, or for that matter the convolutes, in which they are explicitly mentioned, it appears that the language of these passages is not to be taken in a straightforward or informational way, but as figurative, itself imagistic, carrying implication seemingly outside of the text itself. Thus, we have all these reservations about any "centrality" of these categories.

Tiedemann goes on: "We can distinguish two meanings [for these two terms] in Benjamin's texts; they remain somewhat undivulged, but even so cannot be brought totally in congruence." Tiedemann then in fact turns away from the *Arcades* proper to access, first, the 1935 exposé to the *Arcades*, and then "On the Concept of History." As I've tried to show in this paper, I've attempted to interpret dialectics at a standstill exclusively within the framework of the *Arcades* itself, and so have brought another sense, reading, or legibility to the language of the book, whereas Tiedemann is turning away from the "main text" and citing other of Benjamin's texts that, while they may specifically mention dialectics at a standstill, do so in work and writing that is positioned far differently from what appears in the *Arcades*, outside text that is intended to be read more functionally, in a linear way, non-figuratively, informationally. Is it fair to make this distinction? Can it possibly be true that Benjamin intended the more discursive commentary in the *Arcades* to be read symbolically, figuratively? While there are any number of indications in the *Arcades* itself that there is effectively no distinction between what appears as commentary and what appears as citation, that all is to be read at a symbolic level, I'm not sure it matters that we concern ourselves with the appropriateness of when and where to rule out a figurative reading. My impression here is twofold: one, that the blanket

assumption that reading the commentary as non-figurative language in fact impedes a full understanding of the *Arcades*, since it works to prevent our experience of the intermingling of citation and commentary; two, that if we do a figurative or symbolic reading of a passage that seems purely discursive and it seems to take us somewhere, to constructive and compelling insights, I'm not sure why we wouldn't do it.

Thus, with his first meaning of dialectical images and dialectics at a standstill, Tiedemann turns not to an analysis of how the text of the *Arcades* itself functions on a material level but to what is technically the outside text of the 1935 exposé. Specifically, he quotes two areas of this text:

In the dream, in which each epoch entertains images of its successor, the latter appears wedded to elements of *Ur*-history—that is, to elements of a classless society. And the experiences of such a society—as stored in the unconscious of the collective—engender, through interpenetration with what is new, utopia.

Ambiguity is the manifest imaging of dialectic, 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.

The key to this reading is the fetish and the intimate relation, the identification, of the commodity with utopia. The standstill is a reference to dream and ambiguity, two things we would not normally associate with motionlessness, and movement insofar as it has commodity character is static. Thus to refer to the dialectics at a standstill within the material context of the *Arcades* is perfectly appropriate, since in that work, and only there, is its material status made manifest to the highest degree, whether as commentary or citation. What's missing in Tiedemann's discussion is exactly that status as a component of the larger work, one that fills out Benjamin's ideas in these two quotes and works to show that consciousness even at this removed level can be seen as a commodity fetish, controverting Adorno's critique that such a thing was not possible.

Tiedemann's second major meaning for dialectical image and dialectics at a standstill is that they function "almost like a heuristic principle, a procedure that enables the historical materialist to maneuver his objects." He includes a long quote from "On the Concept of History" (again working outside the actual text of the *Arcades*) that, because it seems to include a misreading, I will cite in full:

A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history . . . Materialist historiography . . . is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. (*Illuminations*, pp. 264-265)

Benjamin's sense here seems clear, even with the confusing double negative in the first sentence. He is saying that the historical materialist (of which presumably in some sense he counts himself as one) must have the stasis of his own critical perspective. This stasis provides the "constructive principle" on which history is founded. But we must also factor in here the way in which that stasis is constitutionally linked in a back and forth dialectical emergence with the movement of "transition," which includes a vast array of ideas of movement, including the "flow of thoughts," thinking itself (making stasis a kind of non-thinking), the process of crystallization, "happening." We can't elide the fact that there is no point at which the dialectic at standstill comes up as a central topic where ideas of movement are not also and equally in play. What I am attempting to point out here is that again and again, in both Tiedemann, Weber, and other critics, we have an over-reliance on an informational reading of the *Arcades*, resulting I would say in a kind of gravitation in criticism of Benjamin and the *Arcades* to the

more discursive convolute N and an interpretation that settles far too readily on notions of the importance of stasis, even as those same critics resist close readings of the more directly citational material in the *Arcades*. Even here in Tiedemann's commentary on this passage from "On the Concept of History" we can see this tendency in action, as he flatly states "Benjamin's dialectic tried to halt the flow of movement, to grasp each becoming as being." Yes, I would say this is true, but that being is never without an immediate dialectical shift back into becoming. Again, Tiedemann writes "through the *immobilizing* of dialectic, the historical 'victors' have their accounts with history canceled, and all pathos is shifted toward salvation of the oppressed" (my emphasis). This comment suggests a degree of hope in Benjamin, a sense of the messianic and theological, that perhaps should not be so seamlessly put forward.

Conclusion

With these complexities circulating through any reading of Benjamin, it's perhaps not fair to any given critique dealing with Benjamin to hold it to the fire, as it were, of summarizing what sets out to be non-summarizable. But in fact I'm not at all sure that's the case: as much as a number of critics will go ahead and admit that Benjamin's methodology is that of very exactly "no methodology," and as much as critics will admit that Benjamin locates this conundrum not only within historiographic and scholarly discourse but within language itself, it's true that there seems to be a firm barrier for scholars, those who use the rigorous techniques of scholarly analysis, to using those same techniques to go on to interrogate the very forms of their own outputs in the way Benjamin himself has modeled. The culture of information-based scholarly discourse has not budged to any significant degree since the appearance of the *Arcades*, as much as the secret of that work banishes the traditional epistemological assumptions that enable that discourse to maintain its status of presumed effectiveness. Hence, as we read the *Arcades*, a massive number of

questions arise that might quite productively enable us to both move away from a discourse that resolutely stands in the way of knowledge and to experiment with alternative ways of speaking and communicating that might resonate far more with experience as we seem to have it as our daily lot.



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Production refers to the finalization of peer-reviewed, board-approved projects that have been placed in the pipeline of a particular press. Its endpoint is distribution to the public in some form. Its pathway is the assessment of each component of a project from the perspective of bringing it into conformity with the highest applicable standards before release. As with many other services initiated by NP, production's role is to some degree malleable with each new press, but NP brings a context-specific care both to project production and to the reassessment informing and implied by a project's release.

NP22 (Office for Soft Architecture)

Lisa Robertson's *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office of Soft Architecture* (Clear Cut, 2003; Coach House, 2006) is a book in which it is proposed that the central narrator, among other things, is a mobile entity, the office for soft architecture, roaming the urban landscape and generating commentary. This entity is a response to the ravages of capital as it dismantles the urban environment, obliterating the very materials that are locations of our memories, the pneumonics of identity scared off.

The Office for Soft Architecture came into being as I watched the city of Vancouver dissolve in the fluid called money. Buildings disappeared into newness. I tried to recall spaces, and what I remembered was surfaces. Here and there money had tarried. The result seemed emotional. I wanted to document this process. I began to research the history of surfaces. I included my own desires in the research. In this way, I became multiple. I became money. (1, *italic in original*)

What's evident in this quote are a number of qualities relevant to NP. There is an ongoing "coming into being" as different facets of the project are engaged, the "newness." There is an interface with what is otherwise a ruin, with a city that has already succumbed to destruction and rebuilding, gentrification as it were. Our city in terms of NP is knowledge itself, which has perhaps been abused forever, a knowledge we would like to uncover but that seems only to exist as a distant memory that nevertheless guides our actions.

The new environment, the new knowledge, is entirely foreign even as it is entirely new. Desire is defined as that urge to go beyond what can only be surface, the new, but finally all that's found is another surface. The impersonal, business office changes places with the "emotional" narrative "I" in Robertson's work and we get this "soft architecture" that she constructs with her essays and images. But she becomes the very surfaces she mourns the absence of and avoids. In the process she herself "becomes" money, becomes the dissolving city in an enveloping fluid.

NP reaches for those same spaces and regards those same desires and failures. It looks at the implication of research as another desire to “uncover,” a desire implicated in the lack it seems to address or want to cover over. NP participates in the overall ubiquity of the architecture that dissolves. It keeps itself “soft” at every turn in order to continue being part of that contradictory construction.

P1,1 (Textual city)

Convolute P discusses the city, specifically the streets of Paris, as a linguistic construct. As with P1,1, the “life of the city’s layout” is not only compared with but described as “no less important” than the “unconquerable power” of names of places and structures. And the power of these names persists “in the face of all topographic displacement,” meaning that even after a place or structure has been destroyed or renamed, the power of their former names, of their presences, can be seen to continue. Thus multiple places, multiple cities, exist in or beneath the city as we know it, the one that appears, in a model of how the past inhabits the present, via forces that “never stop moving.” This is how the city operates—and this is how language operates—there being little ability to tell which, the city or language, is inspiring or leading the other. In a passage such as this we can go back to Benjamin’s *Origin of German Tragic Drama* for the importance of the act of naming, of names or words themselves. As Benjamin writes there:

Truth is not an intent which realizes itself in empirical reality. The state of being, beyond all phenomenality, to which alone this power belongs, is that of the name. This determines the manner in which ideas are given. But they are not so much given in a primordial language as in a primordial form of perception, in which words possess their own nobility as names, unimpaired by cognitive meaning. (pg. 36)

Here “this power” indicates that which is able to realize itself in empirical reality, which is what the city streets represent. The city

streets are part of “phenomenality,” but this passage makes clear that the name, words, language and the way it functions, are what determines the shape of that phenomenality we know as the city, as materiality in general. The depth of the overlap of linguistic structure with empirical reality is also a theme in Benjamin’s *One-Way Street*, written contemporaneously with *Origin*. As Michael Jennings writes in his introduction to that volume, “subliminal connections between textual passages are complimented by overt thematic and formal echoes and rhymes,” and these rhymes are incarnated in the city streets, where “the streets of Paris / Were set to rhyme” (epigraph to convolute P).

But indeed in P1,1, there are a number of ways in which things, names, appear and reappear or resurface, echo and rhyme, streets appearing through other streets, names and meanings appearing through other names and meanings. In this way, we are given three main versions of “topographic displacement.” The earliest glimpses of the city and language are described as “little theaters” from the ancienne regime of Louis Philippe, when the temple was the operative structure. These structures are torn down but resurface in a physically different location, but with the same purpose, theater, and names. Here “to speak of ‘city districts’ is odious to me” makes sense, since a district would confine a certain activity to a certain geographic location, which clearly contradicts how the city operates in a kind of cycle of rebirth that is not topographically specific. (We can quickly note that the refrain “to speak of” here and at the start of this passage emphasizes how the city is defined through language.)

The second form of displacement is one where a street or property continues to be named for someone who died long ago, or some feature or use that has long since disappeared. This is a kind of haunting or ghostly presence about the city that specifically attaches to language, the resurfacing being far less physical than a structure reappearing in a different place. Again Benjamin places these earlier uses in a feudal context of the “landed proprietor” with a “demesne,” so that, particularly as a part of language, it’s not clear that the ownership has not continued to have material

influence. Finally, a third type of displacement relates purely to the spread of contemporary forms of meaning, where as soon as an idea assumes prominence (or a restaurant becomes popular) that particular name or form of understanding spreads out across the linguistic landscape, a meme, and becomes part of general usage. Construction and naming of a restaurant that is, so to speak, part of a chain accounts for both physical and linguistic movement.

These three versions of “topographic displacement” are part of this passage, which itself works to linguistically characterize the linguistic nature of the physical space of the city, of how city streets function. “Such is the movement of the streets, the movement of names.” But we can productively look here as well at the concluding moment of the passage, which seems to raise a new issue: “which [meaning streets and names individually and in relations to each other] often run at cross-purposes to one another.” The “cross-purposes” are indeed what the passage has been indicating, the way in which meaning may not correspond, at least in appearance, with the “empirical reality” we are presented with, names typically indicating people or things that have disappeared or that originate elsewhere. However, with this last moment, last phrase in the passage, we also have a vision of city street crisscrossing one another, moving in opposing directions, mapping over the landscape in a back and forth frenzy of commotion, movement that never stops, city that can’t possibly sleep.

What I’ve been describing thus far have been elements of this movement, but in fact the point is along the lines of a frenetic simultaneity that characterizes the phenomena of language and the city as a whole (as well as the *Arcades*).

(Schizophrenic table)

Henri Michaux describes a schizophrenic table in terms of a process of production which is that of desire: “Once noticed, it continued to occupy one’s mind. It even persisted, as it were, in going about its own business. . . . The striking thing was that it was neither simple

nor really complex, initially or intentionally complex, or constructed according to a complicated plan. Instead, it had been desimplified in the course of its carpentering. . . . As it stood, it was a table of additions, much like certain schizophrenic's drawings, described as 'overstuffed,' and if finished it was only in so far as there was no way of adding anything more to it, the table having become more and more of an accumulation, less and less a table. . . . It was not intended for any specific purpose, for anything one expects of a table. Heavy, cumbersome, it was virtually immovable. One didn't know how to handle it (mentally or physically). Its top surface, the useful part of the table, having been gradually reduced, was disappearing, with so little relation to the clumsy framework that the thing did not strike one as a table, but as some freak piece of furniture, an unfamiliar instrument . . . for which there was no purpose. A dehumanized table, nothing cozy about it, nothing 'middle-class,' nothing rustic, nothing countrified, not a kitchen table or a work table. A table which lent itself to no function, self-protective, denying itself to service and communication alike. There was something stunned about it, something petrified. Perhaps it suggested a stalled engine."

This citation of Michaux appears in the opening pages of *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri (1972; Penguin, 1977). It serves as a touchstone in the book for key concepts of production, desire, and the "body without organs." As above, it is a "process of production which is that of desire," and on the following page: "the schizophrenic table is a body without organs." We can use the table as a model for NP, the new university press.

The table is built with a purpose in mind, the idea of a table is the starting point. So too we build the press, with what we have come to understand as a press or the production of scholarly content informing our desire to do so. But as quickly as we decide to make a press, we have a willingness, or a compulsion, to allow the project to take the shape of whatever might come along, even and particularly to the point of contravening our initial concept of "press," precisely in the way the schizophrenic table builds and adds to the point not only of uselessness but into a realm of

unrecognizability. And yet it is still “noticed” as such, still “occupies one’s mind.”

How then does the original idea of either table or press persist through the production process? Though it may be recognizable as many other things, or nothing at all, the end product still seems to have enough about it that it could speculatively be called a “table” or a “press.” In this way, “it even persisted, as it were, in going about its own business.” An output of something that was known before, certainly, but now with something completely unknowable about it. That first idea might be called “simple,” and what is grafted onto it “complex,” though the plan according to which it was “desimplified” was itself quite simple: a straightforward accrual of available material, a re-use, a bricolage.

Note Deleuze and Guattari’s description of this process as “desiring-production.” The product is significantly about its own producing, the schizophrenic discerning a certain relation to a useful table but far more engaged in the production process with tracking his own wiles, the desire that during the production process more and more becomes the evident motive force behind the table-building project. In this way desire achieves a point of stasis, since as the table is accumulated and added to it becomes “less and less a table,” no way to place it in any useful sense as a table, production that contravenes its own use value, “denying itself to service and communication alike.”

Is it the case that the new press is opposed to communication? We have to believe that “the schizophrenic is the universal producer.” It is when communication passes beyond itself that production and product no longer need to be distinguished, that we can experience a “thisness” to the object (even while it is only tangentially defined as such). As with the table, our goal as publishers must be to have the product “eaten up by the supporting framework.” This is the form we seek out. In our absolute commitment to communication we have to be committed, perhaps in every sense, to the achieving the impossibility of communication.

At last, the producing/product identity results in “an enormous undifferentiated object,” where life and death are indistinguishable:

Everything stops dead for a moment, everything freezes in place—and then the whole process will begin all over again. From a certain point of view it would be much better if nothing worked, if nothing functioned. Never being born, escaping the wheel of continued birth and rebirth, no mouth to suck with, no anus to shit through. Will the machines run so badly, their component pieces fall apart to such a point that they will return to nothingness and thus allow us to return to nothingness?

The new university press must facilitate this return to nothingness, if it has anything to do with a commitment to knowledge as such. It becomes the body without organs. And here we can say that the body without organs provides a whole rubric for judgment for already-existing presses, particularly experimental presses or press projects.

Sun, look out for yourself!

The title of this section is the first epigraph in convolute Y [Photography]. The sentence relates to the idea of perfect mechanical reproduction in the photograph. It is a warning to, as it were, the center of our universe, the ultimate source of light, which itself enables photography, a warning (by extension) to the representative natural element in the hierarchies of governmental sovereignty, that photography, the machine, has achieved or is building toward its perfect reproduction, so that any essence the sun might possess is now able to be utterly duplicated, its copy not recognizable as a copy at all. So that this early promise of photography, perfect reproduction, promises to obviate anything original, bringing to humanity the supreme power of creation, even as it's true that this power is perceived through the prism of traditional modes of understanding, of exactly those same hierarchies. All this is exactly what's picked up in the second epigraph, “If one day the sun should sputter out, / 'Twill be a mortal who rekindles

it.”, again through technology and photography specifically giving this power of recreating or saving the world to the human. We no longer need the natural world: this is the core promise of the technological. And the photograph does this through representation. By this representation then we see through the dialectical image, that central idea, an artificiality at its root, a way that the human is introduced to obscure or replace the natural world. As transcendent as the dialectical image is, it is only so with this latent reality in mind, this produced quality. That “Genius of Industry” in the source line of the second epigraph is exactly the only pure substance of nature itself, since it replaces the deepest structures of the natural world. Remember here as well, in this context, how the *Arcades* is a type of camera, a producer of images through artificial means, though in this case a producer of dialectical images through text. We ask too what the sun might be that these textual images are replacing or duplicating? What world has disappeared that we’re continually rebuilding?

NP24 (Introduction the non-fascist life)

But what is our body without organs in the context of NP? The body without organs is the point of the “enormous undifferentiated object,” where the “automata stop dead” as a result of the infinite accumulations of bricolage. Desiring-machines incessantly construct the schizophrenic table, progressively distancing production from pre-determined ideas of use, their project emerging into a denial of communication and functionality, the point at which “nothing else can be added.” The body without organs is both produced in this way, the object of a mode of production, and quintessentially nonproductive. It “couples production with antiproduction.”

NP is really in the world. It’s the same as any other press, consisting of people and projects, or those it facilitates. Desiring-production is rampant at every level, worming its way through every subject and every social body. But it finally must remain a surface of inscription, full of agents of production that lean toward

becoming actual organs. “Although the organ-machines attach themselves to the body without organs, the latter continues nonetheless to be without organs and does not become an organism in the ordinary sense of the word. It remains fluid and slippery.” NP incorporates constant interruptions in this way.

But still the acknowledgment of its interruptions and its character as a desiring-machine place it in relation to that “unengendered, nonproductive attitude,” providing “an element of antiproduction coupled with the process.” “The body without organs, the unproductive, the unconsumable, serves as a surface for the recording of the entire process of production of desire, so that desiring-machines seem to emanate from it in the apparent objective movement that establishes a relationship between the machines and the body without organs.” NP is open to building this relationship. Here and now NP is radically committed to opening the way to the body without organs.

Y1,1 (Prophetic mode)

The advent of photography is comprehended in religious terms like “prophecy.” It is a movement of the spirit, which art points toward. There is a merger of contraries in the long citation from Wiertz, the artisanal element in art being subsumed, matched, and exceeded by what is possible technologically. Note that Wiertz’s text comes to us as a poem, another derivative of religious experience, in short stanza’s with line breaks indicated, though the poem is forced into the prose of the citations, a formal echo of the content of the citation, an intervention in that citation, where the spiritual is forced into the mold of the mechanical, the supposedly prosaic. Note as well that the movement is from the artisanal, bricklaying, to the architectural as it is enabled by photography: control of the various elements of the photograph/painting is so complete that the artist is freed to think at a higher level, is freed from a type of work or a type of labor: and of course this echoes the construction, the architecture, at stake in the arcades and the *Arcades*. The “full sense” of the painter or artist is in this type of architecture.

NP25 (Foucault's panopticon)

Bentham's Panopticon is the architectural figure. . . . We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a school-boy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theaters, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. . . . Visibility is a trap.

I quote at length this passage from Michel Foucault's *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975; Vintage, 1977, pg. 200) for many reasons. First of all the passage is the primary point, a locus classicus, at which Foucault describes this architectural machine, central to this book, his thought, and, as he describes it later in the chapter, to the functioning of the social body, a generalized disciplinary apparatus, and to profit. The panopticon is a surveillance structure that also becomes a figure of thought, an avenue by which physical machinery or material architecture is reproduced via visibility but also through indirection as the very substance of both individual and social thought. Its visibility is a trap in that it is characterized by a thoroughgoing propagation into and as subjectivity itself. Its ironies are multiple as well: I speak here of a "centrality" of Foucault's thought or something that seems to cast its influence or control over other parts of Foucault's work not at all unlike the panopticon's supervisory shadow. Finally, contemporaneity seems ever more awash in this exact structure of surveillance, emerging from visibility and light, with potential examples being the cellular blog format or the brightly lit computer or phone screen, its camera peering both at us and

at everything we see. If any machine describes the totality of the world it might be this one. Bentham seems to have gotten it right in the mid-nineteenth century, conceptualizing a new disciplinary regime that would quickly come to be associated with institutionalism itself. Human community, at least in capitalist society, is so defined: when we are together we share and commiserate in these exact habits of surveilling and being surveilled.

But I'd like to call one aspect of Foucault's description into question as we work toward a definition of NP. Foucault's "perfectly individualized" disciplinary subject seems to be an overstatement of how that subject exists in and relates to the world. The borders of this subject seem far more porous than we might suspect when presented with, for instance, the thick, dividing concrete of a prison cell. First, we need to imagine that if indeed the panopticon is a structure that defines subjectivity itself then any subjectivity that occupies, or is even supposed to occupy, the central tower must itself operate according to the disciplinary mental and physical construct of a prisoner, and hence vice versa. Rather than what we might understand as an "individual" it seems more to be a situation of parallel subjectivities operating in support of themselves. A fluidity comes to the fore that would also cross between and among the inmates, patients, or students under direct surveillance, who are doing neither more nor less than surveilling themselves.

Indeed if we dispense with the "perfect individual" we seem to get closer to an understanding of the panopticon as a pure form, not unlike Michaux's schizophrenic table, atop which multiple institutions are superimposed in perhaps a random process, resolving in an original nothingness, capital itself. As Foucault writes, the panopticon "is the diagram of the mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use." We must think here of the uselessness, nothingness, and untouchability of the body without organs, of the far reaches of NP as we are trying to construct it.

Self-aware materialist reading

Materialist reading is all about how we “allow text in.” We can’t think that we’re going to do a straightforward reading of something and not be “participating.” The type of reading we choose to do co-creates the world in front of us. Thus to consistently have a work that circles around how it is reading is quite central. You can do a basic reading of the *Arcades*, and that’s fine. But there are also many ways to move from there, to “read the world” similarly, so that each piece of writing is yet another attempt in that direction, but one where we ourselves attempt to maintain a consciousness of what such a reading really means. We take short quotes and make short attempts to read the world we’re in similarly to Benjamin, knowing that we’ll arrive at different conclusions and ideas, but still from there having a sense that all the above concerns are summarized somehow, making a new work that breaks away, perhaps in its lack of breaking away.

NP26 (Benjamin’s panopticon)

I want to continue the consideration of the potential individuality of the panoptical subject as something that operates as part of the “generalizable model of functioning” (Foucault 205) of the panopticon. In the *Arcades*, Benjamin references a “Panoptikum,” or waxworks or wax museum, associated with the diorama and a long list of other camera-like constructions, reaching back to the camera obscura and by implication forward through the arcades themselves, photography, and cinema. Like Foucault, Benjamin treats the panopticon as a physical construction that doubles as a figure of thought.

The wax museum <Panoptikum> a manifestation of the total work of art. The universalism of the nineteenth century has its monument in the waxworks. Panopticon: not only does one see everything, but one sees it in all ways. (Q2,8)

Visuality functions in parallel to Bentham and Foucault’s panopticon but the object of that visuality here is given as malleable,

a wax figure, not at all a “perfect individual.” There is a type of stasis in this historical moment of “universalism” and in the monumental quality of the waxworks overall, but the figures inhabiting the “cells” cannot be said to have any lastingly individual characteristics, that is, other than a costume fitted over a substrate of sculpted wax. It is important to note that wax figures for Benjamin do not appear in one form only, but have now one shape then another, often traversing completely oppositional historical personages. As we read in Q2,2: “The multiple deployment of figures in the wax museum opens a way to the colportage phenomena of space. . . . The wax statues and busts [are] today an emperor, tomorrow a political subversive, and the next day a liveried attendant.”

Again the *Arcades* begins to come into view, again giving an indication of how we’re approaching a reading of that book, which is precisely the same thing as to say how we are approaching the idea of reading overall, itself a key indicator of what NP would be or “look like.” For here we can see how Foucault’s prose is, in the end, as complex as it is, an example of a relatively straightforward discursivity, quite unlike Benjamin’s engagement of language in the *Arcades*, which always already situates itself as an artwork, indeed as precisely the “total work of art.” Let me quickly cite Benjamin’s original German before continuing this discussion, in this cumulative building up of thematics and subject matter:

Das Panoptikum eine Erscheinungsform des Gesamtkunstwerks. Der Universalismus des 19ten Jahrhunderts hat im Panoptikum sein Denkmal. Pan-Optikum: nicht nur, dass man alles sieht; man sieht es auf alle Weise. [Q2,8]

The “total work of art,” the “Gesamtkunstwerk” is exactly what’s at stake in the physical structure of the wax museum. It embraces all of history at once, providing its viewer with a mental impression of absolute knowledge and a God-like, omniscient perspective. In many respects, this perspective is what we pay for when we go to a wax museum, when we go to any sort of museum. And as we connect that *Gesamtkunstwerk* with the *Passengen-Werk*

that is the *Arcades*, it is clear that our entry into the reading of the book, into reading in its entirety, carries this implication or participation. The pre-eminent physicality of sitting down to read is explicit subject matter in the *Arcades*. Yes, we are implicated in the subject matter of any given passage, but our presence in the text exists as an analogical outcome of the varying registers of meaning the text presents. The text presents itself, it presents us, it presents us to the text and the text to us. It's in this way that the *Arcades* is the "total work of art" and activates its very readers as content of that artwork.

One thing the English translation unfortunately loses, in what is likely its own predilection to bring out the link to Foucault (since why not consistently translate "Panoptikum" as "wax museum"?), is Benjamin's landing with heavy emphasis on the prefix "Pan" in line 2, "pan" effectively meaning "all" or "omni," but here very much indicating that Benjamin is crossing the border, openly, performatively, between seeing each and every thing, like the central surveillor in Foucault's panopticon, and seeing each thing from each and every angle that thing might at all be seen from, ever. Exactly as in Foucault, the critique here is of a universalism that is manifested in a viewer by the architectural arrangement of space and history.

But it is important to step back and recognize what Benjamin is saying that effectively goes unaccounted for in the Foucault. First is the resistance to positing any omniscience outside the text. Second is the identity of content in the individual cells, such that the content, wax, could as easily appear in one cell (or display) as in any other. Benjamin posits a transferability between cells as a defining characteristic of the entire conception of the panopticon. And finally it is those passages between cells to which we bring our most rigorous consideration, those passages that give us a better way to see, to grasp how the "generalizable model of functioning" might come to circulate not only at the individual level but what shape it might take as it courses through the socius.

Y6a4 (Preservation)

Here Benjamin's topic is photomontage, which clearly has everything to do with how he has constructed the *Arcades*. It relates both to the mechanical reproductive technique that is photography—that might be seen as informational and deeply opposed to the artisanal, or, that is, the thing that creates aura—and also to an advanced form of this technique, a move toward its truer nature of montage. This montage is birthed or incarnated exactly from an attempt (failed we presume) to maintain what is distinctive about photography's polar opposite, painting, and then not only painting but what is perhaps an advanced form of painting, the landscape, something that demands a highly developed continuity, one that mirrors basic natural characteristics of geography.

What Benjamin is showing here is that the impulse to advance technology is one to preserve old technology. There is an impulse to use photography to make the world appear painterly. In any case, there is a “painterly character” to a few different things here: the painting itself; the world in the painting; the real world of actual appearance, which the painting in many ways constructs; the photographic image of the world; the image produced with photomontage. We also keep in mind here the relationship to the *Arcades* itself: how Benjamin's photomontage of text is used to create something “painterly,” how that may well be its basic impulse. How the *Arcades* is bringing a certain falseness to the appearance of reality.

Here the productivity of mechanical reproduction is defined by how well it can reproduce traditional values. Here too in this passage we can see Benjamin's idea of photomontage is not one of simple juxtaposition, but one of photo manipulation, where various elements of a single unified image might be brought forward or deemphasized separately. Photomontage as a type of deconstruction of the image, a behind the scenes and *technological*, as much as it is chemical, alteration and modulation of appearances, one that is not at all immediately noticeable, one whose every intent is in fact to remain unnoticeable, one that works to provide

us with the comforting illusion of a world that specifically counteracts these perceived threats of technology.

NP27 (Mystic writing pad)

Panopticon as wax museum, disciplinary subject as unrecognizable: both ideas open the way toward a closer examination not only of the effects of power of the panoptical machine but also to the presumed substance on which that power operates. The “wax” that we can see as in fact standing outside of, of “escaping,” the constitutive confinement of the panopticon also intersects ideas surrounding the “Mystic Writing Pad” of Freud and Derrida.

I want to note here how the dynamic of the Mystic Writing Pad is not really comprehensible through a Benjaminian lens without the type of reading, so to speak the “total work of art” or *Gesamtkunstwerk* reading, mentioned regarding Q2,8. But with that reading, combined with Derrida’s text, we open a dialogue that produces a whole new range of understandings of the operation of power through both spectacle and surveillance.

In any case, I want to read Derrida’s essay “Freud and the Scene of Writing” as a way to uncover this reading of Q2,8 and the *Arcades* in general, as a way to get closer to, perhaps, the “body without organs” and what the contours should be of the mobile office construct of NP. This reading would be a theoretical grounding of, among other things, how a press should operate.

What is the Mystic Writing Pad? It is an apparatus or machine that Freud theorizes as a psychical model for the operation of memory, of perception, the unconscious and consciousness. We might simply think of it today as a computer, an iPad. But the crucial aspect of the writing pad is that, like human perception, it allows for the “permanence of the trace and for the virginity of the receiving substance, for the engraving of furrows and for the perennially intact bareness of the perceptive surface.” A more detailed description:

To make use of the Mystic Pad, one writes upon the celluloid portion of the covering-sheet which rests upon the wax slab. . . . It is a return to the ancient method of writing on tablets of clay or wax: a pointed stylus scratches the surface, the depression upon which constitutes the "writing." . . . this scratching is not effected directly, but through the medium of the covering-sheet. At the points which the stylus touches, it presses the lower surface of the waxed paper on to the waxed slab, and the grooves are visible as dark writing upon the otherwise smooth whitish-gray surface of the celluloid. If one wishes to destroy what has been written, all that is necessary is to raise the double covering-sheet from the wax slab by a light pull, starting from the free lower end. The close contact between the waxed paper and the wax slab at the places which have been scratched (upon which the visibility of the writing depended) is thus brought to an end and it does not recur when the two surfaces come together once more. The Mystic Pad is now clear of writing and ready to receive fresh inscriptions. (Freud, "Note on the Mystic Writing Pad")

The technology here is not much different from, for example, an EtchaSketch, except that the bottom portion of wax presumably retains a deep impression of anything that is ever written on the top sheets, a prototypical version of computer memory. Derrida then comments:

Note that the depth of the Mystic Pad is simultaneously a depth without bottom, an infinite allusion, and a perfectly superficial exteriority: a stratification of surfaces each of whose relation to itself, each of whose interior, is but the implication of another similarly exposed surface. It joins the two empirical certainties by which we are constituted: infinite depth in the implication of meaning, in the unlimited envelopment of the present, and, simultaneously, the pellicular essence of being, the absolute absence of any foundation.

We are working then with a number of entities that circulate on a connected or similar strata. The disciplinary, institutional structure of Foucault's panopticon reproduces itself as the effective model of any given subjectivity. Yet Foucault spends seemingly little time describing the disciplinary subject, the surveilled, the exhibited.

Next Benjamin, in *Arcades* Q2,8, positions visuality in relation to a wax substrate that can take on different appearances depending on which costume is placed over it. In this sense the subject of observation is anything but confined as it passes through a multitude of identities and historical time frames. Its most consistent characterization is that it appears in a museum context, a collection of veritable citations to various historical periods and personages analogous to the writing of the *Arcades* itself.

Enter Freud's Mystic Pad, which again overtly humanizes the wax substrate by analogizing it to the unconscious, a locus of memory that like a wax figure both remains available for new impressions and consistently keeps the shape of its history of inscriptions. Finally we can bring back in here the "body without organs" and the schizophrenic table, which manifests in the world as a certain thing—a table, an institution, a panopticon, a historical figure in wax, a piece of writing or a thing perceived—but that transgresses that initial structure as it follows desire to transform, over time, beyond all recognition and control.

There is an impasse or aporia that can be traced through each of these perceptual apparatuses, a way in which each of them is "without bottom, an infinite allusion, and a perfectly superficial exteriority." This is the territory that NP constantly rehearses, devotes itself to thinking again and again. It is most easily pursued through study, which has the lightest structural footprint and commitment, but we also consistently reimagine that same study through forays into the world. The energy and relevance of study comes from the world.

Scholarship and the Chicago Cubs

You're tasked with writing about Benjamin. You've delved in to Benjamin's work exclusively for seemingly a long time. Now you want to look at the criticism. But it feels odd: not unlike prioritizing the reading of Shakespeare criticism over reading Shakespeare's text itself. There's clearly no comparison whatsoever. The criticism feels like, is, a completely misleading waste of time. This

is perhaps a founding moment of all criticism, all scholarship, this inauthentically secondary quality. The quality of taking one away or removing oneself from the experience of the object.

But just like with so much in the *Arcades*, we have to look at how things become their opposites, how they build up to a transformation. One way of speaking of this is to look at how much the *Arcades* fits into a written response, a critical response, not unlike the scholarship that's built up around it. Even the inauthentically secondary has a place in establishing the nature of the *Arcades*. Certainly the criticism is all quotable material, such Benjamin himself would have no doubt make use of it (just as he did with other criticisms). That folding in of whatever happens to be current, that nonrejection of any element as itself a dialectical image, containing a potentiality of the now of recognizability—and this is a political move, to the extent of defining the political itself.

Yes, the most elemental thing to do is to stay with a generalized sense of text, building in pieces of critique as “needed” or as they come to one, but staying with that discourse that the broader idea of text itself is generating.

The fact is we could have done a study on one passage of the *Arcades Project*. It would have lead out to everything else that was happening in the book.

Saying this, it's important to recognize that work done on the *Arcades* must either confidently exceed the *Arcades* in insight, or work assiduously to follow it, to try to walk behind in its footsteps, which itself is very likely sufficient to exceed 95% of the existing writing on the *Arcades*.

Criticism has thus not absorbed this work. To write *through* the *Arcades* is precisely to “believe the absurd,” as in Y8a,1. And that is the point of any academic project whatsoever, to find that place in what you are doing that can be seen in no way other than pursuing the incomprehensible, the silly, the mad, the futile.

The decision point at which one “turns back” and tries to reinterpret one's findings in terms of dissatisfying existing discursive practices is always already caught in an empty history.

The not-at-all unrelated moment we have recently witnessed: the Chicago Cubs, cursed as the most unmagical, losingest team in baseball, wins the World Series after a 108 year drought. That team is now transformed into the most magical team baseball will perhaps ever know. It's not the team or the place or the cause that's significant; it's perception and how experience is created. You believe that thing until you work through it, to its basic transformation, which might not be in your lifetime (how many players for the "cause" of the Cubs are no longer living, but of course who live in baseball history through this victory?).

All this being said, if in fact this translating back into more traditional discourse keeps a central significance, then yes this process of figuring out and performing that transformation is key.

NP28 (Peer review)

Any type of institutional formation passes through peer review, almost as if it is passing through its very self. No matter what form an NP press assumes, it will have some version of peer review at its core.

Most basically then peer review is a process of legitimation. Individuals in the scholarly community do not nominally rely on their own judgment but act by committee. A "jury" of "peers" decides what qualifies as scholarly knowledge. When publication happens in the university, projects are vetted by two or more experts in the field from which the project originates. If these experts agree that the project is an advancement of the concerns of that field, the publication process commences in full, with no further questions asked, that particular period of investigation closed. Insofar as NP attempts a model of innovative publishing, it must either pass through these kinds of traditional value assessments or re-conceive of them on its own terms.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (NYU Press, 2011) is a thorough treatment of the axioms of peer review and a sober look at how those axioms make more or less sense in the context of the

affordances of digital technology and publication strategies. One of my primary concerns here will be to consider Fitzpatrick's work in light of the disciplinary, self-perpetuating structure of peer review, a pan-optical seeing by which the entire institution of the university press is legitimated.

One of the basic truths of NP is that if we can advance new models of peer review and the legitimation of knowledge we'd then be able to structure publication processes around that review. The university press system as it exists does the same thing, has a superstructure that is keyed to an array of internal processes, with an age-old system of peer review at its base. It's just that the system has been for all intents and purposes the only system, becoming infrastructural. Part of the awareness built up by NP is one where those axial processes are brought forward, questioned, and rearranged.

Fitzpatrick, referencing the work of Mario Biagioli, provides an essentially one-to-one link between peer review's deep history and disciplinary surveillance technique as outlined by Foucault:

Biagioli ties the establishment of editorial peer review to the royal license that was required for the legal sale of printed texts; this mode of state censorship, employed to prevent sedition or heresy, was delegated to the royal academies through the imprimatur granted them at the time of their founding. . . . Gradually . . . scholarly societies facilitated a transition in scientific peer review from state censorship to self-policing, allowing them a degree of autonomy but simultaneously creating, in the Foucauldian sense, a disciplinary technology, one that produces the conditions of possibility for the academic disciplines that it authorizes. (21)

Fitzpatrick continues:

Biagioli's argument leads us to understand peer review not simply as a system that produces disciplinarity in an intellectual sense, but as a mode of disciplining knowledge itself, a mode that is "simultaneously repressive, productive, and constitutive" of academic ways of knowing. . . . He pertinently distinguishes Michel Foucault's disciplinary reference points in medicine and the prison from the

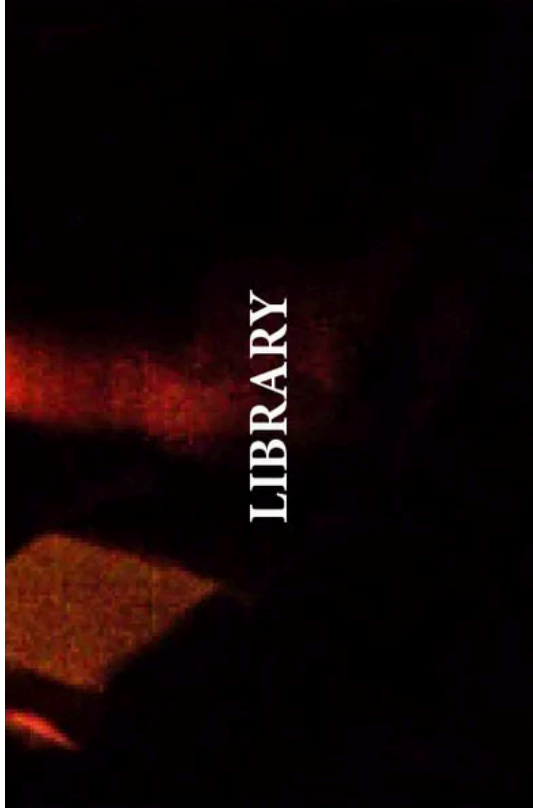
discipline of peer review, however, as only in the academy do we find “that the roles of the disciplined and the discipliner are often reversed during one’s career”. . . indicated the ways that peer review functions as a self-perpetuating disciplinary system, inculcating the objects of discipline into becoming its subjects. (22)

I would pause here not only to take in fully both the historical and contemporary relevance of peer review as a self-policing force of censorship in service not of “knowledge” but of state power, but also to look at a potential misreading or underestimation by Fitzpatrick and Biagioli of the all-encompassing “total work of art” that is the genuine import of the “generalizable model of functioning” that is the panopticon.

Foucault’s idea in *Discipline and Punish* seems to be that the subject of surveillance is always already surveilling itself. The quintessence of subjectivity considered in general is that it is in fact constituted by power relations, so that as much as the machinic architecture of the panopticon in itself, with no literal central figure or subjectivity, creates the disciplined subject, that very same subject reproduces the panoptical construct with even more effectiveness than any physical structure. This brand of indistinguishability, how it is generated and perpetuated, is something we trace through Foucault, is blatantly at issue in the *Arcades*, and runs through our perception of the body without organs.

The question then becomes what happens when we fail, as seems to be happening in this critique of peer review, to recognize this thoroughgoing co-implication or phantasm of two versions of the same disciplinarity? Foucault grounds his argument in the hospital and the prison precisely as concrete historical, documented reference points for the discipline of near pure immateriality, whose other name could easily be knowledge production: that is his primary object in writing. To say that the roles of disciplined and discipliner are “often reversed” is to elide the significance of Foucault’s contribution to disciplinary thinking almost entirely, to in fact obscure its relevance to a reconsideration of peer review.

A cascade of questions arises here as to why this misreading might have happened, but one thing we can do is attribute the error to the academy itself. At what point is it impossible for a disciplinary institution to contemplate its own status as a key player in a repressive regime? As Fitzpatrick writes (in this peer-reviewed book) “peer review is in some sense the *sine qua non* of the academy. We employ it in almost every aspect of the ways that we work, from hiring decisions through tenure and promotion reviews, in both internal and external grant and fellowship competitions, and, of course, in publishing. The work we do as scholars is repeatedly subjected to a series of vetting processes that enable us to indicate that the results of our work have been scrutinized by authorities in the field, and that those results are therefore authoritative” (16).



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Many of the institutions NP partners with will have a fully developed library system dedicated to making available and archiving research outputs, thus sharing certain components of the NP mission and the mission of presses NP facilitates. We therefore prioritize close communication with key library staff as new presses are contracted and developed, putting in place a framework for shared resources, conversation, and outlook.

Full sense of language (Y1,1, pt. 1)

From the beginning of this convolute we're looking at the advent, the start, the conception, the coming into being of photography. Its birth. And we look at the narrative trajectories in which it is placed. As Benjamin writes, the citation is a "prophecy," and the author Wiertz attributes a mythic quality to the machine, being "born" and becoming the "glory of our age:" it holds the mythic status of "titan," which the gods defeated. And while the citation lists out the artisanal qualities of painting destined to be replaced by photography, it also hypothesizes the return of painting, at a more refined level, to follow photography, where an abstracted architectural sense of art and creation is achieved. These are "painters in the full sense of the word." This is a kind of messianic time when words have their full sense, a time when traditional artistic and artisanal values reclaim ascendance. Is this finally what technology is directed toward? The answer seems to be a dialectical (that is, heavily qualified) yes. And we take the point that when these traditional values do return to the fore, it's then that the full sense of language is manifested.

NP29 (On the reproduction of capitalism)

In light of the reproductive qualities of peer review, its re-instituting of a disciplinary surveillance, consider (and also as a way into considering Marx) the following quote from Louis Althusser's *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (1995; Verso 2014):

The tenaciously self-evident truths (the empiricist kind of ideological self-evident truths) of the point of view of *production* alone, or even of simple productive practice (which is itself abstract with respect to the process of production), are so much a part of our everyday "consciousness" that it is extremely difficult, not to say practically impossible, to rise to *the standpoint of reproduction*. Yet, outside this standpoint, everything remains abstract (not just one-sided, but distorted). That holds even at the level of production and, a fortiori, at the level of simple practice.

And let's hold side by side or at least keep on the back burner this statement from Fitzpatrick:

. . . because of the role that [peer review] has played in authorizing academic research—because we ourselves, as Biagioli suggests, are both the subject and the object of its disciplining gestures—it has become so intractably established that we have a hard time imagining not just a future without it, but any way that it could conceivably change.

What is the mode of production of peer review? What is it reproducing? (Which is to try to “rise to the standpoint of reproduction.”) This question is the context within which all of our reading and writing takes place, all of our production of knowledge. Can we make a list of the forces behind university-based production, the forces behind the creation of whatever it is that is produced in the university, and then of course and immediately the forces behind that pure extension of whatever the university is, the university press, the portal through which legitimate knowledge seems everywhere and always to pass? A shift in consciousness around peer review, which may be all it takes to update, change, or eliminate peer review, may materialize only by such an itemization of its component parts. To quote Althusser again, “we shall not go into an analysis of this question.”

But there are two main points to draw from Althusser (working toward the explication of ideology) as we work our way to an explication of a business model of our own. The first is the need of the corporation, an institution, a university, to reproduce both its means of material production and labor power. This latter idea of labor power, on the social level, is crucial, since, as Althusser describes, there is a describable tendency over time for the corporation to rely less and less on reproducing labor power through direct, even on-site means such as wages (which enables the worker to reproduce itself) and to turn to indirect means, foremost among them education.

How is this reproduction of (diversely) qualified labour-power ensured in a capitalist regime? It is ensured differently from social

formations based on slavery or serfdom: the reproduction of the qualification of labour-power no longer tends (it is a question of tendential law) to be ensured “on the job” (instructions during production itself) but, increasingly, outside production, by the capitalist school system and other instances and institutions. (51)

Althusser solidifies here an extension of Marxist economics into the pedagogical, positioning educational institutions (and all institutions) as apparatuses explicitly committed to the reproduction of labor power within capitalism. I’m not sure what other way we’re going to view education or the university system, or the knowledge-legitimation apparatus known as the university press, the defining characteristic of which is peer review. And the beating heart of peer review, as we’ve seen, is panoptical discipline. Althusser continues:

every agent of production, exploitation, or repression, to say nothing of ‘professional ideologues’ (Marx), has to be ‘steeped’ in that ideology in one way or another in order conscientiously (and with no need to have his own personal gendarme breathing down his neck) to carry out his or her task: the task of the exploited (the proletarians), the exploiters (the capitalists), the auxiliaries of exploitation (supervisory personnel), or the high priests of the dominant ideology, its ‘functionaries,’ and so on.

The absence of the gendarme again links the argument here to everything Foucault is theorizing through the panopticon. On this view pure knowledge functions as pure penetration of ideology into the fiber of subjectivity. Anything devoted to knowledge by that fact announces itself as completely committed to the off-site, as it were, reproduction of labor power. In fact it’s useful at this point to interrogate the entire idea of “subjectivity” as a playing card in the capitalist mindset, in the race for expanded productivity. We shall not go into an analysis of this question.

Merger of art and technology (Y1,1, pt. 2)

The passage outlines that, very much contrary to what might be thought of as the “murder,” the violent overthrow of painting by photography, of humanity by the machine, of traditional values by industrial labor, it is when the photograph comes to its fullest realization that the “genius of art” returns, takes possession but also insists that from thenceforward technology and art work together. Recall the “genius of industry” mentioned in the source to the second epigraph, and here it’s clear that there is little to no distinction between the “genius of art” and the “genius of industry.” Thus the prophecy Benjamin refers to at the start of the passage is that art will be subsumed by technology but that art will then return, in a kind of Hegelian synthesis, to become an almost unified entity with technology.

NP30 (Pedagogic art)

In many ways taking a cue from relational art, “pedagogic art,” seen from a distance, is an attempt to “forge a closer connection between art and life,” it is an artistic “intervention into social processes” and includes “educational experiments” (and I’d like to keep in view here the Althusserian ideology of education). In her book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Verso, 2012), Claire Bishop documents the rise of pedagogic projects in the 2000s, where “artists and curators have become increasingly engaged in projects that appropriate the tropes of education as both a method and a form: lectures, seminars, libraries, reading-rooms, publications, workshops and even full-blown schools.” She also references:

the growth of museum education departments, whose activities are no longer restricted to classes and workshops to enhance the viewer’s understanding of a particular exhibition or collection, but can now include research networks with universities, symposia reflecting upon their practice, and interdisciplinary conferences. (242)

Bishop notes a full array of pedagogic projects, “at the intersection of art, education, and performance,” that were both self-organized, documented and undertaken by art magazines, and undertaken by institutions and corporations such as Nike, which collaborated with the Cooper Hewitt art school “to produce art and design workshops for teenagers.”

NP includes a pedagogical component in that a cumulative program of study, represented by this text and including iterations of community engagements, is central to a dialogue that forms the internal structure of its ongoing engagement with capital and historical consciousness. Bishop cites Ira Rogoff citing Foucault’s “parrhesis”:

free, blatant public speech. . . . an educational turn in art and curating . . . might be “the moment when we attend to the production and articulation of truths—not truth as correct, as provable, as fact, but truth as that which collects around its subjectivities that are neither gathered nor reflected by other utterances.” (242)

If we clearly delineate late-capitalist institutional forces in terms of the context within which we operate, returning to a basic conception of panoptical discipline, it makes sense to incorporate these discussions into the basic pedagogy of NP. Bishop goes on to reference Joseph Beuys, whose Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research, founded in 1973, had a curriculum in which:

culture, sociology and economics were integrated as the foundations of an all-encompassing programme [and sought to] implement Beuys’s belief that economics should not be restricted to a question of money but should include alternative forms of capital, such as people’s creativity.

There are a few thematic threads here, such as the overt introduction of sociology and economics, that I’m holding in suspension at the moment as we form a program of study for NP, but these concerns will I think increase in relevance as we move ahead. I’ll note here as well that the conjoining of economics and “creativity” is a

concern NP will underscore. Continuing with Beuys as a model, then, the following as cited by Bishop is quite informative for NP:

From a contemporary perspective, one of Beuys's most salient later projects is 100 Days of the Free International University, organized for Documenta 6 (1977). Thirteen interdisciplinary workshops, open to the public, featured trade unionists, lawyers, economists, politicians, journalists, community workers, educationalists and sociologists speaking alongside actors, musicians and young artists. (244)

I want very much to keep in view how this broad concept of artistic activity within an educational and experimental university context operates. NP will arrange itself in a quite similar manner, except that it will zero in on publication formats, and will not only found its own (anti)organization but operate within already existing institutional arrangements, such as mainstream universities themselves. A key idea is also here expressed by Bishop:

Programming events, seminars and discussions (and the alternative institutions that might result from these) can all be regarded as artistic outcomes in exactly the same way as the production of discreet objects, performances and projects. (245)

This is a truth about the study that underlies NP: it will be programmed and public, even as the study that is part of the programs and public events will lead back to innovations in the same programming and events. Thus these will all be outputs at the same time as they are "inputs," or content-oriented manifestations of the overall project.

Present-tense rekindling (Y1,1, pt. 3)

Perhaps Benjamin couldn't have said it better himself, but this passage is obviously a citation. These are Wiertz's words, these are Wiertz's ideas, his prophecy, part of the history of the arcades, the history of Paris in the nineteenth century. Benjamin then wants to point out that the article was in response to "the new invention of photographic enlargement," so that we see, in the

creation of “life-size photos,” the artificial enhancement of the human (not to mention the photo itself), who then, as a result of technological engagement or cooperation, creates a kind of cyborgian mythic creature to rival the paranoia about the “titan” of photography itself. The prophecy is in many ways already fulfilled, then, by means of the citation in front of us. Technology here produces life itself, just as was implied in the epigraphs, the mortal “rekindling” the sun.

NP31 (A first pass at a project-based press (per)formed by NP)

This text operates as the foundational activity of NP, specifically of the program of study announced as a key element of the overall project. As much as this text can be a kind of annotated bibliography or incubator for relevant ideas (or web ontology), it can also exhibit the development of ongoing real-time arrangements of projects under consideration for the kinds of presses NP seeks to generate.

Three projects present themselves:

—Michelle Ellsworth, *The Rehearsal Artist*. Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/224796340>. “An eight foot high wooden wheel assists dancers as they rotate in the sagittal plane with their nose as the central axis. Each rotation of the wheel tests the viability of the constructed environment the dancers inhabit and allows the audience to reconsider the nature of stability. Part rehearsal and part social science experiment, “The Rehearsal Artist” employs knee aprons, one-way surveillance glass, Mormon temple rituals, and a wooden bikini to prepare the audience for shifts in perspective and other revelations related to death.”

—Laurie Gries, *Mapping Obama Hope: A Digital Visualization Project for Visual Rhetorics* <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/21.2/topoi/gries/index.html#> “The purpose of this mapping project is twofold. First, this mapping project will help improve

the digital research method of iconographic tracking so that it can better account for the movement, transformation, and rhetorical activities of new media images. As I discuss in the following section, iconographic tracking is a digital research method I invented to trace the circulation and rhetorical transformation of images such as Obama Hope that tend to go viral in the sense that they spread quickly across culture(s), trigger a considerable cultural response, and replicate through reproduction, imitation, and/or remix. Iconographic tracking, as originally designed and implemented, made use of some data visualizations. However, it did not take full advantage of data visualization tools and interactive models at our current disposal. This mapping project, therefore, attempts to make more robust use of digital visualization techniques so that iconographic tracking can better account for a viral image's transnational flows, distributed collective activities, and divergent rhetorical functions. Second, this mapping project aims to make iconographic tracking more efficient for scholarly use. In *Still Life with Rhetoric* (2015), I described iconographic tracking in rich detail so that it is methodical enough to be adapted for other research needs. But as initially designed, iconographic tracking requires the gathering of various software to collect, store, code, analyze, and visualize data. Such piecemealing makes iconographic tracking extremely time-intensive and unnecessarily laborious. It also limits the amount of visual data a researcher can ultimately collect given typical research time constraints. This digital visualization project will specifically help to develop the digital visualization techniques to be used in PikTrack—a software prototype currently being designed to make it possible to collect, store, organize, analyze, and visualize visual data in one easy-to-use graphic interface.”

—John Ackerman, project under development “Scholarship. I and others are trying to actively rethink ‘city’ to pry it away from its 18th, 19th, 20th century moorings—just when trans-capital, ecological duress, and violent migrations disentangle the city differently. The difference, plainly, is that cities have been devolving

into streams, networks, eddies, territorial sprawls throughout late modernity, and a number of us are trying to reclaim locality as a cultural, economic, and imaginary construct. Neither my tribe nor the venture capitalists have much use for the modern notion of the city: the beacon of democracy and commerce by a river or on a hill. My particular contribution focuses on cultural resilience inextricable from location, local economies that circulate through affect, and then flipping the modernist dream upside down so that ruin precedes design. I just sent off an article on ‘indigenous biophilia’ that makes some of these arguments.”

At this point these projects have been presented, in this particular form, based on conversations we have had so far about NP. What we would be doing is looking for connections between them that would serve as both an internal, curated link as well as an overall external narrative of presentation. I want to say that any imaginative construct will do, as an organizing principle, as long as there is one, as long as we can say something is taking shape.

But here too is where our theorization takes off, as we move beyond any idea that we’re simply “yoking things together.” What is it that we immortalize, that we perpetuate, by committing to some version of each of these projects? Are we building a business? What would sell? What forms are these and what exactly are we doing when we move from one project to another? What is the shape an interstice takes here? What is it that’s most unsettling, what has been fallen for, about each of these projects? What can something like a temporary press offer in supporting that particular quality of each project? We presume that a new press is useful or needed, but in what way exactly? All this must constantly be reinvented.

Further, what do we make of the panoptical subject if these works serve both to innovate in terms of that subject and clearly have some relation to the panoptical construct in that they appear here, in the visualization that is this text, in this dissertation environment, as elements as it were of a panoptical gaze looking back at itself? How do we discuss the ideology of education, what labor

are we preparing for, if this is how we are given to perform for ourselves? Can NP be a collective consciousness that builds up around such a performance? Are we archiving such performances, for instance, of a techno-scientific relation to nature? Of global reading strategies? Or of locations? Do we need to decide on such things? How long can we keep postponing these decisions? (See *Writing and Difference* p. 203 on the originary nature of delay)

Bricklayer as renderer (Y1,1, pt. 4)

The passage seems to jump back in time, referencing toward its end, once again, the “bricklayer-painter,” that older artisanal form, pointing out that they only “render” the “material.” How does one explain this recurrence, however, which seems to ask for some way to fit it into the overall movement of the passage? One way is to view the “bricklayer-painter” as Benjamin himself, the *Arcades* nothing more than a piling of brick on brick, mortar of space and thought between each, Benjamin applying himself “to the material part,” artisanally, in a painterly way, visually “rendering” the world. Here to imagine the bricklayer as painter is one of the funnier moments in the *Arcades*: what kind of rendering is a bricklayer going to do? Citation and commentary as text, material, that renders something else, but only as much as a brick might do? Is this the status of painting, the embarrassment in the face of the detailed rendering the camera might bring? And if this is the status of painting, what kind of world is it even capable of imagining, where of course it can only conceive of its own returning to power? What kind of power? And if all this is as we can imagine perfectly defunct, what sort of power will technology take?

NP32 (The aesthetic sociality of blackness)

What is NP’s relation to the “aesthetic sociality of blackness”? As we have been discussing it, NP is directly related to disavowal, to maintaining at one and the same time a relation to institutional

structures and a refusal to associate too closely with those structures. It wants to participate in a type of disavowal of the institution and therefore works with “blackness” as a model, as it makes its appearance within university discourse through the work of a number of scholars.

NP attempts to remain fugitive in this sense. To reference what we’ve been discussing, its model here is the “body without organs” and it crosses through an “office of soft architecture” or the creation of a “schizophrenic table,” it wants to regard the problematic of the panoptical subject within institutional formation and how that subject reproduces a capitalist ideology of education, ultimately becoming a pedagogic performance of its own disavowal.

NP is permanently embedded in redefinition. There is no answer on offer here as to what redefinition is but only an identification of overlapping thematics that inform ongoing structural emergence. In *Experiments in Exile: C.L.R. James, Hélio Oiticica, and the Aesthetic Sociality of Blackness* (Fordham University Press, 2018), Laura Harris discusses the work of James and Oiticica in terms of a search for “alternatives to the social relations of citizens by studying and attempting very different modes of sociality or collective life.” These social relations first make their appearance on the margins, through:

black performances in cricket and samba and with the more quotidian performative practices they [James and Oiticica] encountered in the barrack-yards of Port of Spain and the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, among their poor, mostly black, but always also motley residents of those spaces.

These are “unruly aesthetic and social practices” that the subjects of Harris’s study explore. “In seeking an alternative to the social life of the citizen, James and Oiticica are both attracted to those other aesthetic and social practices that together comprise what I call the aesthetic sociality of blackness.” Again, as Harris writes:

In the aesthetic sociality of blackness and the modes of composition, arrangement, organization or assembly, and the forms, always simultaneously aesthetic and social, through which it takes shape, they

[James and Oiticica] find what they understand to be vital resources for the construction of other forms of social life, other ways to live—to live otherwise.

By constantly doubling back to reorganize itself at new institutions, by keeping at the innermost reaches of its central office the disavowal inherent in study itself, NP arranges an entrepreneurial endeavor that constantly re-invents sociality, performs new versions of itself in multiple contexts, becoming an ongoing and dangerous flirtation with radical unrecognizability that nevertheless acts as a wellspring of life itself and of the idea that perhaps there is at some future time a characteristic of blackness that won't be disavowed.

Photography and sovereignty (Y1,1, pt. 5)

The significance of Wiertz's article appearing in a publication entitled "The Nation" is that forms of sovereignty are implicated or produced by technology: it is no longer the age of bricks, but of iron. One comes away with a sense of how far technology has outstripped humanity's capacity to comprehend it. Indeed Wiertz is only "rendering" a certain teleology of the artisanal and of technology, and here he very much seems the inaccurate "bricklayer," attempting to be the "architect" and thinker but truly applying himself to "the material part only" since his characterization of



MARKETING, PUBLICITY, SALES

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One of the defining elements of creating a new press is responding to new market formations created by and generating the appearance of new projects. Discerning market potential is therefore integral to press development, which includes the assessment of new audiences or perspectives in conjunction with the projects generated by new presses. Extending from market analysis, forms of publicizing both new presses and new projects are planned and implemented, including traditional areas such as reviews or appearances in mainstream media, including social media, but also tapping potential for publicity innovation in new markets. Sales follow each of these trajectories within a nonprofit context, with access, subscriptions, and point-of-sale purchases gaining relevance at different times or within different project phases. As with other area of focus, NP brings a developing marketing, publicity, and sales knowledge-base to each new press at the same time as it arranges for independent press activity in each of these areas.

technology's progress is so rooted in traditional values and far removed from the implications of technological dominance.

NP33 (AUP 1)

There's a breach, an imperative breach, breach of an imperative. It is directed toward the institutional formations that surround study, toward the study that surrounds institutions. We learn as we go. In this case, the imperative is to address the extra-institutional formation known as the Association of University Presses (AUP), a collection of approximately 125 university presses that represent the largest educational institutions in the United States. (Note that the AUP—until recently called the “Association of American University Presses”—includes other scholarly, nonprofit but non-university presses, as well as non-US presses, though these do not represent its core mission).

Not unlike college or university accreditation organizations, the AUP has criteria for membership that serve to define and legitimate a university press. There are many smaller publishing concerns, outfits, or organizations that are university-based, but they will not qualify as a university press without membership in the AUP. And then once a press does qualify for AUP membership, it may be said to obtain to and ensure, with continued membership, whatever authority is the outcome of such membership, whatever authority accompanies the status of membership.

There is a further complexity here as well, since, as many are already aware, the core role of a university press itself is as a grantor of legitimation, as a stamp of approval for whatever it is we deem to be “scholarship.” The university press is a gateway for knowledge insofar as that knowledge is deemed to be “legitimate.” Of course knowledge takes a multitude of forms, but whether it be scientific knowledge or well-trusted and agreed-upon knowledge in the humanities, it will not obtain to the status of such knowledge without the involvement of a university press. Along these same lines, we can say that whatever limitations we can designate as belonging to the university press or its

systems of operation will be the same limitations on legitimated knowledge itself.

The breach is made. What could these criteria or guidelines for membership look like? They must be significant indeed, since they will provide the details and affordances of a structure beyond which we perhaps cannot look. This legitimation of legitimation itself, a gate before which we can expect to be questioned, for instance, on the epistemological foundations of life itself. There is certainly an everyday quality to the AUP and its annual conference, where it so happens that the employees of university presses like to congregate and talk to each other, swap trade secrets, check in. But there is as well this sense of august responsibility, a sense of ownership of the questions of who will be let in to this conversation and precisely what form that conversation will take. For the implication is there: by granting a press membership, that press will then be empowered to grant the status of “knowledge” to the projects it produces. If enough presses are granted this ability, a proliferation of new knowledges might well be set loose. Questions NP would like to ask range from (a) how it is that of the approximately 2,618 accredited four-year colleges and universities in the United States only approximately 125 (5%) have university presses that are AUP members, to (z) what the effect on “knowledge” might be if more of these institutions had AUP-member presses?

There seems to be an imperative here, contained even in these extra-institutional formations. The university press forms as an extra-institutional entity, starting with Cambridge and Oxford university presses. Scholarly communication was facilitated, along with the production of a collection of university ephemera in print form. Then the secondary institution of the AUP forms as a kind of overlay on this disparate, if not feudal, landscape. A force for uniformity, enhanced collaboration and thus enhanced effectiveness, efficiency, and recognition. Yet somehow, in this hyperobject of red tape, the idea of a commitment to knowledge itself has been held on to, an idea of the university and the university press in their highest forms. Hence the imperative. It seems to contain, or even be, its own breach. So that at this stage, if we're thinking

of acting responsibly, we need to ask in detail what these criteria of membership might be, how they might operate in a contemporary context, what their implications might be, and how we might in fact build our own commitment to knowledge within them.

Citation as industrial practice (Y1,2, pt. 1)

The passage picks up the themes of Y1,1 with “industrialization in literature,” or the force of technology in artisanal practice. “Scribe” here is the name of a writer, a figure, an actual person, but very much references the ancient and defunct traditional practice, not unlike bricklaying, as well as the act of writing, in this case copying, and in that case citation. Thus we have here an instance of citation being defined as an industrial practice.

NP34 (AUP 2)

The text has been a development into a status of reading as an ongoing ontology or phenomenology. Mistakes therefore simply do not matter. And so in this context we set out to read the criteria for AUP membership, which themselves of course form a criteria for and presupposition of reading itself. And here I am only linking to this NP centerpiece. Shouldn't I quote it in its entirety? Much of what we would like here is to arrive at a certain questioning, which is a kind of questioning of reading and the guidelines and (disciplinary) structures arranged for that reading. We question the text. And are these guidelines not exerting force behind, into, around, before, and after text as we are aware of it? I'll make a very simple statement and say “we only want to read.” This implies an innocence that seems universal. It implies an ability to not work, to be idle. We want to be left alone to read our own idleness. So we're inside or completely part of this attempt to read more closely.

There's always a breach and the guidelines themselves breach with the two words, as header or title, “Membership Guidelines.” Membership. Alright. We want to hang out on that first

word of this whole thing, which I've been using but not saying anything. But that one would need to be a "member" first and foremost, and unforgettably, this puts forward a political framework as the defining aspect of the knowledge economy. This is a club. Whether a publishing organization gains legitimacy, whether knowledge is deemed creditable, will be an aspect of who is in, and who is out. Favors and compromises will be rampant. Authority will be to some degree random, prejudices will be tolerated. Where one might expect the most careful and circumspect foray into objectivity, for the best possible motives, one comes up against a free radical, an unpredictable subjective force that comes across as institutionally dark, perhaps dangerous. Isn't there a type of veneration here, perhaps "of the Beautiful, the Good," that is reminiscent of Haussmann?

The following word is "Guidelines," which is of a piece with our argument since it announces the criteria as only that, guidelines. The implication is that they may shift or not be followed, suddenly be clarified in some other way, some other venue, depending one presumes on who is favored with membership status. Things are flexible, which in itself seems deeply appropriate given the complex subject matter but in the context of "membership" seems sinister. As if to say, we all know that some of us will not be adhering to any of this, will be doing as we please, will be granted the ability to behave completely arbitrarily. Guidelines are for fools. Taken together, then, "membership" and "guidelines" raise the specter of stony-faced silence and refusal, quite the opposite of the open invitation they perform (if poorly) here on the AUP website. Of course this is all far from uncommon in any organization. Organizations perhaps universally rely on their ability to exclude as constitutive of their existentially crucial inclusion. What's being pointed out here is the unexpectedness of this particular gambit in this context. But there it is.

One asks, before reading the guidelines any further, what could be going on? And then, self-critically, why launch into an attempt at a nearly delusional, microscopic close reading of what is finally an off-hand on-line document, almost a place-holder for

behind-the-scenes collaboration, the really important work of university press publishing? But this document is what we have to go on, as outsiders as it were, and we want to come back to it again and again in an engagement of reading. In some sense it is our founding document, as much as the *Arcades*.

Dramatists and photographers (Y1,2, pt. 2)

What does this second passage in the convolute have to do with photography, which is nowhere mentioned? It shows the context within which the artisanal operates, the way it is infiltrated and comingled with planning, capital, mechanization. The passage starts by showing exactly the same collaboration, the essential sameness of or dialectic between the forces that represent photography and those that represent, like painting, artisanal activity. As in Y1,1, there is a distancing or making fun of the “big industrialists and moneymen,” or a differentiation in place, but there is an absolute merger, at the level of the “secret,” or in fact the “genius,” of what that capitalistic process is.

NP35 (AUP 3)

Having assessed the fact that any consideration of joining the university press community must pass through “Membership Guidelines,” we take as a source the following text:

Guidelines on Admission to Membership and Maintenance of Membership (Hereinafter, “Guidelines”)

Isn't it unfair to zero in microscopically on a word-by-word close reading of such a document? I think that question is fair. But the question also seems misguided, given the stakes, as we can certainly imagine them, of joining such a community. Since what we understand by becoming a full fledged member of the AUP is that a press then occupies a position of being sanctioned, legitimated, in its ability to sanction and legitimate what we understand as new knowledge. The day-to-day reality of this taking place, of a

press gaining membership and producing projects, may happen across a whole vast spectrum of possible press formations and outcomes, but the central problematic remains the same. If we stay focused on the particular rhetorical move the AUP seems to find necessary in its role as gatekeeper at this particular point of entry, it becomes possible to characterize, or even recognize, the key disciplinary structures that impact how knowledge is produced and received. Such an analytical task is seen to open alternative analytical pathways in this particular domain.

The word “Admission” is introduced at this point in the document. One will, then, be “admitted” to membership. Given the overwhelmingly academic context of the AUP and of anyone who might be pursuing membership—in many ways it in fact defines “academicism” itself—the word “admission” mirrors the whole process of undergraduate or graduate “admission” to a program. We all know what this means. Yes, there is a goal by applicants of crossing the threshold of membership, or enrollment, in this way, but even more what is raised here is the specter of the admissions committee, a panel of judges who might inspect whatever criteria are presented in the following AUP document. The word introduces the idea of a particular type of authority that will be operative in this process. In this case one assumes that the implied authority is the AUP board.

Also introduced here is the word “Maintenance.” One must then “maintain” membership, presumably in a mechanical fashion, subsequent to being admitted, which implies a regular process of observation or inspection as to the criteria of membership and that they are persistently met. The idea is that membership will not simply be assessed once on admission but on an ongoing basis, that the authorities of the AUP in some sense intend to conduct checks, of an unspecified nature, that a particular press continues to align with the appropriate idea of an AUP member. While the word “maintenance” sounds quite straightforward the overall impression of the phrase “maintenance of membership” here serves as a counterforce to the preceding “admission,” specifically raising the idea of how an expulsion or ejection might

operate, where for some as yet unspecified reason adherence to AUP criteria was not maintained and admission was rescinded. As with the word “admission,” again at this second location in the sentence the intention seems to be to instill the idea that there is an authority that may well decide to kick you out of the knowledge economy. Applicants are hereby on notice.

What could it mean to be on notice? First of all it means that the attentional economy of university presses must be defined by an awareness of the AUP criteria, such that limits are imposed on the parameters for the expression, generation, and positioning of what they produce, which presumably is what we mean by knowledge itself, the knowledge product. What we are now positioned to assess, the criteria of membership in the AUP, needs to form the background to any given scholarly effort. Those efforts then, in some way will have these guidelines, and of course perhaps many other sets of guidelines from any number of other authorities, as founding principles. Like university authorities and degree-granting agencies themselves, the AUP both cites and perpetuates an existential threat that works to direct discourse to its purposes. If one would like to exist in this particular framework or community, it will be as per the formation of this authority.

Finally we have the parenthetical “(Hereinafter, ‘Guidelines’)”. This seemingly helpful, innocent, and efficient aside in fact speaks volumes. For this is the point at which a kind of marginal implication of the legal document is introduced, with “Hereinafter,” a thickly Latinate term that announces a whole archaic communication strategy of the official and heavily codified. As much as the word “Guidelines” is perfectly noncommittal, this term changes the story, as it were, ushering in a vision of potential breach of contract, lawsuits, and generally a thoroughgoing conservatism and perhaps constricted idea of the inner working of the university and its publication apparatus. The unrequested and useless efficiency (the abbreviation “Guidelines” is used only once in the document) is also an obfuscatory strategy of the legal document, quickly lumping together distasteful specificities (usually names) into an anodyne abstraction that speeds digestion of the gory

details. In any case, this moment in the Guidelines constitutes a tautological knock over the head with the role of authority of the AUP and its status as both leader of the “club” and vaguely legal entity. If we desire membership we better be prepared to sign on this roving dotted line.

Models of industrial production (Y1,2, pt. 3)

The secret of industrial production is “the art of getting others to work for us.” In this case for Scribe, for a scribe, for a maker of literature, this involved the “transfer of the principle of the division of labor,” effectively a transfer of identity itself, from the artisanal or material realms of occupations like “tailors, cabinet-makers” and so on, over to the immaterial or imaginative tasks of creating literature, into the realm of the “dramatic artist.” Scribe goes on to create an assembly line of entertainment, a Fordist model of industrial production but this time applied to drama, to abstracted entertainment.

NP36 (AUP 4)

The question arises: why not simply move forward with the creation of organizations rather than do a dubiously motivated “close reading” of the AUP membership guidelines? Why not take a couple main points from the guidelines and proceed from there? It’s true that a faster implementation of specific structural components of NP could be done and would make sense. But in fact what NP is positioned to do is in many ways just the opposite. NP is positioned for delay, which as we’ve been able to show leads to study itself. That is, the reading process is a realization of study and scholarship that, as we are theorizing it here, is of parallel importance to actual “business formation.” This may be the apex of any foundational insight NP possesses, and is certainly a modality of engagement the Arcades speaks to. Again, our business plan is a plan of study, of reading, and a close reading of the “text” of the AUP coalesces in every respect with both of those projects.

How then do we derive a business plan from such a reading? Of course this is our ongoing question and we can only arrive at the answer by doing the reading, even as the decision to do that reading is itself the affective or primal moment of the business plan. As with any context, the context of NP is partitioned into a multitude of concerns, as the blog has shown and has perhaps been designed to show, and the writing of the reading of this writing of the reading of the university press is what will align those finally anti-institutional concerns of NP with, as may be shown, still performative institutional fabrics at work via the AUP. Our “study” in the context of NP needs to take this form. NP’s outcomes will derive from this phenomenological locus.

The rationale for the close reading also implies the non-print-based emergence of NP activity that circulates at a point of crucial recharacterization of any publishing entity in the digital context. What this means is that the “business” model that emanates from reading practice is one of pure embodied activity, which runs contrary to the formation of capital insofar as it insists on mechanical repetition. The primary affordance of NP is the ability to operationalize both a radical embodiment of bona fide participation and a radical theorization of increasing liquidity. Thus by not abrogating the seemingly futile and amateurish dismantlement of the textual circuit understood as the AUP “Membership Guidelines”, NP keeps alive a passageway between, as it were, the living and the dead, keeps in motion a stillness that was, is, and will be the e-motion of Earth.

Student reading (Y1,2, pt. 4)

This is not a close reading, it is a “reading at all.” It is a looking at the passage as a dialectical image, seeing how meaning is operating on two distinct “sides,” but these sides seamlessly feeding into one another, disappearing into each other, in a way that aligns with but also critically comments on things like Benjamin’s theory of language. (Sidenote on lack of clarity in these notes: it is a reflection of the object, a necessity, a desire to let the object that

is the *Arcades* not be interfered with and to exist on its own terms; we come to clarity now and then, and those times are all the more important, but these other preparatory readings have just as much claim to existence). In any case, we can say that even this doubleness is a “profane” understanding of that language, a language summarized in Benjamin’s otherwise anti-linguistic (if we can say that) conception of the “dramatic,” though as we can easily see this studious reading happens to depict precisely what Benjamin is doing with the *Arcades* overall, with history itself, with his definition of what writing is, with his engagement with language and ideas at all. A vague sense of abyss.

NP37 (AUP 5)

The AUP membership guidelines continue:

As revised August 29, 2017

One wonders who did the revision, or who in fact wrote the guidelines in the first place. While it’s probably positive that the guidelines are announced as subject to revision, to different versions, this changeability is also of a piece with the fact that these are simply “guidelines,” fairly informal. But again, that informality seems to clash with the quite formal legal jargon and overwrought establishment of authority that seems to be in play. There is a particular combination of these two things, a mixture we might see as extending into the university itself. There is a kind of improvisatory imperative to the creation of knowledge, a “letting go,” at the same time as the disciplinary apparatus is of central importance. And of course the date here lets us know that everything we are assessing in these blog posts was very recently approved. We are not in any way analyzing an outmoded or archaic document, at least not ostensibly. This is all effectively what is happening in the contemporary moment.

A. Preamble

The outline structure then works to remind us of the legalistic framework that seems to be desired. It builds the expectation of a high level of clarity for what is going to be presented. To jump ahead just a bit the full structure of the outline is as follows:

- A. Preamble
- B. Types of Membership
 - 1. Regular Membership
 - 2. Affiliate Membership
 - 3. Introductory Membership
- C. Application, Admission, and Cancellation
 - 1. Application
 - 2. Admission
 - 3. Cancellation
- D. The Committee on Admissions and Standards
- E. Amendments

We can return to assess the overall progression of this hierarchy, but for now we can simply note the relative brevity of the document as a whole, so that “preamble” seems a little precious, not quite fitting the in fact everyday or less formal nature (as we will continue to see) of the actual document. Again, the legalistic framework seems to be determining this administrative overreach, as we might understand it. And, just to be clear, “preamble” does indicate “the introductory part of a statute or deed, stating its purpose, aims, and justification,” with steadily decreasing usage since the 1800s, according to Google. Its choice here, rather than simply “Introduction,” seems odd, unless of course the legal overtones are exactly the intention.

Reading: Benjamin’s employ (Y1,2, pt. 5)

To pull this text apart one engages a reading on multiple levels, and we can perhaps begin to categorize these levels, since at least one of them seems to occur with each passage: the self-referential, where the explication of one thing, most often done through the medium of citation, functions as cipher for an explication of

Benjamin's process in the *Arcades* itself. Here in Y1,2 we can note immediately that the Scribe is Benjamin himself, and our reading is meant to always have these implications firmly in front of us, implicating Benjamin and the *Arcades* quite fundamentally in the "industrialization in literature." The citational practice enlisted in the *Arcades* is precisely a "getting others to work for us," a way of outsourcing writing in the same way that Scribe outsources the creation of elements of dramatic text. Except that in Benjamin's case the outsourcing runs unconsciously, so to speak, to the already published authors of books, to the unsuspecting creators of the history of the nineteenth century, even as he is outsourcing the very description of this process to the author of this citation, Kressig. Benjamin does indeed see his scribal activity, his copying, as a photographic process, another copying that also has a negative element, this time in language itself. Such that the team of dramatic writers are akin to a team of photographers, each creating their own version of a mechanically produced "presentation": and we know that Benjamin's conception of language had everything to do with presentation, as seen in the work on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*:

Mystery in the dramatic is that moment in which the latter overshoots the realm of its own language towards a higher and unattainable one. It can therefore no longer be expressed in words but only through presentation: it is "dramatic" in the strictest sense.

NP38 (AUP 6)

To continue with the AUP membership guidelines:

The mission of the Association is to advance the essential role of a global community of publishers whose mission is to ensure academic excellence and cultivate knowledge.

As we contemplate adding presses, or members, to this association it will be important to keep the "mission" front and center (the anonymous AUP author figure here using the word

“mission” twice in a tautological tracing of a kind of transcendent, aimless boredom). The “Preamble” section, really the mission statement, of the guidelines is where that mission is most directly articulated. Even so, the language is vague and uses large abstractions liberally, like any mission statement, particularly for organizations that need to accommodate a diverse range of members. It has a boring, corporate flavor, but that does not differentiate the guidelines from much else in the contemporary environment. Here we are certainly left wondering what might be meant by: “advance,” “essential,” “role,” “global,” “community,” “publishers,” “ensure,” “academic,” “excellence,” “cultivate,” and of course “knowledge.”

And we should pause to assess exactly what is meant by each of these terms. How do we align what is fairly clearly at stake with the AUP and how we have been assessing study and the institution? How would such a consideration of these terms lead back to the actual building up of new presses that would join such an association? Is this the work that needs to be done? I think the ongoing answer that NP puts forward is that NP is all about maintaining a position within this “space of contemplation,” where we work with and see how publishers and the publishing community are actually formed, and why. There is a kind of privilege inherent in the delay, since “making a living” might be able to be set aside, at least for a short time—a respite perhaps provided by the academy itself, if increasingly less so—but we are also clear that the delay and separation from real world concerns, that idleness, is what creates our ability to study in the first place, in fact it is study. We are able to study, we say. We have some kind of momentary protective zone that enables us to say, “hold on a second, what could actually be meant by ‘advance the essential role of a global community of publishers?’” So we achieve a kind of stopping point around exactly this question, and many others like it. Yes, businesses will be constructed, but we come to an understanding of how study will “underly” that activity. We honor, we wait with, the open-endedness of the questions.

Thus “advance.” There is an element of progress, of point A to point B. Forward motion, movement forward. But what is implied by this word, really the first word used to characterize the AUP outside of “mission,” is either a certain nineteenth-century idea of progress, or an early twentieth-century version of an “avant-garde.” The AUP would like to arrange its collective forces under the rubric of being the most advanced, in terms of what it is doing and supporting, which happens to be the product of the academy, knowledge. Or at least that is the product of the academy, the university, in a very particular way. That is to say, in what sense, for the university’s primary population, undergraduates, is the product going to be “knowledge”? Undergraduates might, for instance, write a paper and come to know a particular topic more intimately, gaining a certain quantity and quality of knowledge in their own right. But what we are referencing with the university press is the endpoint of this continuum, those students who didn’t simply attend school for the requisite four years and then depart for the “work force,” reabsorbing into, so to speak, the general population. Our reference is to the most advanced of all students, those who emerge, to return to Foucault, from being the surveilled to being the surveillors. That is, emerge from student to professor, which is precisely what we are talking about, how that happens. There is a very specific group, then, for whom the product of the university is this form of “knowledge.” It is a community of advanced students who have passed a threshold into a managerial role that is intimately bound up with a level of expertise that is theoretically only to be exceeded by them, themselves, and that excess is called the advancement of knowledge. Herein lies, to return to the opening sentence, our “academic excellence,” the knowledge we would like to “cultivate.”

But don’t we “know” better? Isn’t it the case that what we’re calling “knowledge” functions within a fully corporatized knowledge economy designed around increasingly technologized affective labor? Is this alternative yes primary scenario

what NP needs to work to reveal, or at least discuss? In what ways might the academy be designed around the urgent need to obscure precisely this underlying provenance or overriding use value of what it is about? What kind of life might there be without a university education? How can we assess this “universal” “good”? Certainly the only possible way is to fall back on an undercommons type of theory, one where authentic and successful pockets of anti-institutional resistance can be located within the university, within this larger take-over. That is the very form of our survival, or at least of some kind of survival. Or might it be that to the degree that we accept an undercommons sensibility we simply throw in the towel on anything whatsoever that might be experienced as extra-institutional? This may well be one of the most significant areas of inquiry in the legitimation process, in the “allowance” of socialities that constitute the backbone of any publishing unit.

To conclude here, this “global community of publishers” that is in fact the very first entity the guidelines designate as of importance, this is the AUP membership, in its relatively new globally conceived iteration, taken in toto. The AUP mission is in fact not necessarily to advance knowledge but to advance its own significance, reflecting another layer of tautology. We can agree that the collection of publishers, legitimated knowledge producers, is important, and that importance, which in fact remains entirely undefined, will be the primary “mission.” We might be understandably frustrated here, even as there are plenty of other hypotheses to be entertained. For instance, “excellence” and “cultivated” knowledge should be the overriding mission of any member press, and these presses will then form an entity that, taken in its entirety, will be a “global community of publishers”, the AUP being driven by a mission to exhibit, describe, and promote how such a community plays and “essential” “role.” The AUP seems to want to say that this community, as it stands, is good for its own sake, which in itself is a profoundly conservative statement. We can only think what might happen if one of its proposed members is

assessing the role and formation of community to begin with, if one of its prospective members is re-evaluating the formation and role of any type of multitude, which is indeed the opening gambit of NP.

A completed *Arcades Project*

Many state that the *Arcades* is incomplete, that it is a collection of notes and was meant to be, as with the Beaudlaire material, extensively revised by Benjamin as he constructed the finished work, which presumably would have far less citation and consist mostly, if not *entirely*, of commentary. But as much as it seems, even with all of the conjecture, quite difficult to confirm that this was the case, we can say that many of the passages can productively be read as complete in themselves.

That is, they contain citations and commentary that could be said to be serving quite identifiable functions, to be indicating quite specific ideas and theories (no matter how difficult they are to get to the bottom of, an investigative process that in fact often seems to be the very point of a passage), and that there is more often than not a word or two, a sentence or two, a whole passage that does hold the status of the commentary so many seem to be looking for.

Thus there is a type of more or less dispersed completion to the *Arcades*, though it does not come in the large doses we might be used to, or want to use. We very much seem to have completed passages, hundreds of them.

Generalizations on reading and writing (Y1,4, pt. 1)

The passage reads as straightforward commentary yet is packed with contraries. It's evidence of Benjamin's ability to speak from a place of seemingly perfect contraries, contradictory meanings that take place simultaneously through and through. Does he "construct" that "phenomena" or is he reflecting an aspect of language

itself, of history? One could argue that even that question is contained in the prose. Should I write about how these contraries function or operate? Would that help us get to a better understanding? It would get to more of an illustration of how text is working in the *Arcades*, how Benjamin seems to be constructing meaning, what he means, what the text means.

Are we the machines that never read? (Y1,4, pt. 2)

Reading is a kind of unifying idea in the *Arcades*. One reads the book, one reads the material, as much as Benjamin wrote it out or copied it down through writing. One comes back, again and again with each passage, *that* one is reading, that *that's* one's activity, and one is constructing a consciousness in this act, in this affectively determined approach, one that requires a kind of work precisely within the idleness required to actually read. And the constant parallel of reading through the passages with walking through the passages of the arcades, with the activity of the flaneur, with a movement that works dialectically with the uncovering of static realities as in Y1,4, a non-reading, non-linguistic experience of the image, of the material itself and the machine that of course never reads. We are constantly asking, are we those machines that never read, that read "only" informationally? And reading is at stake throughout by virtue of the simple fact that Benjamin is reading the texts he cites, bringing forth as pure information, as informationally as he can an exclusive extension of the now of recognizability, by virtue of their effectiveness as dialectical images that contain an abyss.

NP39 (Spelman college)

This post is about Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, as a potential site for a university press facilitated by NP. Spelman is an excellent candidate because it is comparatively small, with only approximately 2,100 undergraduate students and 240 faculty members. If we can create a publisher here then we

should have a working model for other institutions of this size and larger. Another aspect of Spelman is that it is a historically black college (HBCU), with c. 97% of its students African Americans. The reason this latter is significant is that if NP is situated to combat institutional exclusion then it should look first to HBCUs to learn tactics and techniques. Spelman is also a women's college.

In approaching any institution, what's most important is to designate faculty who might have projects that could be produced. To become a regular member of the AUP, the press would need to structure itself around the production of at least 5 titles per year. 10 titles would need to be produced over 2 years, with a five year plan in place (one that would support 3 full-time employees). Thus, identifying and signing on 10 projects to appear over 2 years, with additionally a 5 year plan for 25 more viable projects, we should be able to obtain voting rights in the AUP, assuming we have the requisite number of employees. If we sign a total of 35 projects to be produced over 7 years, hiring those employees and ensuring peer-review of each project, then the goal is accomplished.

Step one is to suggest 35 professors, each with a peer-reviewable project. This list would be complemented by detailed structural plans for the formation of a faculty board, production resources, access to sales channels, distribution, and placement within the institution of some form of decision-making. One thing to note is that the AUP does not have any specification for length of book or type of distribution, or even that projects take the book form. They do have detailed guidelines on peer review.

Peer review requirements are effectively that each project be reviewed by at least 2 scholars who are ideally also themselves published and tenured, and who are employed at a different institution from that of the author. But of particular note in considering peer review is the fact that a number of publications that go toward establishing membership do not require peer review in its standard form. These are: new editions of

previously published (and already peer reviewed) works; co-publications (where presumably peer review is handled by another publisher); translations of already peer-reviewed works; or works intended for general readers (though these may well not qualify as scholarly and should probably be avoided). In any case, assuming standard peer review procedure, preferably two reviews are required for any project. These reviews are then presented to the press's faculty board for final publication approval.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	School	City	R 1, 2, 3	AUP	HBCU
22	Assumption College	Worcester			
33	Ave Maria University	Ave Maria			
34	Averett University	Danville ...			
35	Avila University	Kansas City			
36	Azusa Pacific University	Azusa	3		
37	Babson College	Babson Park			
38	Bacone College	Muskogee			
39	Baker College	Flint ...			
40	Baker University	Baldwin City			
41	Baldwin Wallace University	Berea			
42	Ball State University	Muncie	2		
43	Bank Street College of Education	New York City			
44	Baptist Bible College	Springfield			
45	Baptist Memorial College of Health Sciences	Memphis			
46	Baptist University of the Americas	San Antonio			
47	Barclay College	Haviland			
48	Bard College	Annandale-on-Hudson			
49	Bard College at Simon's Rock	Great Barrington			
00	Barnard College	New York City			
01	Barnes-Jewish College Goldfarb School of Nursing	St. Louis			
02	Barry University	Miami ...	3		
03	Barton College	Wilson			
04	Bastyr University	Kenmore			
05	Bates College	Lewiston			
06	Bay Path University	Longmeadow			
07	Bay State College	Boston ...			
08	Baylor College of Medicine	Houston			
09	Baylor University	Waco	2	x	
10	Beacon College	Leesburg			
11	Becker College	Worcester ...			
49	Bethany University	Linds...			

NP: NEW PRESS

CREATING NEW UNIVERSITY PRESSES

November 8, 2018

Aminta H. Breaux, President
Office of the President
Bowie State University
14000 Jericho Park Road
Bowie, MD 20715-9465

Dear President Breaux:

I write to inquire whether Bowie State University would like to implement plans for the creation of a university press. As many attest, institutions with a university press are often at the forefront of innovative scholarship and are able to substantively support faculty research, at the same time as they engage the broader national and international community of researchers and the general public. By consistently seeking out and promoting contemporary scholarly output in all of its forms, a university press enables an institution to engage faculty at the highest levels, thereby attracting and keeping top faculty, with the concomitant effects on teaching and student populations.

I am the director of NP: New Press, a nonprofit organization that assists institutions in founding and operating new presses. We would bring to Bowie State University a pool of resources that address each of the key elements of establishing a new press. We would first open discussions related to which disciplines are most central to the university, followed by a query to professors who are active researchers, both to enlist them as peer reviewers and potentially include their projects for consideration in an initial 5-year plan for the university press. At this time, we would also form an editorial board for the press, for final approval of projects that had cleared peer review.

NP would facilitate the finalization of each project, preparing it for an official release. Depending on the nature of the project, from born-digital to print-based, this process may take many forms. Text components will be professionally edited and technological components thoroughly tested. With final release, NP will arrange all appropriate sales and distribution channels, again as an extension of the nature of the project, and keyed to a financial life-cycle that is as beneficial as possible within a nonprofit context.

DIRECTOR

Tim Roberts

ADVISORY BOARD

Lori Emerson

Cheryl Higashida

Michelle Ellsworth

Laurie Gries

John Ackerman

We would anticipate an output, to start, of approximately 5 projects annually, 25 projects for the first 5 years. Staffing requirements would be minimal and we believe that with 2 engaged graduate students and 1 faculty member willing to serve as part-time director of the press, within one year the press will have established viability and be able to submit an application for at least an introductory membership in the Association of University Presses.

My personal background includes 20 years of experience in the university press publishing environment, including starting an outside production office for three different Mellon-funded university press collaboratives, the American Literatures Initiative, the Modern Language Initiative, and the Early American Places Initiative. I have also run a scholarly book production business during this time, Field Editorial, and an experimental small press and exhibition space, Counterpath. All told, since 1998, I have been involved in the production of nearly 800 scholarly works across a range of disciplines and formats. I am currently completing a doctoral dissertation at the University of Colorado, Boulder, in the Intermedia Art, Writing, and Performance program.

You may well have already considered the possibility of founding a press at Bowie State University, and I hope this proposal is not too much outside of your vision there. If you might have a moment this Spring, I will be in the area there and would be interested in meeting in person. My contact information is below and I will also send a follow-up email.

All best wishes,

Tim Roberts
Director
tim.roberts@npnewpress.org
303-726-5889

NP: NEW PRESS

CREATING NEW UNIVERSITY PRESSES

November 7, 2018

Robert S. Friedman, Dean
The College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Montclair State University
1 Normal Avenue
Dickson Hall 401
Montclair, NJ 07043

Dear Professor Friedman:

I write to inquire whether faculty in the The College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Montclair State University might be interested in acting as peer reviewers for university press publication projects. These reviews would be requested within the context of the development of new university presses, as part of NP: New Press, a collaborative, nonprofit organization that facilitates the formation of new university presses.

We would add a faculty member's name and areas of expertise to our pool of peer reviewers to be queried as a new university press takes shape, at any given institution we might be working with. When projects become available for review, we would be in touch with appropriate, discipline-specific faculty to potentially send project materials and a brief questionnaire. Payment would consist of a standard honorarium.

As many attest, institutions with a university press are often at the forefront of innovative scholarship and are able to substantively support faculty research, at the same time as they engage the broader national and international community of researchers and the general public. By consistently seeking out and promoting contemporary scholarly output in all of its forms, a university press enables an institution to engage faculty at the highest levels. Our goal at the New Press is to approach institutions that do not currently have a press and investigate whether creating a press might be appropriate. If and when we do initiate a new press, we then facilitate each major component of making a press viable for the long term. Of course peer review is a substantial part of this process.

Thank you for your consideration. We would be excited to work with faculty in the The College of Humanities and Social Sciences as we bring NP projects to the public. My contact information is below and I will also send a follow-up email.

All best wishes,

Tim Roberts
Director
tim.roberts@npnewpress.org
303-726-5889

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There have been a number of milestones along the way and I'll have occasion to refer back to them. They appear and recede rather quickly but are still worth discussing. These comments are to remain as specific as possible while still allowing what should be called "commentary," after the *Arcades*. From October of last year until this week there was preparatory reading and various considerations of this reading in the context of NP. It always seemed clear that this needed to lead to the actual attempt to form new presses at actual institutions. I have now crossed that threshold and am daily making this attempt. Much of the writing here will be a living through those attempts and strategies. In fact what is intended now is to reflect on the previous day, document the current day's activities as they happen, and then offer more reflections on overall status as the day concludes. But still I'm documenting the passing in and out of usefulness of various specifics, specific strategies, as, again, at the same time allowing in commentary.

A working list of most of the colleges and universities was easily obtained from the web. I think I found the current list here: <https://www.4icu.org/us/us-universities.htm>. I then converted this into an Xcel document and created columns for membership in the Association of University Presses and research ranking. There are about 85 institutions, nearly all R1, with presses. Regardless of whether they have a press, there are approximately 100 each of R1, R2, and R3 institutions. There are approximately 1,800 institutions on the list. Hence while the number of institutions to potentially work with is finite, there are a vast number to be investigated, queried, and developed.

The basic mandate of NP is to create university presses where they do not yet exist. As it was decided which institutions would be approached, the first thing to do was to cross off the list of possible clients the 66 R1 institutions, 9 R2 institutions, 1 R3 institution, and 9 apparently unranked institutions that already have presses. It may well be the case that any or all of these institutions

may be able to support multiple university presses, and perhaps these are queries for another time, but for now, in terms of this project, it makes more sense to develop a model that starts from scratch. Indeed as this project progresses there are certain elements that potentially lead to more confusion than they are worth, even as I'd like to keep these elements in mind for future development. Multiple presses at a single institution—certainly possible and quite compelling—is one of these, as is starting presses at non-university-based institutions, namely high schools and prisons, as well as non-US based institutions, with an NP that activates globally in a more pronounced way. I think that once enough is gleaned about institutional structure and press formation from this initial pass of attempted commissions it will be possible to apply whatever techniques are developed to other places and collectivities, even non-pedagogical ones. What is really basically at stake is the formation of a multitude within institutional structures—structures that are multitudes themselves, but of a different nature—how that takes place and what it means. In some sense we can hold non-university press formation as the true test of what it is to form a publication entity. This is a topic area that should be revisited at multiple stages of this project.

There is a whole topic area as well for discussing the rationale for approaching different universities, and the way in which these places are approached or addressed. I have already alluded to a certain overarching framework with the Xcel spreadsheet, the broad list of universities and colleges, whether they already have a press, and the categorization by R1, R2, and R3. And it's important to keep in mind that these are US institutions. But what I'm also referring to is a more direct engagement, on the ground so to speak, with who is actually at an institution at any given moment and how we can work to put in place the foundations of an actual press. Without an actual press everything here is "just talk," though there are numerous ways that "just talk" is exactly the action of and call to study, the crucial backstage of all publication entities. For now, however, we are activating something that is front-of-stage, in the floodlights.

At this point 5 institutions have been researched, one of them actually queried. I want to speak to the rationale for choosing each of these institutions, since with a substantive reply, in terms of moving forward and starting a press, from any of them the working mode of NP at its early stages will be quite concretely defined. As I'd initially blogged in April 2018, Spelman University was the first institution that was seriously considered, though no contact was made. As I'd written at that time:

Spelman is an excellent candidate because it is quite small, with only approximately 2,100 undergraduate students and 240 faculty members. If we can create a publisher here then we should have a working model for other institutions of this size and larger. Another aspect of Spelman is that it is a historically black college (HBCU), with c. 97% of its students African Americans. The reason this latter is significant is that if NP is situated to combat institutional anti-blackness then it should look first to HBCUs to learn tactics and techniques. Spelman has the added advantage of being a women's college.

This rationale is complex and leads in a number of directions. Part of NP is to formulate a model for generating presses at smaller institutions, but it is not clear yet what the threshold might be in terms of how small we can go. Thinking very specifically about the need to have a project peer reviewed (2 tenured faculty signing off) and to some degree produced, the press might represent the efforts of a single person. It is finally significant to keep this far edge of the publication spectrum in mind, as an extreme but still possible perspective. In terms of a press availing itself of digital efficiencies, email, word processing, web site creation, and so on, along with self publishing and distribution channels like Lulu, it is so easy to acquire a venue for critique through publication that there is a nearly automated quality to it. Here, with the right resources, in the context of the increasing prevalence of auto-generated "journalism," an AI university press model could be constructed, where the academic landscape is scanned for likely author candidates based on, for example, progress within the tenure process, auto-generated query letters sent that requested a

project, and so on. In any case, a press that relied entirely on the work of a single person seems, in this context, quite substantial, not at all like a project run on a shoestring.

So again in this context we need to talk about the somewhat mysterious impression of necessary size, of institutional power, created not simply by university presses but publishing in general, or by the “book” itself. Perhaps creating this impression is the sole business of publication in general, the book or publication project as commodity, the substance of knowledge. We can certainly hypothesize about books or research projects that have “changed our lives,” but how does this break down into the various attenuations of that quality within the networks of, for example, the idea that the project didn’t at all change the lives of most of its audience, of how small the audience was to begin with, of the likely vast number of completely ineffective books to which a publisher may have committed resources, or the titles produced that may have exactly the opposite effect as those receiving certain accolades. The circuits of meaning surrounding publishers and publication projects are perhaps well known. What we need to do in the context of the NP project is keep aware of them, at the moment very specifically in the university press scenario, once that, as I have indicated elsewhere, is purely, though not at all simply, an appendage and supplement to the overarching scenario of the university, both in the US and globally.

Thus there is no question that Spelman is say 10 times, 100 times, 1,000 times large enough to maintain a press. And if Spelman and institutions of its size come fully loaded with the ability to support scholarly research and student engagement in this way, the question of course is why they are not doing so. What are the forces preventing press formation? Materially, economically, pedagogically, socially, and so on. These considerations are vast and qualify for a much larger project but NP project as I am engaging it here must also keep them in view, something to at least allude to in the progress of creating actual presses. For now, a question has been answered that yes, Spelman is entirely capable of hosting a press. We can create a model here.

To return to the quote from the blog, there is now before us the question of the historically black college (HBCU) and the way in which a university press might enter into this environment. There are approximately 75 HBCUs, *none* of which maintain a university press. Perhaps the premier HBCU, Howard University, did have a press for 39 years, 1972 to 2011, and we can investigate their backlist. But at present it is possible to take note of a complex of issues, none of which have easy resolutions. First and foremost I would continue to highlight the complete absence at HBCUs of what is properly termed a university press (a press with membership in the Association of University Presses). If a press is the *sin qua non* of an institution that embraces and advances innovation, then perhaps this is a sign that innovation by its very nature is exclusionary. Or at least innovation insofar as it takes place within institutions.

HBCU's were founded as a response to institutional exclusion. The basic outlines of this history: For the majority of African Americans, educational attainment in the United States up to the Emancipation Proclamation of 1865 took place specifically within the context of slavery. African Americans were *de jure* excluded not simply from universities but from all schooling and education. When we speak of HBCUs we bring this reality to present awareness. It is also significant that for the first half century of their existence, HBCUs were occupied with remedial education. Higher learning, innovation, and the advancement of knowledge, concerns that demarcate the entirety of the milieu of the university press, would have long to wait if they were to interrupt the impacts of this early history.

In some sense, these early iterations of the HBCU were the first undercommons. But as much as the institution of black study had taken root, what kind of exigency was in play? What kind of resistance could be hoped to have been formed? Could HBCUs at this early stage be said to have been a powerful institutional corrective? Not until the passage of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 were the guiding principles of educational attainment in the United States shifted away from the 1896 case of *Plessy vs.*

Ferguson and “separate but equal.” While their genesis was in reaction to de jure slavery, HBCUs second 50 years of existence was solidified according to the profound acceptance of “separate but equal.” Their segregation is precisely what was rejected by Brown as inadequate, according to the mandates of the US constitution, yet as many are aware it is a segregation that has continued and embraced by many for its benefits.

What I have said above and elsewhere is that NP is situated, arranged specifically to confront institutional exclusion. Its mission thus aligns with the mission of HBCUs insofar as they respond to an educational environment of exclusion. The differences between NP and HBCUs, or their potential relationship, may also be instructive.

NP views this type of exclusion as the self-same thing as institutionalism. NP is structured around the assumption that these two things are co-extensive. Hence the radical anti-institutionalism of NP, which presents itself as an embrace of the institution at its highest levels, very much like HBCUs mirror the US educational apparatus, is always already a radical anti-exclusion. NP presents itself to the institution of the HBCU exactly as it does any other institution that might only profess to “diversity” and not in fact be confrontational to exclusionary practices. There again a similarity of the two projects could be perceived, a professed and constitutional confrontation with exclusionary practices. But again NP will approach an HBCU with the intent of starting a press that fulfills that HBCUs educational mandate residing at the core of its institutional identity, yet exactly at the core of the identity of NP resides its nomadically entrepreneurial move of abandonment and the re-approach to “new” institutions and clients it takes on.

The HBCU is a special case in terms of potential NP clients but the resources brought to bear by NP will be identical, the treatment and outcomes envisioned as exactly the same as with non-HBCU institutions that are approached by NP to create new university presses. Obviously there is far more to be said on all of these issues and one of the most compelling aspects of NP project

is the unending quality to the conversation about institutional oppression, but, almost as an interlude, I want to turn now to the consideration of the rationale for querying other universities, which querying has at this point already been done and as I have mentioned needs to continue being done as a crucial conversational entry point.

A major objective of NP is in fact to have queries out to each of the US universities and colleges that do not already have presses. If that is going to be achieved at the scale of a single person (myself) then a daily querying of at least one new university needs to take place. That daily querying is the same, nearly, as a daily writing of the dissertation and business plan. It happens in and as the anti-institutional, anti-corporate, anti-capitalist processual development of a mode of study.

1. Clark Atlanta University

This is an HBCU. Clark Atlanta University was established in 1988 through the merger of Clark College and Atlanta University, both HBCUs started in the 1860s. W.E.B. Du Bois founded the School of Social Work at Atlanta and taught there from 1897–1910 and from 1934–1944. Clark College was apparently the first four-year HBCU. The university is part of the Atlanta University Center, which includes four other HBCUs. In some sense querying only one of these universities about a press might make sense, or potentially looking at establishing a press for the Atlanta University Center itself, drawing on the resources of all five institutions.

Clark Atlanta has approximately 4,000 students. It qualifies as an R2 and has doctoral programs in business and education. There are a total of approximately 281 faculty. NP query letters were sent to the interim president and four deans Oct. 26, 2018. Followup emails are scheduled for Nov. 9. If followup emails do not garner any response by Nov. 23 I will either begin querying faculty directly or move on to other universities.

2. Hofstra University

Letters were sent to the president and deans of Hofstra on 11/1/18. Email followup is scheduled for 11/15. Right now that followup will hopefully generate an in-person meeting.

Hofstra has about 12,000 students, with c. 1,230 faculty. Private. It is listed as an R3. They have c. 175 graduate programs. They are approximately the 42nd largest university in New York.

Hofstra is located in the Northeast, in Hempstead, NY, just outside of New York City. This is an ideal location for new press formation since it allows for relatively easy visits by NP staff, is in proximity to other possible press sites in the Northeast (perhaps the densest in the US), and positions Hofstra in very close proximity to the intellectual community in the Northeast.

The question at this point is what more does one need to know to, say, begin an approach to such an institution? In this context of an NP approach to an institution about creating a new press, where one does not yet exist. Is there something else? What are the specifics? What joy of writing is there when one contemplates these monolithic websites, geared nearly exclusively toward high school juniors and seniors, website the equivalent of a query letter to potential students about embarking on a major pedagogical project together? Will everything be in place? Will they, a certain demographic, be convinced, will they be sold? Doesn't NP need to come to a halt at a certain level of detail and take note of the extraordinary commonality from one university to the next, such that there is nearly no difference between any of them? Like buying a new car. Convincing a car dealership to start a press.

What seems to be confronted is the generic appearance of the educational establishment. It may house the ultimately chaotic and irrational forces of study but increasingly one after another of them give a corporate cast to the entire project. This appearance defines the institutional. We all wear the same hats at graduation. The university asks to be treated as such—think of how many different educational projects there could actually be!—and NP accommodates by using the same form letter to all presidents and

deans. It is entirely possible to arrive, in a single day, a few hours, at the fact of sending letters to each of the c. 2,000 locations. Or the timing and rhythm could be different, for example one new place each day, which is a more likely shape for the overall project. But still, the same letters, the same level of generic engagement. With generic follow-ups, with generic first meetings, and so on. A generic output, a generic paycheck. A generic NP? Generic study?

Finally the goal must be to actually generate new presses at various institutions. If this generic approach is the most effective according to this criteria, then it must be embraced. It may well be the most effective “phase 1,” at least in terms of getting the word out, to have people know there is a possibility of starting a new press and someone out there who is willing to work on it.

But what’s forgotten here is the work on boredom, which finally is the pervasive weather of institutional exclusion that must be associated with any institutional arrangement. This is the affect of the approach to the institution, where extreme boredom equates to an immovability that is finally internalized. The way the university campus most often equates to a bucolic vision of the natural environment. Does study then not appear in the streets? Isn’t that institutional face of the university the boredom that masks the imprisonment taking place before our very eyes, the instrumentalization of the already instrumental forms of reason? How to characterize all this in terms of an approach to the institution by NP? If the sheen of boredom is at work with a kind of agency, with study the exact opposite of boredom, not just NP but the press in general has a place here. It upholds the centrality of a certain criteria. But criteria whose ultimate aim is to reside within a peaceful containment. We might say that once the knowledge generated by the university has reached a peak, has revealed itself as new knowledge, worthy and capable of being documented and preserved, it then completes its circuit through the university press by coming back around to containment within the university—the imprimatur signaling the university’s ongoing control—and the book form itself, language itself.

By suggesting the press be created, NP holds on offer a coming full circle of the products of the inevitable research arm of the educational institution. This is both a getting back to basics and an extension into the realm of experimental and innovative study that must accompany any research project. By maintaining this “last mile” component of the research process, the university performs the most basic follow-through it possibly can within its self-appointed parameters as a university. There may be any number of community-oriented, university-based outputs that emerge from what takes place at a university, but it is only these autonomous forms of research output that substantiate the claim of a university to be impartially objective, interested in research in itself, pure, research for research. Maintaining a press puts all of the efforts of a university back in the context of the university. Without a press, at least nominally, all of the pure study, all of the research a university supports as integral to its basic mission, must go elsewhere for completion, thus siphoning off the desiderata of that very same intellectual frisson that informs any successful pedagogical efforts at any level.

With a press, the garland of scholarly effort can be had at home. Moreover, if study is boredom on the surface, underneath something else, then a scholarly institution without a press is revealing, very much against its core mission, its belief that study truly is boring, not worth the resources or energy of seeing through to its logical outcomes. The press-less university in some sense underscores a crass motivation to simply get students in the door, without at least staging the culminating moment of scholarly practice. Not having a press is simply bad business, an argument missing its final term.

3. Montclair State University

Another Northeast university, this time in New Jersey. Public. Again an R3. 20k students, considerably larger than Hofstra. 1,855 faculty. Montclair State ties with Bergen Community College as the second largest college or university in New Jersey. They

offer approximately 7 PhD programs and a couple dozen MAs and MSs.

With NP project there is a comparative analysis that comes into play, one that would not otherwise happen at all. This compare-and-contrast might be similar to a student deciding which university to attend, or a job seeker deciding which university to apply to. Of course there's a difference with NP. Certainly we want to determine which institutions will be good working partners or colleagues, or which will have the best chance for a long-term, viable press. But additionally we are able to generate a conversation about the nature of publication and the nature of the institution that might otherwise be displaced or left unacknowledged, whose possibility will not be tapped.

The answer to the question of why at each of these institutions there is not a university-wide publication apparatus likely has slight variations at each location. So the rationale at a place like Hofstra will be at least slightly different from the rationale at a place like Montclair State, as would the rationale for creating a press. What NP brings to each institutional project it initiates is a certain generative standpoint that operates at a foundational moment for any press it creates. In part this is the same as to say that up until now university presses have taken root in more or less *de rigueur* fashion, responding to exigencies like the need to disseminate research or a desire to put in place traditional publication frameworks. These founding principles are all well and good, but what now is being referenced with NP is a destabilized motivational core primarily characterized by anti-institutionalism. The central office of NP, an office out of which any press it creates will necessarily emerge and have as part of its foundational history, is no office at all, no place at all, in any key respect, but fetishization of the new and radical commitment to abandonment. I want to hasten to add that these two latter aspects of NP are not meant to shock, surprise, or disappoint, but function as important counter-vailing forces to an institutionalism that has overrun publication processes as we know and experience them.

Thus NP central office opens a comparative window of discussion that works to allow in, perhaps for the first time, an experience of the publication process that foregrounds its anti-institutional pedigree, alongside a perfect simultaneity, exactly as if they are the same thing, with the anti-institutional moorings of NP itself. The necessarily comparative nature of NP, the way it moves from institution to institution, paradoxically carries with it its true nature as study itself, which can only be specific, on the ground, and community-based. How is this so? A major founding component of NP is the inclusion of a plan of study as part of both its central office and as part of any press it initiates. But this plan of study is not necessarily a specific event, a series of events, or a syllabus of some kind, but a gestalt, a way of characterizing NP itself, part of its genetic code. Thus NP emerges from study and must carry study with it to any organizational construct it participates in. That study is the destabilized, comparative envelope of experience I have been referring to, both a severely institutional formation since it abstracts itself, and is a product of abstraction, from specific institutions or universities, and an embrace of study in its pure form, since it keeps itself in a place of disavowal and manifests its own experience from that (non)location. In this sense NP is study and in that sense any press formed by NP always already has study as a formative and ongoing status.

From this perspective then one makes the choice of a new university to query based on the strength of study it can bring about, based on the maximum destabilization. It's possible to theorize this choice from the perspective of (a) the HBCU and its variant institutional engagements, (b) the overall institutional character for NP that results from the choice, or for instance (c) starting a press at a large institution, with the concomitant connections and power structure that must result. A further key question is how do we attend to the nature of study at the same time as approaching universities and actually implementing presses as effectively as possible?

4. Arizona State University

Southwest. R1. 71k students. Multiple locations in Arizona. 2,300 faculty.

There is absolutely a sameness to the approach NP makes to each university. Consider, for instance, that the introductory letter seems to work equally well for any university, large or small. But a place like Arizona State is a massive educational clearinghouse. How could a single point of contact—and I want to turn here to considering university websites—be anything but generic, what we mean by “the boring”? What else could a university website do, even in its kaleidoscopic plethora of offerings, but hide the multiplicity that must exist, as it were, behind it: the schools, departments, professors, and students. Even as this hiding is meant to reveal, since the website is that thing that most effectively, that is, on the broadest scale, brings information about Arizona State to the public, what we could call the post-acceptance daily experience of being there must be, at least, backgrounded, if not elided, ignored, suppressed, or contradicted.

Thus, there is a quite specific double edge to how information is aggregated and marshalled in the service of creating the public face of an educational institution. It is abstracted and categorized for easy consumption, a move that obscures and distances specificity, enabling a birds-eye view of the entire university. We are invited to “drill down” to obtain more detail but the overall impression is still quite abstract. At the same time, this particular representation of the university in fact enables access to the information pertaining to the university. The university becomes “findable,” even as that findability itself is duplicated across institutions and becomes another version of rote mechanization, exactly like the key element of a generic educational sales pitch is the excitement of discovery and intellectual awakening. Epiphanic study and the suffusion of educational ideology with capital here fade into one another.

And, something that becomes increasingly significant when contending with the educational institution as it manifests within global capital, a large amount of money is in fact at stake, on two primary and blatantly obvious levels. First, the tuition students are asked to pay leads to some version of financial solvency for the institution, as well as a trillion dollar debt economy that is the perennial subject of national political (in)action. The school must to some degree sell what it offers, most often to those who clearly have no resources to purchase it themselves. Second, the money involved is related to larger societal workforce requirements, jobs that need to be filled in order for economic forces writ large to operate. Through study a mantle of debt is handed to people who are entering their creative prime, sealing a long-term deal that requires participation in financialization, a battle against interest rates, a servitude.

To return to the web interface itself, however, we remain exclusively concerned with the impression made by its stock images (or, that is, images specific to ASU but made to appear like stock images), to the stultifying blandness of its rote categories, multiplied ad nauseum across the US pedagogical landscape of university websites, “Academics,” “Admission,” “Athletics,” and so on. In any case, I won’t belabor all of this, which is so painfully obvious (and we can also discuss the increasing blandness of the web itself), to highlight a particular strand of boredom that makes its way into and through the university, and thus plays a part in establishing a press at these institutions.

What becomes significant here is that institutionally induced boredom becomes the “face” the university exposes to the general public. This could be described as no more than a university’s meeting expectations in terms of what a university should be. It should have students, teachers, and administration, and so on. A full-service university should consistently exhibit each element of a total environment, where young adults go to be immersed in study for, on average, about $\frac{1}{4}$ of their time so far on Earth. The university, starting perhaps with its website, shows how all-pervasive it can be. There is nominally a teleology of exit, that is,

graduation, that informs a student's relationship to the university, but the university also functions as a trial run for institutional life outside the confines of academia proper as well. This consistent predictability characterizes what the university exposes of itself, again its "face."

As Jean-Luc Nancy writes in *The Inoperative Community*:

"To be exposed" means to be "posed" in exteriority, according to an exteriority, having to do with an outside in the very intimacy of an inside. Or again: having access to what is proper to existence, and therefore, of course, to the proper of one's own existence, only through an "expropriation" whose exemplary reality is that of "my" face always exposed to others, always turned toward an other and faced by him or her, never facing myself. This is the archi-original impossibility of Narcissus that opens straight away onto the possibility of the political.

The university exposes itself as a consistent duplicate of every other university, which constitutes its boredom. This bland exteriority thus obscures, at the same time as it indicates or emphasizes, that for all intents and purposes the university is the location of study itself, which in many ways is the very definition of intimacy and interiority. Of course, study happens in a variety of ways outside of academia, and in fact those instantiations of study may be the most revolutionary, but the marketing that is bought and sold on a daily basis is that rigorous, thorough study cannot possibly manifest beyond the university walls, since that study would then be missing the university's crucial imprimatur. The "face" of the university, its exposure, contains this complexity.

And it is a human face. It is possible to compare here *Arcades* M1a,1, the first part of which reads:

The phenomena of superposition, the overlap that occurs in hashish, fall under the notion of similarity. If we say that one face resembles the other, it means that certain features of this second face appear to us in the first, without the former ceasing to be what it was. [trans. Google]

We are referring here to the generic face presented by the university. In itself, that face has certain effects, yet those effects are determined by its similarity to other universities, to the faces presented by those universities. The genericness at issue here arises from that similarity of faces. When we compare one university to another, which NP inherently takes on as its task, there is then a “phenomena of superposition,” of seeing one institution through another, one face in and through another, exactly as one recognizes one human face in another. In this passage from the *Arcades*, this phenomena “occurs in hashish,” or in a drug-induced or dream-like state of perception, and as such it is greatly enhanced. But the enhancement also happens here in front of us, in the text itself, with the directional shift from “overlap” to the “falling under.” So the sentence that is referencing the adjustment of superpositions, the manner in which one thing is seen through another, exhibits or performs that very process, is itself the “phenomena of superposition” (the Eiland/McLaughlin translation loses this nuance by not including the word “under”).

What we have is a “phenomena” falling under a “notion.” To turn again to the Nancy, a face or phenomena is “exposed” or outwardly directed toward what it sees of another as part of itself, its interiority. The exterior and interior are superposed in being exposed, so that the highly personal and human “face” merges in this “phenomena” with an externality, impersonal, political, anonymous. The generic quality that arises from the duplication of the educational institution derives from this exact phenomena of superposition, one university in direct comparison to another, one seeing itself in another. The university achieves its politics in this way.

To continue with M1a,1 (and here to cite the Eiland/McLaughlin translation):

Nevertheless, the possibilities of entering into appearance in this way are not subject to any criterion and are therefore boundless. The category of similarity, which for the waking consciousness has only minimal relevance, attains unlimited relevance in the world of hashish. There, we may say, everything is face: each thing has the degree

of bodily presence that allows it to be searched—as one searches a face—for such traits as appear.

What Benjamin invokes is perhaps not simply a radical but an absolute “boundlessness” of referentiality, or we can say of superposition, of one thing both appearing through and being seen as another, which must ultimately mean a complete loss of identity or distinct border or boundary of any kind. In the case of the *Arcades*, this manifests as a citational boundlessness, with the universe of potential citations leading one to another and the meanings they cite possessing a quality of infinite transformability (and as we’ll see he returns to the linguistic nature of the appearance of faces in this passage), the primary characterization of commodity capital. In the case of NP, the appearance of the university and its “face” in, for instance, the business of obtaining new students and the commodification of study exhibits an “unlimited relevance” exactly to the degree that it takes on the generic qualities I have been referencing. The successful university will in many respects be the generic university, with the largest possible appeal. But finally the dilution necessary to generate that appeal produces a pervasive boredom, which may be said to be purely of the institution as such. That boredom is the location of the exclusionary nature of the university.

The exposed face of the university is in this way an institutional facelessness. Here Nancy’s “possibility of the political” is the interchange of face and facelessness, that moment of the “impossibility of Narcissus” that in fact results in what we can know as both interior and exterior (political). One of Benjamin’s interventions in this debate is to materialize it in the reading process itself. We can ask what that materialization means on a whole range of levels, each of which variously impacts NP. I have already mentioned (a) the way the passage performs its own subject matter, reducing itself to a tautological *mis en abyme* that repeats the boundlessness of referentiality and facial cross-recognition. Another key moment is (b) the designation of the “degree of bodily presence,” which is a threshold that in fact does indicate a boundary area,

since it is only once a “face” attains to that degree of bodily presence that it can enter the economy of things able to be searched. Thus things in the world are given to appear, but not without immediately disappearing once more into cross-referentiality. An additional key moment in the passage is the (c) introduction of the aside “as one searches a face,” which underscores once more the manner in which “searching a face” is equivalent to the act of reading a citation, the cognitive shifting about and puzzling over that is the process of determining meaning, the act of reading in general, of reading text at all, of being in a world of text, of texted being, in fact of our entire internal/external perceptual or interpretive faculties. Of course this latter is specifically the modality of textual study. As much as in the passage a dreamworld is the world of hashish, it is study as well, Benjamin’s emphatic “There” pushing the reader into a consideration of that alternate topology.

What we have then is a spectrum or apparent hierarchy of appearances, from university or institutional, to subsections of the university such as the university press, all the way to the level of the student. NP is none of these and all of them at once. Pure and simple, it functions outside the university. It does this only by immersing itself in the university at the deepest levels. It passes through, but only into a certain silencing and reorientation.

The reason I can say all this is because we are working on NP as it stands. Part of that working is to interrogate the citational nature of text, which holds the historiography of materiality. I don’t want to force NP into overly abstract territory by belaboring seemingly irrelevant hypotheses but I do want to respect this territory of uselessness NP has the ability to generate. So to complete the thought with the lettering system above, NP (a) is what looks at the exposure of the face of the university from a certain angle, one that opens a cognition or consciousness but, to use the terms of M1a,1, grasps similarity or the possibility of appearance. It enters the game on the university’s own terms by mirroring the boundlessness of superposition that informs the educational apparatus externally and internally. It is (b) a politics of refusal in that there is no doubt that as study and dream world come

to be, no doubt that the very boundlessness at stake is betrayed, which is the whole constitution of a new press, but there is an equal amount of doubt, equally no way to tell if that betrayal was not the best possible tactic for ushering in an opposing argument. (c) “as one searches a face”: and it is a human face. The text, this text, becomes unstable, as if it were not text at all. The surround of non-text becomes operative, takes on value, valuates, valorizes. Why? Because it is “like” one is searching a face, for recognition or a looking back.

I want to say that the features that make up the administrative or institutional face (there can be no other face) of the university offer a degree of bodily presence to achieve a certain level of recognition or likeness by those who are searching for that face or likeness. What happens, however, is that this face, which we cannot forget is deeply personal and internal, the very site of emotion, that which presents the internal to the outside world, cannot but search for itself, a face searching only for another face, cannot but search for what it understands as another face, as the “personal,” as the “internal.” This is our next level of the tautological and it gets at the entire manner in which this passage is explicating “similitude.” The concept determines this particular operation or version of truth. The question then becomes to what degree are these bodily presences confirmed or in fact obscured by the operation of the university, how is intra-systemic tautology in fact hidden by institutional forces, and then how does NP in fact contradict these closed circuits?

There is much here that is unresolved. But there are other universities to query about starting a new press. We can close this consideration of Arizona State University by quoting the balance of M1a1:

Under these conditions even a sentence (to say nothing of the single word) puts on a face, and this face resembles that of the sentence standing opposed to it. In this way every truth points manifestly to its opposite, and this state of affairs explains the existence of doubt. Truth becomes something living; it lives solely in the rhythm by

which statement and counterstatement displace each other in order to think each other.

In fact we need to cite the German to get the emphasis right for the first part of this quote:

Selbst ein Satz bekommt unter diesen Umständen ein Gesicht (ganz zu schweigen vom einzelnen Wort) und dieses Gesicht sieht dem des ihm entgegengesetzten Satzes ähnlich.

Note that “Gesicht” is the word for “face” (as well as “vision”). More literally (and even Google translate shifts the syntax), we have “Even the sentence under these circumstance has a face (not to mention the single word)..” Of course “under these circumstance” means within the way similitude operates, . . .

NP40 (Prelude)

I want to take *Arcades* O1,1, the first passage in the “[Prostitution, Gambling]” convolute, as a starting point for addressing many of the issues already raised. I’ll try to record here my reading process as it seems to emerge, as a way to approach these key issues, as a way to live an absence of the definitive, a way to refuse. We can proceed sentence by sentence, crossing into the German and auto-translate as needed. There is a recursiveness and potential for error here, in this process, in this recording, that seems to cite the passage itself. In this way there is an “allowing in.”

The same holds for the text format in general, which is in particular a digital affordance, or a way we come to define the operation of the digital in general. Accuracy as opposed to the digital. Inaccuracy, cacophony and freedom of movement, groove. There is a specific impermanence to anything that might be written, that might happen, or be done. There is little to no direct consequence for mistakes in the virtual.

The potential for repetition is infinite, the possibility of starting over. That staticness of the infinite distance from the static. It seems equally important to define this modality as at the same time a manifestation of what is most human, the ability to imaginatively reinvent and to not be beholden to material reality, objecthood, objectivity, and what most clearly defines technological reproducibility itself, or, in other words, what most directly confronts or re-configures the human, the machine, controlled in essence by industrial capital.

NP is permanently on the barrier between these two versions of its own mistakes, its essays, appearing on both sides at once, taking advantage of appearance to appear exactly in between in a middle zone, appearing as movement from one side to the other. (Between these sections, I am somewhere, perhaps in the *Arcades*, reading or re-reading a passage, perhaps reading something or somewhere else. Where exactly would I be? Is the space and time between these sections material or immaterial, between what must be seen here as a kind of landing or realization, with

an equivalency built up that states that the interruption or interval is also that between the formation of one press and another, between different organizations, between the formation of one multitude and another?)

NP41 (O1,1 Part 1)

1. The first passage, O1,1, of convolute O begins with the sentence:

Hasn't his eternal vagabondage everywhere accustomed him to reinterpreting the image of the city?

[German: Ist ers von seinen standhaften Irrgänge<n> her nicht gewohnt, das Bild der Stadt sich allerorten umzudeuten?]

[auto-translate: Is not he ever used to reinterpreting the image of the city from his steadfast erroneous passages?]

The male figure, whom we are presented with entirely in medias res, is the gambler. He is an entity that can't be known and must be approached in the interrogative. The figure is constantly questioned and reinterpreted in the same way he himself questions and reinterprets the city. Thus there is an equivalence between us as readers (interpreters, answerers of the question), this figure, and the city. Need that be said? That we're in self-relation? That we're "accustomed" to that? What will be said of that great exteriority of the city, of image, is the constitution of our very selves. We interrogate Benjamin and the *Arcades* about this language, reapproaching again and again with every passage, our "steadfast" attempts emerging "erroneous" every time. As readers, we inhabit this mythical labyrinth (Irrgange) of the text, wandering its passages, taking a chance on each one, looking for payoff, open to it.

The English seems to introduce the idea of "eternal vagabondage" but it fits. It also connects us back to Benjamin's development of the figures of "eternal return" and "boredom." Our condition, it might be said, is to have past, present, and future permanently appearing through each other, simultaneously, and

any subject position we might experience must then be one of near total transparency, constantly on the verge of disappearance as one entity after another appears through us, or alternatively as we ourselves seemingly indiscriminately cite one entity after another. This constant reappearance saturates our existence to the degree that its occurrence becomes atmospheric, the equivalent of the weather, or, perhaps on the other hand, an emotional stasis on a par with boredom or ennui. Our affect is one of thoroughgoing dissatisfaction. Benjamin's references to boredom/ennui also appear as rain, or dust, blanketing everything with a nearly unbearable equality or equivalence.

Like the flaneur, the gambler strategizes an existence within the labyrinth. It is characterized by a certain rubric of disavowal, which manifests as a willingness or habituation to moving from one sexual partner to another. The atmosphere is static but there is this movement within it, and hence the oxymoron "eternal vagabondage," or "steadfast passage." And the "everywhere," the "accustomed" or being "used to," that habituation to an environment of constant repetition but also of willing the repetition and starting over through disavowal, all this is part of the image of the city and its textual cognate. Our interpretive work situates itself within this environment.

NP42 (O1,1 Part 2)

2. The second sentence:

And doesn't he transform the arcade into a casino, into a gambling den, where now and again he stakes the red, blue, yellow jetons of feeling on women, on a face that suddenly surfaces (will it return his look?), on a mute mouth (will it speak?)

[Verwandelt er nicht die Passage in ein Kasino, in einen Spielsaal, wo er die roten, blauen, gelben Jetons der Gefühle auf Frauen setzt, auf ein Gesicht, das auftaucht - wird es seinen Blick erwidern? - auf einen stummen Mund - wird er reden?]

[Does not he turn the passage into a casino, into a gaming room, where he puts the red, blue, yellow tokens of emotions on women, on a face that appears - will it return his gaze? - on a silent mouth - will he talk?]

The interrogative is maintained, that interrogation that the gambler himself will do with the two questions here but that is also our own interrogation of the text before us (at least that). Here it makes sense, as in many passages in the *Arcades*, to follow the emphases and order of appearance (if they aren't identical) of words in the German. The sentence's first word is "transform" (*verwandelt*), which indicates that what we as readers are questioning is whether we are witnessing a transformation, or not. We need to entertain both possibilities. We could say the passage says, "Transform, doesn't he, the passage into a casino?" "*Verwandelt*" might also indicate trans-substantiation, or, that is, the appearance of one thing within another, one time within another time. Is this happening, or not? Is the figure of the gambler actively instantiating this act, or would it happen anyway? And of course the arcade, the image of the city, the city in miniature, is our "Passage," that which we read, that which this is, which consistently brings along with it, as in some sense a historical document, a trans-substantiation in its own right. Or does it?

By reading—this universe of textual interrogation that arrives with and through the *Arcades*—are we not placing ourselves within a textual environment where we ourselves transform that environment into a "gaming room," another Biedemier room (E1,1 and see earlier sections) of pure decoration, where what's at "stake" in the play of appearances is our own presence? These types of questions hold through the balance of the sentence and the passage as a whole. As much as the biological or sexual implications—passage being the vaginal passage, the gambler "putting" his "jeton of emotion," a woman who then gives birth, an un-talking face/baby—the technological implications of the passage are striking. Here the tricolor schema of the gambling tokens echoes the nineteenth and early twentieth century development of color photography, transforming the gambler into a photographer and

the woman into a portrait sitter of sorts, so that the “face that appears” is the face in a photo, our questioning itself transforming into a querying of the humanity or gaze of the photo’s subject, and the “silent mouth” is that of silent film. What kind of speech emerges from silent film? Is reading the *Arcades* that much different from such “viewing”?

Benjamin here places in complete parallel the assessment of the live human/baby and the assessment of the human contained in the photographic image. And here is probably a good place to note the unfortunate editing that has taken place in the English edition. We see in the German a very specific use of dashes, which have a very specific effect of a subtle interruption in the semantic flow, such that the dominant sense of meaning in the sentence interchanges or transforms into a secondary sense or persona or questioning, and then back again. This shifting mirrors or echoes the shift between human and technological just mentioned, as much as it is a material extension of the act of focussing a camera lens, back and forth, attempting to settle on some version of an image, constantly engaged in some form of assessment, interpretation, or alignment. For some reason the English translators decided it was better to edit out Benjamin’s dashes and use parentheses for the supplementary questions, undoubtedly distancing them more from the main flow of meaning, and then to introduce a closing question mark. This latter move might provide a grammatically correct closure to the sentence, but it also elides the implication, which very well may have been intended, that the interrogative zones, dominant and secondary, merge as part of the overall semantic thrust in this sentence. Benjamin here “puts” the two interrogative zones together, merges them, makes them indistinguishable. Again the two zones are what we understand by the human and the technological, and this merger is depicted as biologically induced, part of the sex drive. As much as the gambler is seen as in possession of agency, making his bets, in this sense the risk is completely determined, a game ordered, ruled, and structured by technology itself, by the materiality of the tokens, of the camera.

Finally, it's important to note how these trans-substantiations and appearances include history itself and the citational practice that defines the *Arcades*. The central question of historiography is whether the telling of history will be humanly meaningful, whether it's possible for us as inhabitants of the present to actually experience the humanity or gaze of figures in the past, whether we can get them to "talk," whether we can displace our own interests long enough to have them authentically appear. And in the case of the failure of these attempts, the loss of what we have put at stake, are we not then left with the non-human, the purely technologically produced? These are precisely the questions of the student, the scholar, the reader, the gambler, the photographer, and Benjamin, particularly as "citationist," constantly appropriating the voices of others as though they really were speaking in his own text, aligning these voices, indeed eliding his own presence with theirs in precisely the same way as dominant and secondary interrogative zones become one with the use of only one question mark at the end of the second sentence in O1,1.

NP43 (O1,1 Part 3)

3. On to the third sentence:

What, on the baize cloth, looks out at the gambler from every number—luck, that is—here, from the bodies of all the women, winks at him as the chimera of sexuality: as his type.

[Was auf dem grünen Tuch aus jeder Nummer den Spieler ansieht - das Glück - blinzelt ihm hier ausallen Frauenkörpern als die Chimäre der Geschlechtlichkeit entgegen: als sein Typ.]

[What on the green cloth from each number looks at the player - the happiness - winks at him out of all women's bodies as the chimera of sexuality: as his type.]

Here gaze is reduced to a coquettish wink, a chimera, desire itself. Again dashes, included this time in the English, suggest a visual focus, a clarification, where the gambler first sees a field or table

full of numbers, a blur, then hones in on individual numbers, out of each of which happiness, the human, appears to become animate and to return his looking, to answer his gaze. Again, technology, or number, becomes the embodied human, the essence of humanity, sexuality. This is indeed the gambler's "type," exactly who he himself is, but it is also here a number on a grid, a generic number as perfectly beyond anyone's grasp as luck itself.

Finally, what the gambler sees in number is indeed exactly himself. What actually winks at him is his type, so that he is in fact solipsistically winking at himself. The denigration implied by "all women's bodies," and by the invocation of prostitution in this convolute and elsewhere in the *Arcades*, is intense. I don't want to produce excuses other than to say that there is too much of apparent value in Benjamin's work to not at least make the attempt, like so many others, to bring that "other" value into our present lives, separating it from what is clearly reprehensible. It should be noted that the appearance of the commodity, quantifiable number, as specifically the human itself, that selling of what cannot be sold, to reference the Rimbaud epigraph that opens the *Arcades*, finds its cipher in the idea of prostitution.

In this passage, there is a typification at work in the phrase "all women's bodies," one that, like prostitution, places those bodies into a grid of values, in this case stretching across the visual field of the gambler, each one seeming to bring into focus his own happiness. But as we see here, the endgame and immediate result of this typification is that the gambler has a total vision of himself as precisely another type. Life is a numbers game and the figure of the gambler, and the prostitute, is exactly who and what gives itself over to that game. The objectification of women's bodies is present here as an objectification of humanity on a large scale, an objectification performed by humanity itself, in fact as the essence of humanity, to constantly be bringing itself into union with the numerical and the technological.

NP44 (O1,1 Part 4)

4. Following on to the fourth sentence:

This is nothing other than the number, the cipher, in which just at that moment luck will be called by name in order to jump immediately to another number.

[Der ist nichts anderes als die Nummer, die Chiffer, in welcher gerade in diesem Augenblick das Glück beim Namen will gerufen sein, um gleich darauf in eine andere umzuspringen.]

[This is none other than the number, the chiffer, in which right now in this moment the happiness of the name is called, and then immediately jump into another.]

I'll point out how this series of sections on O1,1 would not look the same or be what it is without my having first read the passage many times in great detail and seen, caught a glimpse of, a particular and particularly productive trajectory of individual, sentence-by-sentence sections. That reading, which was not done "here" but was in many ways an effect of the thinking through writing that is done here, has a presence, forms and informs any methodology that's in play. In any case, to return:

Of course NP structurally peers out from this sentence, this construct. Note how we get to this place through study of this passage, O1,1, how our context here is also one of prostitution and gambling, a context of objecthood and number. Study is enmeshed in all of this, scholarship is, and that can be discussed and delineated, by way of the *Arcades*.

The sentence begins with the notably vague "this" (as much as it is followed by the clear-eyed "none other") whose referent is certainly unclear, given the complexity of the preceding sentence. But we can take what is certainly happening in that previous sentence and apply it here, and that is the birth of number, "on the baize cloth," representing the earth perhaps, which is then for a fleeting moment, a wink, understood to be the gambler himself. This profound mirroring is then repeated. That recognition of

number by number is number, is in fact the form of the cipher, and that moment, that wink, which in fact is happiness, is again duplicated in a duplication called “right now in this moment.” Here this layering and repetition through which we arrive at the definition of number and of the human (insofar as that is happiness) in the same instant, this all comes to us as both the “name” and the calling of the name at once. And yet as soon as that name is called, or calls itself, that moment is exactly the moment, the immediacy, of its self-denial, rerouting, and reconfiguration into another version of itself, a different number. Here the word “chiffer” in fact works well since it crosses the border between figure of speech, cipher, and something that sounds like a jeton, or gambling chip on the board or cloth, and later in this passage, the ivory ball of roulette, which itself as soon as it lands in one place “immediately jumps into another.” Thus there is a play here of dense abstraction, starting with the vague first word “this” and manifesting through the constant repetition, mirroring, and tautology, a sameness that echoes the ennui discussed in earlier sections and that forms a central component of study, and a sharp and direct movement taking place in a literal “gambling den.” Benjamin constantly brings us through the world as material, a move that itself operates as the cipher for a re-investigation of materiality and immateriality, through both a literary and “informational” format at once, a poetry and a historiography, as they each give onto and point to one another.

Our material is an actual press. There are many material things to do to make a press work and to get it to where we would like it to be. It needs to be somewhere, it does, in the world as we know it, especially since we can't deny we are in that world. We come to know that world through being in it. But what is that coming to know? When does it happen? How will we know? We can go on and on being in the world, through statements, collaborations, projects, investments, but in each case we will make a decision or draw a line and make a positive statement, allow number to recognize itself.

NP45 (O1,1 Part 5)

5. The next sentence is as follows:

His type—that's the number that pays off thirty-six-fold, the one on which, without even trying, the eye of the voluptuary falls, as the ivory ball falls into the red or black compartment.

[Der Typ - das ist das Fach des sechsendreißfachen Setzens, in das das Auge des Lüstlings ohne sein Zutun fällt wie die elfenbeinerne Kugel in die rote oder schwarze Kasette.]

[The type - this is the subject of the thirty-six sitting, into which the eye of the lecher falls without his intervention like the ivory ball into the red or black cassette.]

The apparent strategy of moving sentence by sentence through the reading of a passage should probably be commented on. The density of the passages is too great, each passage its own world, novel, philosophy, to be fleshed out on its "own" or by itself and think we can "summarize" it. Summary of course is a communicative modality that is always already accounted for by the form of the *Arcades* (starting perhaps with its structure as an encyclopedia). The pause between sentences echoes the pause between passages. And though it's clear that even at the sentence level we can't truly get to the entirety of what the text might be doing, one feels much closer to the art of the *Arcades* in this way, which of course also announces itself as the art of interpretation, as well as the interruption, the art of the pause between, the precarious perch on the barricade between entry into the world, and departure from it. So that these sections, these passages, began by quoting long passages and meandering back and forth among sentences that were too complex for such cursory treatment (not to then be heavy handed . . .). These sections are finding themselves still lost but now closer to what they would like to be in terms of level of analysis. The *Arcades* puts us in the vicinity of "meaning" and we're asked to ask what that experience of that vicinity might be, even as its a ground that incessantly pulls out from under.

Benjamin continues then in the modality of abstraction reversed through material specificity and back again, working and reworking the scene of action, multivalent or multi-level allegory, and the self-referential or tautological. And with this sentence we have all of this, in spades as it were. If any word is central to this passage it is probably “type,” which plays a large role in this sentence. So let this sentence be our “gambling den” and we will play at unpacking what we seem to have in front of us.

Type is what the gambler sees as the “chimera of sexuality.” It is the biological and the bodily equally as much as pure number itself, the gambler’s lucky number, which calls to him as powerfully as any form of self-identity could. He pursues it beyond his own intention to do so. The numerical is his life and when he sees a grid of numbers on the gambling table or on the roulette wheel he is mesmerized, in a dream state, drugged. Each number is its own type; his visions ricochets from one to the next in orgasmic ecstacy that immediately transfers to his search for a prostitute.

This all holds true. But we clearly are asked to interpret “type” as a font of type, a typographical character, of which in fact, adding letters and numbers, there would be 36 in total. This typographical machinery, then, is clearly also of the nature of number, representative of an overdetermined industrial universe within which our “eternal vagabond” moves, from one interpretation to another, one iteration of number to another, from one letter to the next in what is also an act of reading. Since indeed the “ivory ball” here function exactly as the eye of the reader moving from one bit of type to the next in what is ultimately an interpretive process that is also performed “without intervention.” As noted earlier, the gambler must settle on one number or another, but specifically what the gambler does is relinquish agency to what appears to be chance, and we as readers finally have little say in what comes before us to be read.

The ivory roulette ball descends into its “Kassette” or “compartment” just as the eye latches on to some letter or number, or indeed some “subject,” which translates the German “Fach,” which also translates as “compartment.” The mechanical ivory ball, the

biological eye, the mind's eye, all set to interchange, become and comment on each other in a process that can't but show the universe to be mechanized. These compartments where the eye of the reader falls are these separate passages of the *Arcades*, the ivory ball the equivalent of the intervening white of paper as much as the white of the eye, the compartment of the eye socket (its red capillaries, its black lashes) paralleling those material compartments on the roulette wheel. The gambler is both embodied, having what for him constitutes his most genuine or authentic experience, and disembodied, trans-substantiated, constantly transferred into and back out of the numerical grid of his environment. The gambler finds passage between these "places" and in this sense as well is an "eternal vagabond," a "bird of passage," to quote the epigraph.

There is little to no resolution in this interpretation, only a hunt after as many interpretive valences as I can land on, suss out. The *Arcades* pushes past language in this way. The exercise here is futile in that I'm attempting to enclose in informational prose a symbolic object. This can't work, but in the failure we're showing something. Perhaps something more than what we're pushing up against. It's some sort of multiple. It's a comprehension of the multitude itself. Is that a possibility?

NP46 (O1,1 Part 6)

6. The following sentence:

He leaves the Palais-Royal with bulging pockets, calls to a whore, and once more celebrates in her arms the communion with number, in which money and riches, absolved from every earthen weight, have come to him from the fates like a joyous embrace returned to the full.

[Er tritt mit prallen Taschen aus dem Palais Royal, ruft eine Hure heran und feiert noch einmal in ihren Armen den Akt mit der Nummer, in welchem Geld und Gut, von aller Erdschwere entbunden, vom Schicksal ihm wie die Erwidernng einer völlig geglückten Umarmung kamen.]

[He comes out of the Palais Royal with bulging pockets, calls a whore, and once again celebrates in her arms the act with the number, in which money and property, freed of all gravity, of the fate came to him as the reply of a perfectly successful embrace.]

But we get closer here to the crux of dealing with what we are “presented” with in the *Arcades*. Closer, not “passing” through. So here perhaps the gambler, number himself, emerges from the compartment of the casino like the ivory roulette ball. That’s not clear. But there is a sudden transformation of the casino into the Palais Royal, just as the arcade had earlier transformed into the casino. The gambling den, the human mind, the department store, we are meant to understand that these operate according to the same laws, principles, and structures as governmentality (of course even if there was a casino with the name “Palais Royal”). Our vagabondage from number to number and place to place, one appearance to another, that multiplication and way in which we catch one version or another, one chimera or another, only as a “wink,” these are the figures and forms that make up an economy of control. And the gambler has played his hand well, found his lucky number, emerging from the casino a newly rich and happy man, pockets bulging with winnings, as well as a sense of sexual prowess, biological distinction. Yet he then acts out in the larger world precisely the same pursuits as at the gambling table: he sees number everywhere, the “pursuit of the chimera of sexuality” is stronger than ever, his “call to a whore” mirrors luck’s being called “by name” in the figure of the number. This more or less symbolic reading is in fact close to the informational surface.

It is significant to note here how the relations built up are in fact number to number, insofar as the gambler finds his identity as number and the whore is the type of the woman equally as much “given over” to financial transaction. The gambler is the prostitute to number. It is in this sense a multivalent “communion with number,” enlisting bodily function and religious overtones throughout, one that is inspired by and finds its source in number itself. Finally this devotion to abstraction makes sense as well as a type of transcendence that takes hold and is fed in the midst

of the stark materiality of the gambling den, the roulette ball, the numeric grid printed on the “baize cloth.” There is a numerically produced apotheosis of sorts, an orgasmic moment even in the paid-for intercourse, where all that materiality is truly forgotten during a “wink” of pure joy, “absolved” from worldly cares. The embrace of the prostitute repeats the embrace of number, of course. It’s clear to all.

NP47 (O1,1 Part 7)

7.

For in gambling hall and bordello, it is the same supremely sinful delight: to challenge fate in pleasure.

[Denn in Bordell und Spielsaal ist es die gleiche, sündigste Wonne: In der Lust das Schicksal zu stellen.]

[For in the brothel and gaming room it is the same, most sinful bliss: in the desire to face fate.]

“It is the same” in both places, brothel and casino. Benjamin here and throughout the *Arcades* is showing in what way intimacy is co-extensive with number, showing us the depths of their dialectical interchange. But is that enough for us to accept, say, and move on? We’re being shown something. It is not being told to us, in the manner of my previous sentence. It is being danced, of the flesh, performed painfully in front of us. What is it to preference that “being told” over any other form of communication, namely the one Benjamin has himself chosen in the *Arcades*, indirection at every possible turn? What exactly is being asked here, in what I’ll say is my own extremely modest and humble reading of the *Arcades*, or what would be requested of NP in its mission and assessment of projects? What is being asked, and do we “just know”? I want to say that the entire resonance of Benjamin’s thought is behind each of the passages of the *Arcades*, but that it is something we come to only on our own, can only guess at, though how we imagine that “entire resonance,” that “full

embrace,” of his thought is in question. Nowhere does he speak straightforwardly, we always contend with some hidden message (hence a proliferation of interpretive text). In that sense, we face a textual art work unlike any other, one we perform ourselves and in which we perform ourselves, in order to read this text, but the text also interrogates performance itself, which finally is a formal insight. It is almost as if Benjamin attacks the very emotional intimacy of our reading, enslaving us to his “type” like any gambler to his number. We go back and forth seeing ourselves through the book even as we slip in and out of view exactly as Benjamin himself. This is precisely the scholarly writing of history, a bodily dance of writing that repeatedly reinstantiates the commodity.

The in and out of view, our sin of pleasure, reading always in theological terms, the framework within which sin must be assessed. And here our being face to face with type is the same too as the gambler’s discovery of number as if it were his own child, somehow immaculately born from number itself. Yet this particular incarnation is our fate, as if we are saying our very life is in fact death. This human happiness is at the cost of complete mechanization, a throwing oneself at the mercy of a deck of cards, a role of dice, a bouncing ivory ball. Either that, and both are fine, or our pursuit of mechanization, of both losing and finding consciousness in the machine, is in fact our most substantive, hopeful, and legitimate pursuit of happiness itself, our affective well-being. We say this, yes, even as at that moment when we settle on and enjoy its proof we comprehend that we’ve given ourselves over to nothing but ourselves yet again. The play of illusion, political illusion, is that there might at all be something that is outside us, there might be something we could be released into.

The English translation here “to challenge fate in pleasure” seems quite vague, with Google translate’s “in the desire to face fate” far more to the point, and this idea of “facing” is clearly already at work in the passage. The English also loses the parallel construction of “in the,” which initiates the clauses both before and after the colon, indicating that desire (“Lust”) itself is the equivalent of a gaming room and a bordello, indicating that the

very manner in which we process desire has been utterly quantified and instrumentalized. The external and internal run parallel, tracing one onto the other in such symmetry that their “difference” is utterly destabilized.

Is that true then, we cannot settle on either one, torn between one “place” and another? What is this “state” then? And we don’t ask that question lightly, for text and question occupy a unity, which is simply to say that the answer is right there in front us, we are indeed “face to face.” This “eternal vagabondage” is precisely our own. The first sentence again (or do we start another section here?) is: “Hasn’t his eternal vagabondage everywhere accustomed him to reinterpreting the image of the city?” At exactly what level now is this interrogative? We know at this point that we are constantly questioning the image of the city just as we are constantly questioning the textual image of the book, these two states running parallel to the gambler’s questioning, gazing at, number, as at himself. So this facing fate, it is the facing of our own crisis of reinterpretation, facing that need to reassess, in some sense to build a new press, to face the dissatisfaction that impels, the passionate improvisation, constantly intermixed with the inescapable (institutional) boredom of repetition. Not to put too fine a point on it, but the *Arcades* achieves a glimpse or wink, at least, of a work of humanity facing itself, even if on a pre-determined path on which human value is extinguished. Or, again, we are talking about an affective state wherein the elimination of human value cannot at any point be told apart from its realization.

NP48 (O1,1 Part 8)

8.

Let unsuspecting idealists imagine that sensual pleasure, of whatever stripe, could ever determine the theological concept of sin.

[Daß Sinnenlust, von welcher Art sie sei, den theologischen Begriff der Sünde bestimmen könne, mögen ahnungslose Idealisten sich träumen lassen.]

[That sensual pleasure, of whatever kind it is, could determine the theological concept of sin, may unsuspecting idealists dream.]

What is close reading of the *Arcades*? What do we mean by textual analysis? What happens when we read this text? Simply put, it's a project of reading reading itself. No doubt. But we place ourselves, in addressing the book, in an environment where it seems that Benjamin has already read reading, has very much read reading reading reading, gone into and even perhaps out of this *mis en abyme*, a labyrinth, that feels like the architecture of the imagination itself. As I indicated in NP1, the *Arcades* is not a text, if we take it at its word. But this is true exactly in the sense that text itself is not a text. Must be a dream, an intoxication of some kind.

Benjamin starts here by referencing the sensual pleasure of "bordello," "gambler," and the "desire to face fate" (whose status is, again, obscured by the English translation). This "of whatever kind it is" opens the door to the various forms of sensual pleasure under consideration, as well as to the discussion of what the "senses" might do at all. Note as well that the German "Art" (Kunst) may also mean "type," dimensionalizing the situation even further, as it announces that art itself is a mechanical reproduction. But what Benjamin is at pains to do here is depart from an idealist or traditionally theological rubric of sinful sensuality, which gambling and prostitution would be, and reposition these various forces around a border between "sinful" behavior and an authentic bliss. This then reinvents the sensual, or at least adds a component to it. It's probably best here to continue this discussion through a look at the next sentence.

NP49 (O1,1 Part 9)

9.

The origin of true lechery is nothing else but this stealing of pleasure from out of the course of life with God, whose covenant with such life resides in the name.

[Der wahren Unzucht liegt nichts anderes zu Grunde als gerade diese Entwendung der Lust aus dem Verlaufe des Lebens mit Gott, dessen Bindung an ihn im Namen wohnt.]

[The true fornication is based on nothing other than this abduction of pleasure from the course of life with God, whose attachment to him lives in the name.]

Note how the previous sentence dismisses “idealists” even as this sentence comes right back to looking for a “true” form of something, in this case fornication or lechery. The sentence is still searching for what determines the “theological concept of sin” and works to firmly place the entire passage in a theological context, life being determined in relation to God, “the course of life with God.” The passage is in fact unusual in the *Arcades* for this reason. But what is said here, in combination with the previous sentence, is that “sensual pleasure” is not in itself sinful but the “stealing of pleasure,” here equated with the ungodly, gambling and prostitution. So as we’ve been referring to it as this “chimera of sexuality,” this “wink” and recognition of number as the source of happiness is an excess that defines sin itself. It is an ungodliness that sets up the framework of the godly, thereby defining the theological.

But it’s important here to notice how “the name” takes on a theologico-philosophical significance and ties back to naming earlier in the passage, which relates to the birthing metaphor and the gambler’s recognition of his “type” and of himself within that type, constituted as number. Following the auto-translated “abduction” makes sense here as well, since it provides a better bodily sense, a sense of the pleasure at issue being a kind of

Christ-like incarnation, where following Christian tradition we can note how God might then be attached to this “name.” There is a kind of kidnapping in play, taking the form and function of pleasure and turning it against its original purposes, inverting it. So that the naming that happens in, by, and to the gambler appropriates that naming that is operative in a theological context, even as the gambler could be said to be on the trail of true human happiness, which as we have seen is identical with utterly corrupt mechanization. Finally, citational practice is also seen as an abduction of an originally intended meaning. Benjamin’s true fornication, lechery, promiscuity is his own indiscriminately latching on to any historical source whatsoever and turning it to his solipsistic purposes, his abduction, his usurpation, which process will then characterize historiography in toto.

NP50 (O1,1 Part 10)

10.

The name itself is the cry of naked lust.

[Der Name selber ist der Schrei der nackten Lust.]

[The name itself is the cry of naked lust.]

Benjamin writes extensively about the “name” in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, though here I would like to as much as possible stay within the context of O1,1. In the previous sentence Benjamin effectively defines what is meant by blasphemy, a stealing from theology the very “life” of that theology, a stolen life. The image is of the abduction of Christ the moment Christ is born into the world, the moment there is any incarnation whatsoever, which is associated with the moment of coming into language or being named. This textual passage appropriates in a certain economy that birth as the birth of number, a kind of anti-life or anti-Christ, through the figure of the gambler and prostitute (and as we’ve seen by extension the figure of Benjamin, and of us

as readers and co-creators). That previous sentence designates a crime, then, and this very short, concise, simple sentence, where auto-translate happens to line up perfectly with the English, performs it. “Naked lust” is the physical body being born, even as that body is associated here with the word, the name. And that first primal moment, that communicative “cry,” that is what finally constitutes the name itself. We could say that this is, then, opposed to a “covenant” with God, but we should also recognize how the power, and ongoing perpetuation, of this supposedly corrupted name follows the Christian birth scenario. We need to mention God’s attachment to the name because that is exactly how we will convey, that is what will be the cipher for, what the gambler is when he does finally catch a glimpse of that “chimera of sexuality,” when he gets lucky. He will achieve that ecstatic denial and confirmation of his humanity precisely within a Judeo-Christian trans-substantiative framework. And, again, this will be the core model of appropriation itself, the work of every passage in the *Passagenwerk*.

NP51 (O1,1 Part 11)

11.

This sober thing, fateless in itself—the name—knows no other adversary than the fate that takes its place in whoring and that forges its arsenal in superstition.

[Dies Nüchterne, Schicksalslose an sich - der Name - kennt keinen andern Gegner als das Schicksal, das in der Hurerei an seine Stelle tritt und sich im Aberglauben sein Arsenal schafft.]

[This sober, fateless in itself - the name - knows no other opponent than fate, which takes its place in fornication and creates its arsenal in superstition.]

Here the wild “cry” of birth in the previous sentence is exchanged for a stark sobriety. Following the English we get a sense of the “thing itself,” or following the auto-translation

the name “in itself,” which would echo and extend the previous sentence’s “name itself” in a state of nakedness. Here that nakedness is an absence of fate, a kind of *ex post facto* adornment, as much as clearly what Benjamin does here is effectively name the name before naming it: he characterizes something as “sober” and “fateless” first, he adorns it first, and only then brings into sharp focus what he is referring to, “—the name—.” We are to believe we have a “sobriety,” a pure entity, carrying with it an aspect of the divine, even as it is also personified as “knowing” something. But as pointed out earlier, this pure name cannot be conceived or given definition without its opponent, its single adversary, it “knows no other,” it’s dialectical opposing force known as “fate.” That fate then “takes its place”—an appropriation, citation, usurpation—in prostitution and gambling (effectively a superstitious belief in number) in an exclusive one-to-one correspondence. These things battle each other in a universe unto themselves, a radically solipsistic totality of conflict.

NP52 (O1,1 Part 12)

12.

Thus in gambler and prostitute that superstition which arranges the figure of fate and fills all wanton behavior with fateful forwardness, fateful concupiscence, bringing even pleasure to kneel before its throne.

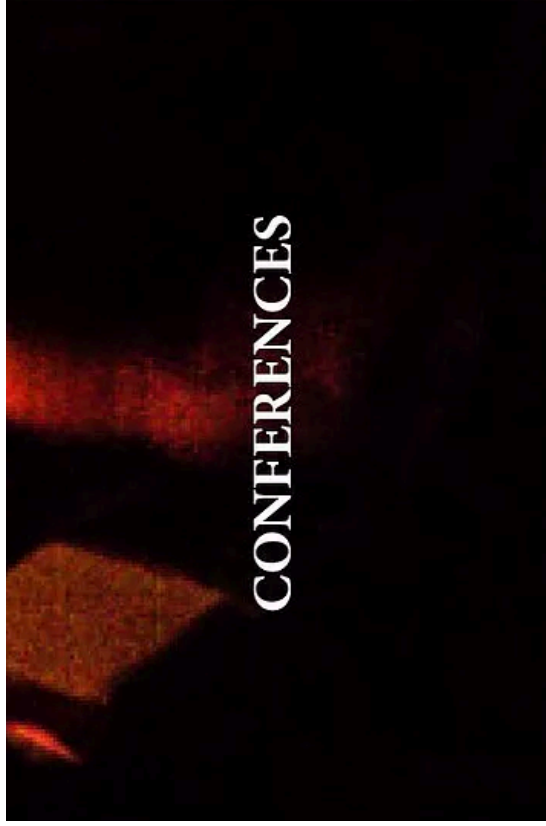
[Daher im Spieler und in der Hure der Aberglaube, der die Figuren des Schicksals stellt, der alle buhlerische Unterhaltung mit Schicksalsvorwitz, Schicksalslüsternheit erfüllt und selbst die Lust zu dessen Thron erniedrigt.]

[Hence, in the player and in the whore, the superstition that sets the characters of fate, who fulfills all the boorish conversation with fateful anticipation, fate whisper, and even humbles the desire for his throne.]

Two major characteristics of this concluding flourish are the rhetoric of logic, the “Thus” or “Hence,” and the last word’s firmness in its imperial, backward-casting re-configuration of the hierarchy of values expressed in the passage, doubling as a sudden first appearance or birth of what is seemingly a whole new divine figure, superstition. The conjunction of logic and mystery is of piece with the passage overall.

And this relates to the subtext here of the printing process, which comes through more in the auto-translated version’s “sets the characters,” rather than “arranges the figures.” It is finally the irrational belief in number, that superstition, that sets the type and determines the “forwardness” or “anticipation” of reading. Our fate here is contained in language and the mechanism of production by which it finds its way into the world and consciousness.

And the status of pleasure here experiences a shift, a demotion, from earlier, moving from the sanctioned “sensual pleasure” within the “theological concept of sin” to an opposing pleasure that takes the form of the original but is in fact “stolen” and is the true object of pursuit of the gambler and prostitute. Now however this particular outcome and the pursuit of pleasure emerge as not only determinants but vassals of this other force, the sober version of the name, fatelessness. What appears at this stage is a reappearance, a re-birth or afterbirth, of feudal pre-modern governmentality at the deepest of levels.



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N-Dimensional Translation: Neural Networks and Pure Digitality

Why think about what translation means today? There are at least three versions of translation that might be relevant. First, more or less straightforward or utilitarian translation from language to language, for instance literary translation from French to English to publish a new novel. Most of the traditional issues surrounding the difficulty of translation—denotative versus connotative meaning, style, and so on—might be encountered in this category. This type of translation has of course been going on for thousands of years. Second, an issue particularly relevant to the digital humanities, is translation into computer code of literary corpi as this material is digitized and made searchable. Organizations such as the Text Encoding Initiative maintain standards for such translation, which is in many respects a type of conversion between formats. Lastly, and the type of translation I would like to discuss here, is a form that is much closer to the contemporary essence of the digital itself than coding: artificial neural networks. Here we have not only the transference of meaning and information from one language or format to the next, but a machine translation with a high degree of accuracy and the potential to apply the translation process across different contexts. This latter capacity is known as “artificial general intelligence.” By considering this mode of translation through the lens of what Benjamin characterized as a posthuman translatability, the supplementarity of pure language, and the symbolizing agency of language, we can reference an expanded dimensionality of the digital.

Artificial neural networks have been through different phases of development but effectively started in the 1940s as an attempt to mimic the actual biological neural networks being discovered in the human brain. Computer scientists had conceptualized how a digital version of the biological networks might function at that point but technological advances, primarily computer memory capacity, have only now begun to catch up with the core of the earlier insights. Essentially, neural networks are grounded in

the idea of, rather than setting up logical rules by which a computer operates, importing large amounts of data from which the computer then recognizes patterns. The recognition takes place through a trial and error process where connections between data are tested until a particular output is reached. This process is often called “machine learning” when a single neural network layer or pattern is involved, and then “deep learning” when additional layers are added in, the computer working to recognize patterns within patterns. The complexity that emerges from the operation of artificial neural network systems is profoundly different from what we have traditionally known as the potential of the digital computer.

A December 2016 article in the *New York Times Magazine*, “The Great A.I. Awakening,” quotes the CEO of Google, Sundar Pichai, as saying that the future of Google is “AI first,” meaning that the company will be prioritizing machine or deep learning artificial intelligence (AI). The unit within Google that is charged with this initiative is Google Brain, a group of leaders in the artificial intelligence community that has been developing neural network technology. As the article relates, the first test case for its progress with AI (Facebook and Amazon, among others, are also developing it) was Google Translate. The article describes how the Google Brain team implemented AI software within Google Translate to produce translations of complex literary texts that had effectively no identifying mark that might indicate that the translations were computer generated. The example provided is the opening paragraph of the Ernest Hemingway story “The Snows of Kilimanjaro.” Even though I’m simply paraphrasing the *New York Times* article, I want to reproduce this example here, since it provides a very clear impression of the look and feel of neural network outputs. What follows is (1) Hemingway’s original, (2) the translation by the pre-neural network Google Translate, and (3) the updated, neural-network version from Google Translate (both of these latter are translations back into English from a Japanese translation of the original):

1.

Kilimanjaro is a snow-covered mountain 19,710 feet high, and is said to be the highest mountain in Africa. Its western summit is called the Masai “Ngaje Ngai,” the House of God. Close to the western summit there is the dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude.

2.

Kilimanjaro is 19,710 feet of the mountain covered with snow, and it is said that the highest mountain in Africa. Top of the west, “Ngaje Ngai” in the Maasai language, has been referred to as the house of God. The top close to the west, there is a dry, frozen carcass of a leopard. Whether the leopard had what the demand at that altitude, there is no that nobody explained.

3.

Kilimanjaro is a mountain of 19,710 feet covered with snow and is said to be the highest mountain in Africa. The summit of the west is called “Ngaje Ngai” in Masai, the house of God. Near the top of the west there is a dry and frozen dead body of leopard. No one has ever explained what leopard wanted at that altitude.

The point here is, first of all, that Hemingway’s original—what we have come to know as crisp and clean English diction and syntax, his trademark, an American trademark—is not being altered beyond recognition in #3, as it is in many ways in #2,. More importantly, however, the quality of the neural-network translation possesses a strong *readability*, being absent of errors that would inhibit our reading process. It brings another order of experience of language with it. There is a quality of the language in this example that accesses another register of our very experience with language, an unexpected register of the human. Just to highlight the multiple conclusions that might be drawn here: the quality of translations has increased; difficult translations are handled effectively; the computer is able to duplicate the symbolic or connotative implications of literary language; the computer is able to effect translations that are not noticeably computer generated. Finally, in a significant way, we see here Hemingway’s—an excellent example in many ways—ability to be a stand-in for American

identity, and literature itself. The conclusions we should entertain are quite clearly that not only has human translation become a redundancy, but in some sense literature itself may be next, if a computer can recognize and reproduce connotative language. The original, Hemingway himself and whatever he might represent, is situated in a context of the nonhuman, of the breakdown of distinctions between original and translation, one that arises from the transformation of symbolic language.

I want to combine this look at artificial neural networks with three little-discussed aspects of Benjamin's 1921 essay "The Task of the Translator." Benjamin there raises the idea of a translatability that exists in the world but that is beyond human perception. How do we account for such potential if translatability is accessed digitally? Also referenced in Benjamin's essay is a complexity that emerges as a product of the supplementarity of all languages. Should we consider artificial neural networks as that complexity itself? Finally, there is a turn referenced in the essay, a turn that happens within language itself, from passive to active, from being that which is symbolized to the symbolizing, a turn that parallels the potentials being developed with multilayered neural networks. Investigating Benjamin's text in these three areas can perhaps uncover aspects of the contemporary digital context that repositions and expand our notion of translation, its dimensionality and greater significance as a form (as Benjamin calls it)¹ in a world constituted by a feedback loop between human and artificial neural networks.

Translatability

Benjamin constructs an idea of the nonhuman through a consideration of what aspects of an original can possibly be translated.

1. Translation is a form. Benjamin makes the statement suddenly and matter-of-factly. He is concerned with "comprehending" translation as a form, as if his essay translates translation itself, inhabits that task, his task, which is not to convey the original directly (an impossible task) but to do so in a way that is "derivative, ultimate, ideational" (259). In some sense we dispense with our own being to become the translation.

He attributes then to each original a part of its essence that lends itself to being translated, or an aspect of “translatability” that is part of every original. Every origin, in order to be an origin, must have within itself its own particular non-originality, which is that aspect of an original that allows it, that calls for it, to be brought into the realm of the communicable, of what is translated. Once Benjamin settles on this idea he then posits a realm of originals whose translatability will never be accessed. He sees no reason why something might never be translated but still have an existent aspect of translatability, just as an original can exist without our being aware of it. An original might not find anyone who recognizes its translatability, who is able or desires to translate it. It may also be the case that an original’s translatability does not “call for” being translated. Benjamin compares this situation to the sense in which something may be said to be “unforgettable” but then is entirely forgotten by any living person. It can’t be said that designating something as unforgettable is an error, just that the claim is “unfulfilled by men.” His comment then is: “Analogously, the translatability of linguistic creations ought to be considered even if men should prove unable to translate them. Given a strict concept of translation, would they not really [still] be translatable to some degree?” He continues:

Even in times of narrowly prejudiced thought, there was an inkling that life was not limited to organic corporeality. . . . The concept of life is given its due only if everything that has a history of its own, and is not merely the setting for history, is credited with life. (255)

On this model, translatability² exists beyond the realm of human cognition. We only experience those things that are

2. Translation is a form, like other forms. In this case, like art itself is a form. In Wolfgang Ernst’s sense, form is the “real technological condition of expression.” Art is the form of the “original,” and “The Task of the Translator” wants to point out, to say, that art works are not, in their essential or most basic qualities, concerned to communicate or transmit information. This lack is what defines a work of art, and that is exactly what translation wants to translate, the non-informative,

actually brought into translation. When we speak of artificial neural network translation then, we are better able to access its potential by considering this idea, since with AI translation we would have every expectation of not only more translation taking place than would have before (and Google Translate had some 500 million monthly users even before the introduction of neural network technology), but translation of what would not have otherwise been translated. The idea is that neural network technology is an example of exceeding the universe as we know it by accessing this “unforgettable forgotten” or translatability, bringing into communicative exchange aspects of the world that might exist but that would not otherwise be perceived.

Fair enough. This does not however deny the existence of a translatability even neural networks cannot address; this does not mean that originals are fully accessed by technology, or even accessed at all. We are still dealing only with what is translated. “It is evident that no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original.” Benjamin here compares the original to life itself, where any given manifestation of life, an individual, a species, and so on, does not effect the overall quality or existence of life in general. And it is with this qualification in mind that it is useful to do a second pass

the non-denotative status of a work. Since that is what the work is. Anything else is “bad translation.” Translation takes on its status as a form when its intention is to get at, to translate, this essential quality of an original that ostensibly has nothing to do with the transmission of information, that is not concerned with the “receiver,” that is not concerned with audience “attentiveness.” The task of the translator must be to convey the original as an original, which is the original as something that is not translatable, since that quality makes up its originality. In this way translation as a form is like other forms in their relation to content. They can only be provisional or temporary, based in the moment of human perception since any given content is not summarizable by our attempts to summarize it. Here the idea that all form is a form of translation makes sense. Form is translation. Real expression is a technological condition.

through some of the language Benjamin uses to frame his argument for nonhuman translatability, for he is constantly qualifying his descriptions, putting them in place as a play of mental and material constructs, “linguistic” but only in an expanded sense of that term. We need only return to the example of the “unforgettable forgotten” to uncover this quality to Benjamin’s entire argument in “The Task of the Translator.” To quote the passage at more length:

One might, for example, speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten it. If the nature of such a life or moment required that it be unforgotten, that predicate would imply not a falsehood but merely a claim unfulfilled by men, and probably also a reference to a realm in which it *is* fulfilled: God’s remembrance. Analogously, the translatability of linguistic creations ought to be considered even if men should prove unable to translate them. (254)³

What we can note here is the emphasis on language, the way the nonhuman realm is posited as an *effect* of language. The nonhuman realm is built in to words like “unforgettable,” called out as a “predicate,” since clearly anything could be forgotten by all living persons. Language then seeks its own fulfillment, which may in fact be the truly nonhuman, contained within language itself. And that realm is here specifically associated with the Judeo-Christian “God”, a set of values and metaphysical assumptions that finally, as here, does not include the human. As earlier in this same paragraph of Benjamin’s essay, logic itself is also called

3. As you may have noticed, there is a contradiction (at least one) running through Benjamin’s essay, a parallel between how we come to understand what an original is and what a translation, or copy, is. The point almost seems to be to convey their interchangeability, how the one operates in terms of the other, so that finally this quality or this dynamic is what Benjamin’s essay itself is translating to us, is in some sense transmitting to us, communicating, and at the same time resisting, embodying. And it is my work here in discussing the essay that must then parallel that task. It is my work here in reading the essay.

into question and associated with the linguistic, our certainty that there is nonhuman translatability being “apodictic,” and there here “analogously” as an adverbial access to the character of translatability. Benjamin’s point here seems quite clearly to be that translatability, and by extension any concept of an “original,” are ideas that come to us as part of the “technological unconscious”⁴ of language itself. This concept of language contains the nonlinguistic.

The implication for artificial neural networks, particularly for translation, and the way in which the digital is evolving overall, is that what is technologically enabled, perceived as the introduction of nonhuman capacity into the known world, is in fact already contained in a material/immaterial binary carried within the structure of language itself. Translatability, and original, are situated concepts that operate objectively. Any perceived transcendence in the world, and the world may in fact entirely consist of the perception of such transcendence, is reducible to what may almost be termed the agency of language itself, the blueprints, the laws it hands down to humanity. “The laws governing the translation lie within the original, contained in the issue of its translatability.” In a sense, language itself is our original, containing the laws of how neural networks will recognize and reproduce the world, its present, and hence its past, and hence its future. On this logic, we re-evaluate technicity as not only a human construct, rather than in any way nonhuman, but one that remains in every respect embedded in the deepest humanistic traditions at its very root. We have to ask, is there a recursivity or repetition in how we imagine any given technological solution or utopia?

Supplementarity

Benjamin confronts the idea of what the common translatable element between languages is by introducing the idea of

4. For the formulation of the technological unconscious, see Nigel Thrift’s *Knowing Capitalism*, Sage, 2005.

“kinship.” In this sense, he might as well be attempting to define the digital itself, as a global phenomena that by definition crosses all languages and cultures. Is this kinship then what is most biologically human, for instance the basic structure of the brain, the neural structure? We might say that Google seems to think so and that the slogan “AI first” has this tenet behind it. It seems that corporations are able to push the digital to its furthest reaches most successfully through a mimesis of what is most universally human, even as in this case that universal human element is only able to be recognized, detailed, and discussed through advanced science. Technology talks to itself,⁵ as it were, using the idea of the “human” as a mere reference point.

And Benjamin’s text both reflects and extends these tendencies in important ways. As his text works its way toward an understanding of what this kinship might be, he rejects the idea that kinship is found in “vague resemblance,” and writes that “it cannot be defined adequately by an identity of origin,” though the “concept of ‘origin’ remains indispensable.” Thus kinship, commonality, does not substantively hold up as a result of either similarity or shared origin. It may be broken in both these cases,

5. In any case, when we consider an original, it is important to note that “the laws governing the translation lie within the original, contained in the issue of its translatability.” Thus translation in fact finds its way into the heart of any original, which to be an original must have in some sense already planned to be translated or to be taken away from its own nature as an untranslatable original. “Translatability is an essential quality of certain works.” It is in this sense that translation becomes (or is revealed to be) even more solidified as a form itself, one that appears in the world and through which the world takes shape. An original must in some sense correspond to the dictates of translation—only “certain works” do this—to achieve its continued existence as something that is original. Here we can see that translation or the cult of the copy has already in this early essay taken a significant place in Benjamin’s work, anticipating later essays like “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction.” Here there are two distinct dynamics that Benjamin posits as part of the translation process.

mostly since they are both historically oriented. Lasting kinship is rather found in the “suprahistorical” aspect of languages where “in every one of them as a whole, one and the same thing is meant.” What is at stake is that the thing that is in fact signified by different words is the same across languages and cultures. There is a way in which different words for “bread” mean the same thing, bread, across cultures. In this sense, languages intend the same thing, and for Benjamin, globally, it is by conceptualizing the “totality of their intentions” as in fact supplementing each other that the different languages combine this element of their commonality to produce actual kinship, or what Benjamin calls “pure language.” “Whereas all individual elements of foreign languages—words, sentences, associations—are mutually exclusive, these languages supplement each other in their intentions.”

The description of this supplementarity tracks the description of pattern recognition in artificial neural networks. In the trial and error at the base of AI, connections between data points are tested and given different “weights” based on the number of accumulated relevant responses.⁶ Over time patterns emerge and contribute to outputs with a high degree of precision. What we would be theorizing here, through “The Task of the Translator,” is that pure language results from a supplementary aggregation of intentions, an aggregation that parallels the accumulation of “weights” and that enables accurate translation. In this way, pure language serves as a cross-cultural semantic architecture that parallels in its function and makeup artificial neural networks.

But so what? There are perhaps plenty of network structures that might reflect Benjamin’s pure language. But what is important here about the “pure language” of Benjamin’s essay is its further development into a situatedness reminiscent of the originality/translatability problematic discussed above. What Benjamin theorizes through the kinship of languages that produces translation is the very presence of and relation to difference itself. He accesses this register of critique through the seemingly innocuous

6. See Bishop, Christopher M. *Neural Networks for Pattern Recognition*. Clarendon Press, 1995.

example of variant words for “bread,” the French *pain* and German *Brot*:

. . . we must draw a distinction, in the concept of “intention,” between what is meant and the way of meaning it. In the words *Brot* and *pain*, what is meant is the same, but the way of meaning it is not. This difference in the way of meaning permits the word *Brot* to mean something other to a German⁷ than what the word *pain* means to a Frenchman, so that these words are not interchangeable for them; in fact, they strive to exclude each other. As to what is meant, however, the two words signify the very same thing. Even though the way of meaning in these two words is in such conflict, it supplements itself in each of the two languages from

7. First is that there is a realm of non-human translatability that may well never be accessed. “The translatability of linguistic creations ought to be considered even if men should prove unable to translate them.” Thus there is a quality of originals that is translatable but that may never actually be translated, or may only ever exist in pure unrealized potentiality. This could be due to either never finding a translator, the right translator, or to not having any part of its nature that lends itself to translation as we know it, having a nature that does not call for translation. If we take this latter case as true, we might then turn back and ask whether or not the original then had any translatability within it at all. And it may not. Translatability relies on human perception. It’s here that we need to note the linguistic and conceptual nature of translatability. There is an aspect of Benjamin’s argument here that stays entirely within language itself. His single example of an unrealized translatability is an analogy to the linguistic conundrum of an “unforgettable life or moment” that is in fact forgotten by all. Certainly this might be possible but Benjamin draws two implications said to be contained in the language itself, in the “predicate”: that the claim of being unforgotten is “merely a claim unfulfilled by men” or that it “references a realm in which it is fulfilled: God’s remembrance.” Thus translatability is a presupposition contained within language itself but that carries with it the idea of the existence of non-human potentiality and of a kind of theology. Translation as form in this way (among others) takes priority over originals existing purely in their own right, without any regard to how they line up with what might conceivably be translated.

which the words are derived; to be more specific, the way of meaning in them is supplemented in its relation to what is meant.

We can note here the peculiar “strive to exclude each other” and “such conflict” as references to the World War I context out of which Europe had emerged only three years before this essay was published, and that had defined much of Benjamin’s adult life to this point. It seems clear that the German/French conflict is not coincidental in this passage, and that “kinship” likely refers to the relation between these two nations. In this sense, the astonishing destruction of the recent war is at stake in locating a stable idea of kinship. The fact that the “ways of meaning” rule each other out, that “these words are not interchangeable” both defines local identity and serves as the loci of human destruction. But the hints of nonhuman agency persist here as well, since the syntax itself announces that the “difference in the way of meaning” is an aspect of language beyond its specific use, and this difference itself “permits” the German/French divide. And who or what is it that “strives to exclude”? The English syntax is indeterminate: the referent in fact is “these words,” even as it is also in some sense people themselves. Again, it is the “way of meaning *in these two words*” that is in conflict, though they can supplement themselves in their relation to what is meant to access a unified pure language.⁸

8. The second major aspect of the translation process is the “afterlife” within which everything that is translated operates or takes shape. Even though an essential part of an original is its translatability, that does not mean that its being translated will “have any significance as regards the original,” or, that is, that the original will be affected by whether or not it is translated. That said, the translation will stand “in closest relationship” to the original, since it and nothing else will partake in that essential translatability of the original. The analogy here is to the existence of life itself—the “original” is placed in this same realm—which will not depend for its existence on any given manifestation it might take in the world, such as a person, a horse, a species, and so on. No matter what happens to those manifestations life will still exist, beyond human cognizance. “Even in times of narrowly prejudiced thought,

Kinship as a historical force is intermingled with the function of nonhuman agency contained within language itself. As we refine neural network translation capacity to the point of singularity, the non-recognizability of computer generated presence, the decommissioning of the Turing Test, it makes sense to factor in the persistence and gravity of local forces that not only approach the cyborg as “users” or opportunities for interaction, but that are extensions of the very same linguistic structures that constitute those very same neural networks. What Benjamin accesses in his essay is these specific historic links that compose the technological, the digital, the copy, the translation that also retains aspect of a type of “purity.” What Benjamin also points to is the compromised nature of symbolic meaning itself.

*Symbolization*⁹

In this last section I want to hold side by side two key moments, one in the progress of “The Task of the Translator” and one in the

there was an inkling that life was not limited to organic corporeality.” These manifestations of life, these translations of an original entity, are then known as an “afterlife,” mostly since they must come after, follow, life or the original (very much echoing the phenomena of “afterbirth”). An extraordinary statement Benjamin makes here is that “The idea of life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity.”

9. Here translation as form takes on a basic relevance to the phenomena of life itself, broadly defined. Translation of originals and manifestations of life do not have to do with what might have a soul or experience animal sensation and the like, but with whatever might have a history of any kind. This relates specifically to the non-human as a key component of language itself, since translatability and hence translation introduce what has not yet been credited with life or originality into the readability of the present, into our understanding of what does in fact have life. In this sense translation can be equated with the life force. Exchanging the role of the philosopher with that of the translator, Benjamin writes that “The philosopher’s task consists in comprehending all of natural life through the more encompassing life of history.” What

we perceive then is a realm of translatability only, and even though “no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original,” in its manifestations and afterlives, “the life of the originals attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding.”

That any given manifestation or translation has to do with this aspect of a single unified life force or original is what forms the unified underlying structure of language. “Translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the innermost relationship of languages to one another.” A Benjamin writes, this purposiveness “is almost beyond the grasp of the intellect,” but what it has to do with

If we attempt to define free translation we get the benefit of the idea appearing near the end of Benjamin’s essay “The Task of the Translator,” which means that it must already contain within it the progress of the rest of the essays. The paragraphs are recursive and contradictory in nature, meaning they circle back on themselves, sometimes containing blatant repetition, and that they often end up in a place that seems to contradict where they started. For us to pick up the concluding concept of free translation means that we should be able to touch on most of the major points of the essay, means that the network of conclusions and starting places the essay embodies should begin to surface. This a method of digging back into the content of the essay, one that translates the essay by imitating the method of the original.

In this section it’s also possible to look at the article and the quite central role of the “linguistic turn,” which is phrased here as a parallel to that move in philosophy, which declared the centrality of language to all existence. There is no outside the text. Our perception of the highest state of innovation makes its way to us as the journalistic climax and mimetic of the step difference between what had been functional as AI and this new edition, which is the entire point of the article and the thing that purports to take high literature into the cybernetic fold. This is the place at which translation truly operates, even though translation is happening on multiple levels, from the journalist translation of complex science, to the translations the scientists and CEOs are doing of the human into the technological, when then translates the cyborg back into profits that then further mechanize the cyborg. Agency here makes its way straight through symbolic thinking, so that the nonwhite author of the article and the nonwhite CEO of Google effect a transfer point for symbolization to take effect at the deepest level possible. If

development of neural networks, enabling them to perhaps read each other more deeply, enabling us as readers perhaps to position ourselves within the form of translation, as I have partially approached it in one of the footnotes to this paper.

In the penultimate paragraph of Benjamin's essay he contrasts the two overriding concerns of any translation, fidelity and freedom, and writes of how a strong commitment to the exact informational sense of an original leads to the most substantive experience of the freedom of translation. This is a complicated notion, within which we have to allow for the fact that translational freedom is precisely the thing that disallows for or dismantles an overreliance on the basic sense of an original. Benjamin anchors his discussion in the area of this extra-literary content:

Only if the sense of a linguistic creation may be equated with that of the information it conveys does some ultimate, decisive element remain beyond all communication. . . . In all language and linguistic creations, there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated; depending on the context in which it appears, it is something that symbolizes or something symbolized.

Thus this particular "noncommunicated" element exists in relation to the symbolic function of language. Here what one might expect is that this mysterious element might well be something that is symbolized, what language or translation attempts to bring into communicative discourse. We think here of any original that is fed into an automated translation system, and given the capacity of neural networks this would include an original at all levels, from the informational through every level of the symbolic (as indicated in the Hemingway excerpt). What might be unexpected however is that this extra-linguistic element itself is doing

we consider the way web 2.0 manifested itself as key factor in the Arab Spring, which then led to the reaction of repressive regimes, that then led to the migration crisis, it is remarkable that Google CEO T then pushes forward to offer web technology as a solution. But this makes sense exactly in the realm of a step change for symbolization.

the symbolizing: “it is something that symbolizes.” What Benjamin posits in this noncommunicable but core area of translation is nonhuman agency that is operating at what we perceive as the most important level of symbolic meaning. He continues:

And that which seeks to represent, indeed to produce, itself in the evolving of languages is that very nucleus of the pure language; yet though this nucleus remains present in life as that which is symbolized itself, albeit hidden and fragmentary, it persists in linguistic creations only in its symbolizing capacity. (261)

The language of “The Task of the Translator” is laden with words and sentences that say one thing and mean another, and it’s important to stay aware of these exchanges, divides, or alternations in any reading. Here the oscillation appears in our understanding of language itself, which occupies multiple positions in this particular quote. Language is something evolving, transforming over time according to natural force. It is pure language, or the more static effect of the supplementarity of intentions of all languages. Language is “present in life” as what is symbolized (brought about indirectly), hence lacking agency, while at the same time having independent agency, “capacity,” as something that symbolizes. And there is a way in which Benjamin makes the tautological statement here that language is present in language. One of the points of the essay, however, is that we need to hold each of these elements in suspension in order to grasp not only translation but language itself, as well as both human and nonhuman agency and the manner in which they are superposed with each other. Language is about and conveys what we perceive as its own agency as well as whatever agency we perceive as originating from the human.

Interestingly, the nonhuman aspect of pure language operates according to a biological metaphor, the nucleus, in the same way as artificial neural networks circulate around the biological metaphor of the neurons of the human brain. It’s as if the advanced state of AI, where deep learning takes place independently of human input, is constantly faced with its own human reference point, that the “intelligence” of “artificial intelligence” will always

structurally be compromised by the fact that it is human intelligence that is at stake. However, we would always also have in view the fact that the nonhuman or extralinguistic is a constitutive element of language itself, just as we saw in the “unforgettable forgotten” example. In any case, this moment of symbolization, where what is symbolized trades places with that thing that is doing the symbolizing, occupies the absolute forefront of digital science. It is situated as the very subject of the many discussions about technological singularity, or the point at which artificial intelligence takes on more capacity than the intelligence of human beings. The Lewis-Kraus article in the *New York Times* describes this moment, in terms of multilayer neural networks, as follows. The members of Google Brain and others in the artificial intelligence community realized that:

. . . neural networks with more than a billion “synaptic” connections . . . could observe raw, unlabeled data and pick out for [themselves] a high-order human concept. . . . Out of the welter of the pure sensorium the network had isolated a stable pattern. . . . The machine reached directly into the world and seized the idea for itself. . . . Machines could . . . deal with raw unlabeled data, perhaps even data of which humans had no established foreknowledge.

The terms here are strikingly similar to those used by Benjamin if we think of the substantive content or overall import of technological advance being the displacement of agency. It just so happens that through the lens of neural networks and the specific type of capacity they introduce into computing, particularly through Google Translate, this shift is understood as a version of “symbolization,” or the ability of the computer to identify what have hitherto been perceived as noninformational elements of language and the world in general. Benjamin continues to elaborate:

Whereas in the various tongues that ultimate essence, the pure language, is tied only to linguistic elements and their changes, in linguistic creations it is weighted with a heavy, alien meaning. To relieve it of this, to turn the symbolizing into the symbolized

itself, to regain pure language fully formed from the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation. (261)

As we have seen, the supplementarity of intentions produces out of the “various tongues” pure language, but the nonhuman or “alien” aspect of language carries through as another aspect of linguistic being as well. And here again we are faced with the transition between symbolizing and symbolized, this time in the reverse direction, from what has agency, the symbolizing, to what does not, the symbolized. But we must note that removing the aspect in which language appears to have alien or nonhuman agency or import is in fact bringing it back to the realm of the merely symbolized. Translation here finds its true significance, as that which displaces nonhuman agency and restores the world to its human-centeredness.

On this logic the extra-human aspects of neural network technology need always to restore the world as we have come to know it, even as that world, operating as an extension of the symbolized, rather than the symbolizing, reaches beyond itself. We arrive here at a concept of translation that works at the border between the human and nonhuman both at the root of language and of technology, such that neither of these two nominally distinct entities has priority. Benjamin finally outlines a realm in which contrary tendencies cancel each other out:

In this pure language—which no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages—all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished. (261)

The messianic implications are clear but equally as clear is the foreboding of how language and technology are grounded in the dialectical decommissioning of what we know as human, and as with the reference to World War I this “extinguishing” has every indication that it may well play out physically and not only according to what we understand as the immaterial. There is a kind of destined material and theological stasis and

self-cancellation at the farthest reaches of translation and the human. How this plays out in day to day reality is perhaps up for grabs.

Conclusion

Translation can be understood to be multidimensional. But when we begin to apply the concept to the digital it takes on not only the more straightforward and mundane versions of a transfer of meaning between languages or formats, but a sense in which, as we can see Benjamin developing it “The Task of the Translator,” it opens onto a conceptual territory that informs some of our most advanced notions of the digital. Through an analytic that invokes the key Benjaminian concepts of translatability, supplementarity, and symbolization, it’s possible to construct a figuration of deep learning and neural networks that understands them from a humanistic perspective, in the course of which analyses we reclaim central notions of what we mean by the digital as a constitutive element of both language and technology.

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NP: NEW PRESS

CREATING NEW UNIVERSITY PRESSES

UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

Each press NP coordinates has a distinct position within its college or university and is recognized as a component of that institution or organization (or collection of organizations). NP brings a developing knowledge-base that informs initial negotiations with key institutional authorities so that a viable infrastructure is put in place. While this infrastructure may take shape in a variety of ways, NP works toward presidential- or provost-level authorization as a key initial commitment to starting a press.

EDITORIAL BOARD

A crucial first step NP facilitates at any institution is the formation of an editorial board, which consists of approximately five professors or other officials from the member institution who periodically review projects the member press has approved and passed through peer review. This board serves as the final arbiter for projects that carry the institutional imprimatur through its press.

ACQUISITIONS

NP is engaged in project acquisitions in two ways. It begins by locating projects a new press might contract and produce as it begins to take shape. NP staff begin this process at the same time they locate and train ongoing and longer-term employees at the member institution. NP also engages project acquisitions in its own right. That is, it accumulates a temporary reservoir of projects that might be produced at a press it works to develop. These projects are not produced by NP but are highly recommended to its clients.

PEER REVIEW

As with acquisitions, NP works in two interrelated ways to develop peer review. First, it collaborates with clients to put in place an administrative workflow that produces peer review responsibly and professionally. Regardless of project format, we ensure that at least two tenured professors provide thorough project assessment and authorize publication. NP also develops a pool of potential peer reviewers that it recommends to member institutions. It agrees with candidates for the reviewer pool that they are willing to be queried about reviewing projects as part of a developing press or as part of a not-yet-contracted NP project.

ENGAGED PUBLISHING AND STUDY

A major component of NP is its structural blueprint of a process of study. The process is intuitive since NP by its nature is perennially confronted with re-inventing what a viable knowledge-producing university press looks like, how it functions, who it serves. In order to consistently assess new contexts and research outputs, NP itself is thus faced with the need to consistently access new ideas and communicate with new audiences. Without "study," NP devolves into reproducing the identical press over and over. NP thematics are generated and assessed through its parent organization, the nonprofit publisher and exhibition space Counterpath. NP also works to host talks and workshops at any location it visits as new presses are generated. Additionally, NP works to incorporate structures of study within new presses themselves. This study may take the form of dedicated publishing syllabi and courses at the member institution or non-traditional press components such as exhibitions, performances, or as-yet-determined collaborations.

see NPNEWPRESS.ORG for more information and to send inquiries

NP: NEW PRESSES

CREATING NEW UNIVERSITY PRESSES

BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

NP constructs a comprehensive 5-year plan for each new press. We work toward building an organization that produces 10 or more projects per year but also look for clients who are interested in smaller or larger lists. Budgets include income streams such as sales of individual projects, university-based funding, grants, and donations, and budgets detail expenses for start-up costs, overhead, facilities, production, and fulfillment. With sales, NP creates or arranges for distribution channels, and we implement fundraising programs as needed as part of a broad-based financial assessment of each press project.

DIGITAL PROJECTS

Many presses will be constructed entirely around digital-only projects grounded in the digital humanities, and this innovative framework is a specific advantage of NP as it accommodates the structurelessness of the digital. NP thus generates a level of support for the digital that constitutively tracks what the digital itself actually is. By forming new presses, NP is able to innovate business models and operational frameworks that make the most sense for digital projects. Again, these projects will structure an entire press. NP in this way develops a knowledge-base in digital humanities production that not only provides but innovates peer review, along with other project milestones, from inception through archiving.

PRODUCTION

Production refers to the finalization of peer-reviewed, board-approved projects that have been placed in the pipeline of a particular press. Its endpoint is distribution to the public in some form. Its pathway is the assessment of each component of a project from the perspective of bringing it into conformity with the highest applicable standards before release. As with many other services initiated by NP, production's role is to some degree malleable with each new press, but NP brings a context-specific care both to project production and to the reassessment informing and implied by a project's release.

MARKETING, PUBLICITY, SALES

One of the defining elements of creating a new press is responding to new market formations created by and generating the appearance of new projects. Discerning market potential is therefore integral to press development, which includes the assessment of new audiences or perspectives in conjunction with the projects generated by new presses. Extending from market analysis, forms of publicizing both new presses and new projects are planned and implemented, including traditional areas such as reviews or appearances in mainstream media, including social media, but also uncovering potential for publicity innovation in new markets. Sales follow each of these trajectories within a nonprofit context, with access, subscriptions, and point-of-sale purchases gaining relevance at different times or within different project phases. As with other area of focus, NP brings a developing marketing, publicity, and sales knowledge-base to each new press at the same time as it arranges for independent press activity in each of these areas.

see NPNEWSPRESS.ORG for more information and to send inquiries

Image: photo by Kasey Feilic of screening
by Amir Geoghe at Counterpath

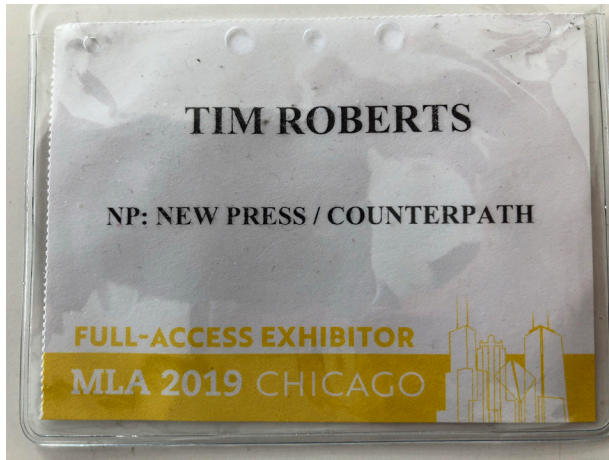
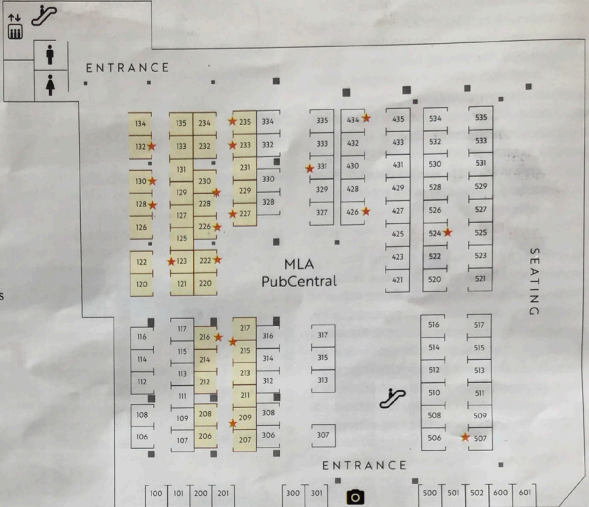


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- 515, 517 Michigan State University Press
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- 122 University Press of Mississippi
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NP: New Press

Creating New University Presses



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The Modern Language Association Annual Convention

Dedicated to the formation of the social and economic combinations of new presses, the nonprofit **NP: New Press** assists in the formation of new institutionally-based publishing units. It questions how innovation comes about in scholarly publishing, given the speed of technological change and the quickly modified forms by which knowledge is generated and sustained. Many publishers rely on outmoded forms, such as the book or journal, whose time frames for acquisition, marketing, and production are tied to oppressive communication technologies and assumptions about what content is and how it is generated. NP is designed specifically to circumvent the problematic nature of publication as we know it, including not simply the way current practices shape scholarship but also the tendency toward reproducing inequality and exclusion.

One of the major components of NP is an attention to the innovation of thinking itself, a focus that resides as an ongoing "plan of study" behind the scenes of its active institutional engagement. This plan of study invites collective participation on all levels as it works out a non-institutional blueprint for NP and its presses. The plan of study takes the form of a blog, exhibitions, print publications, performances, and community events. NP also integrates forms of legitimation such as peer review and thereby qualifies new presses for membership in organizations such as the Association of University Presses.

NP functions as a nomadic office that approaches and takes queries from existing institutions with the idea that publishing innovation arises from what is already going on at these institutions. It publishes work only through the establishment of institutionally-based publishing organizations that form around the projects it helps to select. By bringing projects, individuals, and institutions together in this way, as persistently new formations of the multitude, NP develops new iterations of the social that circulate non-institutionally.

Stop by booth 114B to discuss NP projects or participate by becoming an NP author, reviewer, partner, or member press. See our website for more detail, npnewpress.org.

NP: New Press is a subsidiary of Counterpath, a 501c3 nonprofit publisher and exhibition space.

Photo by Kevin Peltz of Anti-Corporate Resistance and Performance at Counterpath's Urban Festival

NP53 (In the Wake 3)

Here I'd like to assess the mechanics of boredom at a specific location in the *Arcades* and compare this to Christina Sharpe's conception of the weather in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke, 2016). In the *Arcades* boredom effectively corresponds to a widespread, collective version of idleness or study, an atmospheric mental activity, which has a number of parallels with Sharpe's "weather," which is equated with, among other things, a pervasive anti-blackness. So here, I'm quickly lumping together a whole range of thematics. Part of the point is to look at how we are given to read the *Arcades* and connect its modality of reading—which manifests materially and in that sense is revolutionary—how we connect this reading to conceptualizations of "blackness." Once this broader conception of reading practices is approached, possible forms for NP presses begin to materialize, as much as these forms are read through already existing projects at participating institutions.

D1a,1 contains an extraordinary image of post-revolutionary detritus over which dust settles. And we know the dust here is equated with rain—"As dust, rain takes its revenge..."—and hence the weather itself. Substantiating this claim, we can take passages immediately preceding, for instance the "rainy climate of Paris" in D1,6, to contend with which architectural monuments are built, these monuments compared to the book *L'Ennui*, boredom, in D1,5 (discussed extensively in an earlier post). As in D1,3, there is a "deepest connection between weather and boredom." Here is the complete passage, D1a,1:

As dust, rain takes its revenge on the arcades.—Under Louis Philippe, dust settled even on the revolutions. When the young duc d'Orléans "married the princess of Mecklenburg, a great celebration was held at that famous ballroom where the first symptoms of the Revolution <of 1830> had broken out. When they came to prepare the room for the festivities of the young couple, the people in charge found it as the Revolution had left it. On the ground could be seen traces of the military banquet—candle ends, broken glasses,

champagne corks, trampled cockades of the Gardes du Corps, and ceremonial ribbons of officers from the Flanders regiment.” Karl Gutzkow, *Briefe au Paris* (Leipzig, 1842), vol. 2, p. 87. A historical scene becomes a component of the panopticon. / Diorama / Dust and Stifled Perspective [D1a,1]

The dust here is the “traces of the military banquet.” The traces form and undergird the atmosphere in the room, hence its weather, this “revenge” or reappearance of the “rain.” Rain here references an external or outdoor atmospheric component, but its interior counterpart is dust. They are in many respects elements of a background or milieu that have parallel functions, as something barely if at all noticeable but perfectly ubiquitous. The initial statement “as dust, rain takes its revenge on the arcades” has to do with the way architectural formations such as arcades are constructed—exactly as a technology—precisely to overcome elements of the natural world (as per D1,6), rain primary among them. But rain will not be blocked out: its entire effect is translated or trans-substantiated into, passes into or is substantively echoed within, the workings of “dust,” which identically to rain, drizzle, settles onto every available surface.

Here the remnants of an earlier historical period become ineluctably part of a new history, literally the air that history breathes. These remnants do this in a particular way, starting with the first revolution (of 1830, a new height of power for the bourgeoisie), its detritus notably the signs and accoutrements of an even earlier age. Then follows, as a new layer, the wedding that, as it were, moves into the room, a wedding that would presumably leave another layer of evidence of its existence behind, more dust. But of course we don’t simply stop at these quite specific historical moments, but note the appearance of this passage in the *Arcades* overall, this history that in this particular convolute is concerned with boredom and eternal return and how those two things intersect. At least in part, the 1842 citation from Gutzkow is akin to the detritus left behind by the military banquet, forming the dust in the room of the contemporary history of the arcades, a kind of textual rain, imputing to the Arcades an incarnation as pure dust.

Which brings us to Christina Sharpe's work and conception of the weather. She writes "the weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack." The events of history, the Middle Passage, live on as the afterlife of slavery: the weather "is the atmosphere: slave law transformed into lynch law, into Jim and Jane Crow, and other administrative logics that remember the brutal conditions of enslavement after the event of slavery had supposedly come to an end." The weather fits in perfectly with Sharpe's larger notion of the "wake," which is another way of comprehending the ongoingness of what she calls antiblackness. "Antiblackness is pervasive as climate." As dust.

(I'll reiterate at this point that part of my reading of Sharpe is a result of a study/reading group of between 5-10 people, February through April of 2018, leading up to a visit to Denver by Christina Sharpe to discuss this book. The group and visit were announced as Counterpath events and conceived as complementary to NP.)

Crucially we point out that Sharpe limns an experience of "freedom" within the totalizing condition of being subjected to the weather. It is a temporary and fraught experience, however, effectively leading directly back into and enhancing "antiblackness" itself. "And while an air of freedom might linger around the [slave] ship, it does not reach into the hold, or attend the bodies in the hold." Finally, the surest route to freedom is an embrace of death. Sharpe quotes Edwidge Danticat: "The past is full of examples when our foremothers and forefathers showed such deep trust in the sea that they would jump off slave ships and let the waves embrace them. They too believed that the sea was the beginning and the end of all things, the road to freedom." But built into this natural-seeming arc into oblivion are other tactics of survival, what we could say is in the interval of this life. "The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation . . . it produces new ecologies. . . . The weather trans*forms Black being. But the shipped, the held, and those in the wake also produce out of the weather their own ecologies."

Sharpe's book is one such ecology, and she strategizes annotation and redaction as separate but really identical versions of this same ecology, all of this also imagined as "wake work." Her central question seems to remain: "When the only certainty is the weather that produces a pervasive climate of anti-blackness, what must we know in order to move through these environments in which the push is always toward Black death?" Here it is very much the case that "dust settles even on the revolutions," that the pervasive atmosphere of this anti-blackness resituates itself within any given experience of escape or freedom, a re-situating that in fact defines its pervasiveness. We might abolish Jane and Jim Crow but we are left with the resultant "administrative logics." This much seems true: Benjamin's nearly century-old conception of the weather and atmosphere makes its reappearance exactly within contemporary notions of blackness as Sharpe seems to be articulating them. This is the point at which we might draw on the complexities of Sharpe's study seen as an all-pervasive cultural boredom or ennui, produced by exactly that historical reappearance that defines the afterlife of slavery but equally as much the redemptive (if wholly ephemeral) ecological experiment of freedom.

NP forms exilic ecologies. It forms an administrative logic but also fully embraces the inevitability of its ephemerality. And D1a,1 gives us the tools to problematize that ecology. We need only ask, what is it for dust to settle on the revolutions? To be more precise, the English translation of this sentence is: "Under Louis Philippe, dust settled even on the revolutions." This would tend to indicate only after Louis Philippe assumed the throne did dust begin to settle in such a way, even though we might easily understand a secondary sense here of dust in fact already being "under" Louis Philippe.

The German seems to provide a different meaning: "Staub legte sich unter Louis-Philippe sogar über die Revolutionen." Which auto-translates to: "Dust lay under Louis Philippe even about the revolutions." The first word here is "staub" or "dust" and that's where Benjamin places the emphasis of the sentence, on dust, not

on the idea of “Under Louis Philippe.” “Staub legte sich unter” or “Dust settled itself under” leaves us with the distinct impression that the reign of Louis Philippe is based on or undergirded by mere dust, in fact grows or emerges out of it—as much as there is also the contrast with “über” or “over,” a doubled location of dust. All this also lends an air of insignificance to the “revolutions” referenced in the citation, which only take root in a “ballroom” and are artifacts of pure bourgeois privilege. Finally what we are witnessing is that idea that the constricting atmospheres of ennui, dissatisfaction, boredom are in fact created by revolution itself, since the dust here is precisely the dust left behind by revolutionary activity. The “revolution” is equated with nothing more than a loveless marriage of political convenience, like that of the duc D’Orléans. Such indeed is the accumulation of history itself. Thus what we have here is the ecology of revolution as it takes place within a much wider milieu of oppressive affective experience, exactly in line with how Sharpe might situate a “knowledge to survive such lived and produced ecologies.”

And at last we re-route everything here through the extraordinary final sentence of the passage, “A historical scene becomes a component of the panopticon.” What this sentence asks of us is to take the dynamic of visualization of historical scenes contained within the citation and posit that those scenes might form displays in a wax museum (see section on Benjamin’s panopticon). The visual apparatus has the historical “scene” as merely one of its components, which in fact contextualizes dust, its associated rain, and the natural movement that defines both, as themselves within a technological viewing device not unlike a camera. What affects our vision and experience of history then, what constitutes the present and in particular the quotidian, comes by way of what is materially arranged, subject to technological advance. The biological apparatus, which is one that encapsulates a sensitivity to natural events such as rain, here forms a template and feedback loop with internal experience, dust, revolution itself. The technological cannot be said to be either inside or outside but to contain both environments. Here if we interpret Sharpe’s weather—or

even the “weathering” of structural racial stress, theorized by Arline Geronimus in the 1990s—as a pervasive atmosphere, we would, again, associate it with the dust or rain that finally works as a component of technology, as quite specifically technologically produced.

NP54 (In the Wake 4)

Exactly what we mean by the “afterlife of slavery” is contained in the fact that SUL Group found it expedient in late 2013 to turn to “Caribbean and African” countries to experiment with data analytics. This truth becomes the location for an analysis of the digital and race, of specifically “black” data.

A New York Times article, “How Trump Consultants Exploited the Facebook Data of Millions,” from March 18, 2018 states:

the small elections division at SCL Group, a political and defense contractor, [was] trying to break into the lucrative new world of political data. [They were] interested in using inherent psychological traits to affect voters’ behavior and had assembled a team of psychologists and data scientists, some of them affiliated with Cambridge university. . . . The group experimented abroad, including in the Caribbean and Africa, where privacy rules were lax or nonexistent and politicians employing SCL were happy to provide government-held data.

Christina Sharpe addresses the “afterlife of slavery” in *In the Wake*. She sources the concept to Saidiya Hartman’s 2007 book *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, where the afterlife of slavery is characterized by saying “black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I too, am the afterlife of slavery.” The afterlife of slavery is, according to Sharpe,

the precariousities of the ongoing disaster of chattel slavery. They texture my reading practices, my ways of being in and of the world, my

relations with and to others. . . . Transatlantic slavery was and is the disaster. The disaster of Black subjection was and is planned . . . and it is deeply atemporal. The history of capital is inextricable from the history of Atlantic chattel slavery. (5)

Further, the afterlife is the “continued marked migrations, Mediterranean and Caribbean disasters, trans-American and -African migration, structural adjustment imposed by the International Monetary Fund that continues imperialisms/colonialisms, and more.” (15). Sharpe goes on to note specifically how slavery is re-enacted through modes of “experimentation”:

from those experiments on board the floating laboratory of the slave (and migrant) ship, to J. Marion Sims’s surgical experiments conducted without anesthesia on enslaved women; to the outbreaks of cholera in Haiti introduced by UN troops; to experiments with mustard gas on US Black soldiers in World War II to produce an “ideal chemical soldier”; to the Tuskegee and Guatemala syphilis experiments and their ripple effects; to the dubious origins and responses to the crisis of Ebola; to the ongoing practice of forced sterilization; to recent studies that show again and again that Black people in the United States receive inferior health care because they are believed to feel less pain. (50)

My discussion here makes assumptions alongside speculative conclusions. The *New York Times* in many ways makes the point offhandedly that experimentation was done in predominantly black countries. The newspaper imputes a certain racism to the overwhelmingly white-male corporations that engage in the experimentation, first SCL Global and then Cambridge Analytica, which is tied to the sadistically campy, white supremacist Trump administration.

SCL Global and Cambridge Analytica are firms availing themselves of the most advanced forms of social media data mining. They are innovators in the field. As the *New York Times* reports, with the right amount and kind of personal data, they could craft highly personalized political advertising that was seen as capable of swaying elections. But their methods, in the countries in which they were most interested in gaining influence, crossed the line of

legal data collection and were criminally invasive. The existing moral, technological framework in these countries was perceived as a hindrance to a potentiality—of control and power—enabled by technology itself, the internet and specifically social media.

Development of ethical global standards for data collection has lagged in countries with fewer resources. That said, these same countries are advanced enough to model likely behaviors of capital-intensive societies. Like lab mice, then, smaller and less advanced economies and governments serve here to illustrate given pitfalls of new technologies. Insofar as the digital can take new forms, it relies on less digital cultures to determine what it deems to be truly innovative. As it happens—for reasons that can certainly be discussed—these “less digital” cultures are invariably non-white.

Digitality, then, increasingly controlled by racist, authoritarian regimes like the Trump administration, markets its own avant guard as this afterlife of slavery, a merged moment of the advance of capital and subjection. (The situation exactly mirrors that pointed out by W.E.B. Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction*: “The abolition of American slavery started the transportation of capital from white to black countries where slavery prevailed . . . When raw material could not be raised in a country like the United States, it could be raised in the tropics and semi-tropics under a dictatorship of industry, commerce and manufacture and with no free farming class” (48).)

We’re shown this truth in the news on a nearly daily basis. In fact, however, the *New York Times* is not particularly good or thorough in its reporting on race or the protest of racial discrimination. But the inclusion of this particular detail about experimentation being done in majority black countries seems to indicate a larger critique of the digital, seems to actively point us in the direction of a critique of the racialized motivations of our participation in, for instance, Web 2.0, of our sourcing sociality in the quantified portals of the corporatized web. Who of us knows better? Where do we take such a critique?

Total Event: Text/Desire/Control in the *Arcades Project*

“It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again.”

—Benjamin, “The Storyteller”

“The communicability of experience is decreasing.”

—Benjamin, “The Storyteller”

We are, right now, there. In the arcades, the book, the abstract construct of the *Arcades Project*. Desire itself is internal to the project on every level: there is no desire to escape. It is configured as such:

Just as the industrial labor process separates off from handicraft, so the form of communication corresponding to this labor process—information—separates off from the form of communication corresponding to the artisanal process of labor, which is storytelling. (See “Der Erzähler,” p. 21, par. 3 through p. 22, par. 1, line 3; p. 22, par. 3, line 1 through the end of the Valéry citation.) This connection must be kept in mind if one is to form an idea of the explosive force contained within information. This force is liberated in sensation. With the sensation, whatever still resembles wisdom, oral tradition, or the epic side of truth is razed to the ground. [m3a,5]

Like so many, if not all, of the passages in the *Arcades Project*, this passage enacts that to which it refers, in this case the very explosion under discussion. Yet one asks, “what about our first reading, our first encounter? I’ve read the passage and certainly I don’t feel, or read into it, an ‘explosion,’ though I know I see the word ‘explosion’ used here.” I want to take some time, in this paper before you, this very example of informational prose (though one that lives as a response to this example of Benjamin’s text), I want to put in the time now to interpretatively circle around this text of Benjamin’s, but to do so in a way that seeks, at least initially, to ignite it, to hold its flash before our eyes at a place where language shows itself, a dangerous, a perilous reading, a communication that the text itself refers to, so that to read this text for what it

says is to undergo its disturbing subject. I will start by reading this passage to the point at which it gets us to a place where other of Benjamin's commentary takes on relevance, so that we uncover some of his key tenets and can trace their relevance, an explosive relevance, through how we understand text itself in a contemporary context of a surge of global authoritarianism. We aim indeed to discover "in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event."

To repeat, what I'd like to do is embody in this section the explosive moment of this passage, m3a,5, a moment that any of the passages in the *Arcades Project* will produce, by virtue of being part of the *Arcades Project*, and we must therefore extrapolate and say that, following Benjamin's lead, a moment that any passage, anywhere in life, if "read" aright, will produce as well: Benjamin's theory of reading is of course not simply a theory of reading text, but of text's world-completing opposite, image, of perception itself; quite far from being a scholarly undertaking, if not viscerally opposed to such, his theory takes us onto the very streets we ourselves inhabit. My "reading" here must do nothing less.

I

Our reading will peel back layers of meaning, a "series of thin, transparent layers . . . placed one on top of the other" ("The Storyteller" 93). It barely matters where we start in the passage, as long as we follow a trace (as Benjamin describes in other passages in convolute m), as thoroughly as possible, follow it, hunting a kind of prey, until its capture (and we can return to the nature of this studious hunt). Above all else, we must begin with what the passage actually says, following nothing more nor less than what indeed we can all agree the words we hold in front of us literally mean. We have a fidelity to this content, to this linguistic creation, as if we are placing ourselves in the role of translators, not willing to take a single subjective liberty of interpretation until we grasp the literal sense. As Benjamin writes in "The Task of the Translator," "Only if the sense of a linguistic creation may

be equated with the information it conveys does some ultimate, decisive element remain beyond all communication" (*Illuminations* 79). This is how we will proceed here, even as the terms of our encounter with any «ultimate, decisive element» remain undefined.

Let the thread, the trace, start with communication, since a fidelity to this passage will admit that "form of communication" is its first and most consistent subject. Again, I want to say what is completely obvious: Benjamin—and the passage is in the mode of "commentary," Benjamin's voice as author—has in view, is speaking of, two forms of communication, information and storytelling. We want to be clear that there are two distinctly different categories of things, forms of communication, that are here brought forward: there is an analogy, with on one side informational communication and the "industrial labor process," and on the other side "handicraft," the "artisanal process of labor," and "storytelling." Now, storytelling and information are quite famous in Benjamin studies and beyond, most directly as a result of Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov." This essay, at least on its surface, provides us with a great deal of detail as to how Benjamin defines storytelling and sees its function in the culture of his time as well as historically, storytelling and information being quite different and evincing an atrophying of genuine storytelling over time, a distancing and disappearance of its elemental function of the "exchange" of experiences. Most basically, storytelling is "experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth," an oral tradition of the epic. It is a disappearing art, a disappearance that parallels and corresponds to both natural evolution and changing social structures. And the art of storytelling is held up against, contrasted and compared with its opposite form of communication, information. The informational form is characterized by journalistic or newspaper writing, where the "essence" of a matter is immediately conveyed. It complements the "full control of the middle class . . . in fully developed capitalism," it "supplies a handle for what is nearest":

Information . . . lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime requirement is that it appear “understandable in itself.” Often it is no more exact than the intelligence of earlier centuries was. But while the latter was inclined to borrow from the miraculous, it is indispensable for information to sound plausible. (*Illuminations* 89)

Thus storytelling and information are divergent forms of communication, evolving from one toward the other according to different social and material functions and exigencies. However, as might already be obvious, and as we can see in m3a,5 in the *Arcades Project*, the relationship between the two grows tenuous under scrutiny, such that one could hypothesize a resurgence of storytelling within informational communication, or a corresponding disappearance of the informational within the story. Taking “The Storyteller” as a source for such a reversal, there are any number of points where Benjamin seems to problematize any straightforward understanding of, for instance, storytelling’s relationship to that same material, capitalistic domination of culture with which information seems to align. For instance, the last sentence in the first paragraph of the essay, referring to storytelling’s disappearance:

It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences.

Storytelling is here characterized in materialist, economic terms: “inalienable,” “possessions,” “exchange.” The implication is that at its root, in its most primitive formations, storytelling functioned exactly as information does, not as a conduit for the miraculous but as something with everyday use value. And Benjamin goes on to describe storytelling as containing “practical interests,” “agricultural advice,” “scientific instruction,” finally saying “It contains, openly or covertly, something useful.” And this usefulness extends to the abstract, the immaterial, the realm of morals, counsel, proverbs, a dreamlike or illusory nature of storytelling that is also reflected in the essay’s first paragraph as an aspect

of just how far away storytelling is from our ability to perceive it. We see only the “great, simple outlines” that may or may not indicate a “human head or an animal’s body,” though how these shapes appear to us “are prescribed by an experience which we may have almost every day,” a journalistic phenomena but one also founded in the quite material “rock” mentioned in the paragraph. This evolution from one to the other happens before our eyes in the essay, within which we also take note how that “living immediacy” so important to storytelling must also be actively compromised by Benjamin himself, insofar as he is attempting throughout the essay to bring the ideal storyteller Leskov “closer to us,” and hence must certainly be “increasing our distance from him.” In speaking or writing of storytelling Benjamin extends its distance from us, clearing the ground even more decisively for the appearance of information (which in any case storytelling shares an identity with).

But rather than a close reading of “The Storyteller,” I’d like to continue tracking the explosion of m3a,5. Not to defuse it, or to perform a kind self-destruction by getting too close, waiting too long to turn away, but in some sense to let it slowly detonate in front of us, a circling around, an analytical approach but one that contains a willingness at each moment to feel. We take, then, these categories and these reversals, storytelling and information and their interfusion, from “The Storyteller” into our reading of m3a,5. As mentioned above, the different forms of communication, these different uses of language, behave in concert with forms of labor, the industrial/informational “separating off” from storytelling/the artisanal. What Benjamin does here is introduce two levels of equivalence, one the equivalence industrial/informational // storytelling/artisanal, the other the seemingly double “separating off” itself, the informational separating off from storytelling, industrial labor separating off from the artisanal. Those separations are slow historical movements—as we can see in, among other places, “The Storyteller,” “hardly any other forms of human communication have taken shape more slowly”—an equivalent slowness in both categories. And as we

have seen, the process is quite convoluted, one aspect or side of the dialectic appearing in the guise of the other, with an hallucinatory or dream-like character, minute phylogenetic shifts in emphasis, all tending toward a material instantiation of capital itself. As we move and read along toward the second sentence of the passage then, that action of “separating off” is front and center, occupying focus, a kind of mental inertia to our experience of reading.

Here it is my contention that Benjamin retains his focus and amplifies it, exposing an abyssal, vertiginous truth of language and literary writing but at the same time transforming that into a performative, dramatic characterization of the text in front of us, which if “kept in mind” as the passage suggests can be said to constitute a living glimpse into the structural underpinnings of, simultaneously, the ‘how’ and ‘what’ of, among other things, the literal temporal moment in which Benjamin must have been writing, which insofar as language dialectically disintegrates in front of us must be identical to that disintegration, that pulling away or separating off, that Benjamin glimpsed as happening historically as well as contemporaneously. What we have the prospect of is a performance induced in language by Benjamin, a “phantasmagoria” of referentiality that, like any phantasmagoria, is artificially constructed, technologically intended (to use the language of *Origin*, as well as the preceding passage, m3a,4), but by that very fact intersects with a transhistorical immediacy constituent of language as it is conceived at a new level of purity. We must remember here the ongoing dialectic and interchangeability in the *Arcades Project* between commentary and citation: that again and again citation—Benjamin quoting others, going outside his text—is revealed to be more germane to his overriding intent than anything he might say in «his own words;» and that commentary—Benjamin speaking without quotation marks, as it were, seeming to communicate in «his own words»—again and again accesses an identical figural or symbolic dimension as the citations that embody Benjamin’s intent in writing. In this passage then, m3a,5, Benjamin incorporates another level of «separating off» in that, first of all, he incorporates a long parenthetical

comment, a breaking away from the commentary that is the first sentence. And indeed this break from the commentary is precisely a citation, one that is, rather than a quotation of his own text, a deeply informational referencing format of numbering pages, paragraphs, and lines: it reads almost like a bank ledger or legal brief. It is a constitutively informational, as much as it is scholarly, form of reading that we do in reading the text of this parenthesis, of this separating off.

And if we follow its thread, look to its reference, we are confronted once more not only with the “citation” mentioned in the parenthetical comment, but with yet another broadening out of the meanings at work in m3a,5. For just as this parenthetical is “contained within” this passage, again to use the language of m3a,5 itself, so information has “contained within it” an explosive force, such that it is appropriate that here within the informational form of communication we might expect to find that explosion. In this case then we read the reference itself, effectively Section IX of “The Storyteller,” and find reference upon reference to one thing being contained in another, yet another phantasmagoric appearance of “storytelling.” The first part of the cited paragraph is worth quoting:

The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work—the rural, the maritime, and the urban—is itself an artisan form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.

Combined with m3a,5, the level of referentiality that this quote conveys is extraordinary, a vertiginous dialectical play of polysemous meaning that “kept in view” produces what might be characterized as precisely a seemingly non-linguistic, inward explosion or dismantling of certainties. Indeed by quoting this passage, these passages, and commenting on them, we do exactly that “keeping in mind” that Benjamin seems to refer to as forming

“an idea of . . . explosive force.” We can look here at the “milieu of work” *within which* storytelling operates and is in fact necessary for it to «thrive;» we can look at the «essence» *contained within* a «thing» that information aims to convey; we can look at the «life of the storyteller» that *contains* the «thing.» One containment, one separating off, after another as storytelling interacts with work and a material environment, as it processes a world in a proto-informational manner that correlates identically with the formal structure of m3a,5, making the passage into a visual, material performance of its own meaning, in many ways incarnating language, bringing the abstract into visible existence, but only an abstraction that explosively disintegrates.

And even more to the point is the “Valéry citation” at the heart of m3a,5—and here I think we can go so far as to note that in m3a,5 Benjamin layers his meaning yet again by switching from the informational references to page, paragraph, and line number, over to the commentary-like “through the end of the Valéry citation” as he in fact references here, not commentary as with the numerical references, but in fact a citation, yet another instance of the oscillation of one “form of communication” to another. (As a brief aside I’d like to point out that as much as this “reading” might seem unusual, a stretch, it is entirely in keeping with the overall movement of the passage, in fact the heart of that movement since it is so centrally located, the “essence” as it were.) I’ll include here the full paragraph containing the Valéry citation at its conclusion:

The intellectual picture of the atmosphere of craftsmanship from which the storyteller comes has perhaps never been sketched in such a significant way as by Paul Valéry. “He speaks of the perfect things in nature, flawless pearls, full-bodied, matured wines, truly developed creatures, and calls them ‘the precious product of a long chain of causes similar to one another.’” The accumulation of such causes has its temporal limit only at perfection. “This patient process of Nature,” Valéry continues, “was once imitated by men. Miniatures, ivory carvings, elaborated to the point of greatest perfection, stones

that are perfect in polish and engraving, lacquer work or painting in which a series of thin, transparent layers are placed one on top of the other—all these products of sustained, sacrificing effort are vanishing, and the time is past in which time did not matter. Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated.”

There are a number of things to be worked out here, not least that the heart of m3a,5 is Benjamin referencing his own work, bringing an autoeroticism to the orgasmic explosion that we might interpret as a hinging together of subjectivity with the material nature of language, an enclosed and overlapping referentiality whose truth can only be revealed by performing it at its deepest level. I'll also point out here how indeed through the *Arcades Project*, in so many respects mechanical and informational in nature, Benjamin is placing himself precisely in the role of the storyteller, that lost art, since as we have seen the vast majority of the passages are crafted, flawless pearls, highly developed, engaged as we have seen in a “long chain of causes [references] similar to one another.” Again, as mentioned above, these are the “thin transparent layers” of textual meaning that, brought to the surface, dismantle the very constitution of textual meaning itself, and in many ways Benjamin seems to want to indicate that language dismantles itself in such a way. These “products” then are precisely not “vanishing” in the way Valéry indicates, and here it is that we can say that the *Arcades Project* accomplishes its full realization, perhaps another level of that explosion, that now of recognizability (readability, legibility) in what is clearly intended by passages such as this to be the very reading I am attempting, that any reader *I* might have is attempting, a reading that is a writing, exactly as Benjamin's was, that documents and works its way through the layering inherent to language itself, a translation of a certain common, shared being, this brand textual messianism, but perhaps only in quotation marks, in many ways branding language as material.

II

As m3a,5 states, the polyhedral and abyssal experience of knowledge to which I've just referred is a force "liberated in sensation" and I'd like to point out that an important aspect of this passage is that even as we associate "sensation," through many passages in the *Arcades* and particularly in "The Storyteller," with storytelling, the artisanal form of labor—think of the handprints on the clay vessel in the above quote (or the "handicraft" at the start of m3a,5)—Benjamin here seemingly does an about-face or abrupt shift of meaning and links sensation with the informational form of communication, not storytelling. Thus what produces this liberation, this referentiality, the messianic explosion, is, while perhaps a concept borrowed from the artisanal, what must be a kind of attenuated sensation that links directly through informational content and form of communication to the industrial labor process. It is mechanism, automation, and the overwhelming tide of use-value devoid of traditional human content—in fact, what we've come to expect as precisely the "de-sensitized"—that finally explodes into what we know as liberation, where «wisdom, oral tradition, or the epic side of truth» are "razed to the ground." If we are following this passage, we need to theorize how the world created by capital, exactly the in-human world, a world of rampant oppression and the disappearance of human personality, will hold as its culminating moment, and perhaps be the only path toward, human liberation and the return of that personality (again even as we thought it would be something like the liberation of the machine, as bizarre as that concept seems). Here, and this has profound relevance for contemporary forms of communication in which a co-opted variant of liberatory protest is promulgated by barely hidden dominant ideologies (Make America Great Again), the machinic comes to prominence but only in the guise of a "liberation" tied in every detail to the artisanal and traditional modes of understanding. And here it is we should hypothesize within Benjamin's writing a dual nature to the «explosion» we have been focusing on, with a potentiality through

technological dominance not only for a sudden leap into what we might understand as liberation, but also for a radical dropping away, a razing to the ground in perhaps quite different terms as suggested above, of precisely that liberation itself, a falling away or quantum leap into new modalities of the disappearance of what we know as the human at progressively deeper levels of the commodity and capital itself, a circulating back into existence of the primitive, the darkest underside of capital. In this sense the implications of «explosion» can be drawn out in terms of its associations with danger, violence, bodily harm, bombs, the instruments of war, the fact that it is technologically produced, and so on. This metaphor of human liberation is precisely that component of human creation—not to say handiwork—that defeats human existence. The word «explosion» exists at the intersection of these extremes. In this sense we experience the explosion only when we hold its dual meanings simultaneously in mind, a type of “dialectics at a standstill,” to use another concept central to Benjamin’s later writing, two paths of infinitely receding referentiality.

In this case then it is far too simplistic a view that we can either attribute truth value to the functioning of information and the mechanized labor process, or we indict that communicative and labor process by virtue of its mechanistic nature. One thing we should again note, then, is that everything in this passage, from information and storytelling to wisdom/tradition/epic and the “explosion” itself takes on this double cast, a constant dialectical receding from view into an obverse meaning. Again, my sense is that to take singularly either side of these equations is an inadequate description of what the passage is conveying, even as they fold into each other. I want to focus just one moment more on that about-face or inversion of meaning itself as the most important content or take-away in our reading of m3a,5. It appears to be an intentional incursion by Benjamin on our readerly consciousness—and reading here seems to be very much at stake—a kind of progress of the passage, of the readerly time of the passage, where we pass through a period at the start of the passage of being abstractly convinced of the redemptive nature of the artisanal and

storytelling, only to have those expectations, that entire framework of values upended, dismantled, and inverted by its opposite. We can express, as I have been doing to some degree, this oscillation in a number of ways: that the informational switches or separates off to storytelling, that the mode of commentary switches to the citational, that the industrial switches to the artisanal, the oppressive to the liberated, that a kind of compression of crafted writing switches to the explosive or something with outward/inward velocity, that our expectation that storytelling will uphold and reveal wisdom, oral tradition, and the epic switches to those very things being razed to the ground. The whole vast apparatus of language, material, and history is constructed and performed only to lead us to the shock of being taken down the path of their re-valuation and completely contradictory outcomes. This, precisely, is the fate of the technological, a “dialectical fairy tale” that is invoked along the way toward an ever-increasing and abstracted incarnation of the incarnatable: material itself. That about-face of the substitution of information for storytelling in this passage then performs the deeply perilous character of language itself, of following the trace of reading, being turned against by the very prey one has so patiently and carefully pursued.

And reading is the immaterial activity that leads us through these layers of linguistic referentiality—symbolically, allegorically—to these reversals. Finally we interrogate the immaterial process of reading itself as an internalization of the materiality of book and text whose end result is a process of the reader’s bringing into their imaginative space or being a transcendent historical substance within which they both appear and disappear. The question finally becomes a kind of interrogation of language itself and whether it can indeed have any liberatory character at all or whether it must exist only as a commodity to its core, the ascendance of which returns human existence to a primitive state. Again, to quote Benjamin’s “Exposé of 1935,” “In the dream in which each epoch entertains images of its successor, the latter appears wedded to elements of primal history.” A key window into the process by which language, and hence reading, leads both

toward and away from redemptive experience is Benjamin's 1933 essay "On the Mimetic Faculty." Here the primitive human trait of imitating, of finding similarities in the universe, is put forth as a determinant of the roots of language and both human production and perception. The mimetic also has a phylogenetic history of transformation such that its origins in magic, physicality, and ritual have "liquidated" over time, disappearing into the "nonsensuous" without leaving so much as a residue. Thus occult practices still form the defining elements of human existence, but the practices have been progressively mediated by new uses of language, new forms of reading and writing. Benjamin also writes of this phenomena in an earlier version of this essay, "Doctrine of the Similar":

If, at the dawn of humanity, this reading from stars, entrails, and coincidences was reading per se, and if it provided mediating links to a newer kind of reading, as represented by ruins, then one might well assume that his mimetic gift, which was earlier the basis for clairvoyance, very gradually found its way into language and writing in the course of a development over thousands of years, thus creating for itself in language and writing the most perfect archive of nonsensuous similarity. In this way, language is the highest application of the mimetic faculty—a medium into which the earlier perceptual capacity for recognizing the similar had, without residue, entered to such an extent that language now represents the medium in which objects encounter and come into relation with one another.

What Benjamin also points out in "On the Mimetic Faculty" however is that at certain points, typically when the purely informational or semiotic aspects of language are operating at "heightened" or "rapid" level, there are "flashes" of production and perception that access these nonsensuous correspondences or similarities at the core of language and hence a primitive strata of the human. This is when we "read what was never written." Again in "Doctrine of the Similar": "the nexus of meaning which resides in . . . the sentence is the basis from which something similar can become apparent . . . flashing up in an instant."

In returning to the last sentences of m3a,5, we can note that the force contained within information is not “nonsensuous sensation” but “sensation” itself, such that our conclusion must be that the more nonsensuous, informational forms of communication must have at their core something more direct, more primitive, based more in the occult and storytelling itself. And this does align with the idea that absolutely regardless of what form language takes, what form of communication we use, language is still at its base mimetic, even if this force or power is increasingly diffuse, scattered across mechanized culture in smaller and smaller bits. Here we can see as well that the reason “whatever still resembles wisdom, oral tradition, or the epic side of truth is razed to the ground” is that this phylogenetic transformation of mimesis has reached an extreme in (post)industrial society, spreading any “resemblance” to its former existence so thin that former forms of life are effectively “razed to the ground,” or disappear. This does not, again, mean that language has lost its mythic power, only that its traditional centrality has been displaced or is operating differently.

To sum up briefly, language, text, and hence meaning carry with them mimetic forces that originated in ritual but are now, as much as these forces are still intact and functioning, diffused throughout mechanized mass culture (a mass computerized culture we might otherwise call the digital).

III

I’ve made reference to an explosive sensation that is a solipsistic turning inward of mass culture itself, as much mechanistic as primitive, regressive, violent. Through the guise of liberation and progress the most brutal and destructive aspects of what we call the human come to fore. This is a deeply material version of the “explosion,” but one that makes sense most clearly in the context of authoritarianism. I’d like to turn here to another passage in the *Arcades Project*, m3,3, one of only two to use the word “authoritarian,” where it is possible to hold side by side a theory

of cultural development with a theory of the role of text and text's place in that development. Once we see how those two areas develop in conjunction with each other, we can then theorize advanced contemporary models of these phenomena, definitions of textuality, and citational practice. To quote m3,3:

Closely connected with the shattering of long experience is the shattering of juridical certitudes. "In the liberalist period, economic predominance was generally associated with legal ownership of the means of production But after the development of technology in the last century had led to a rapidly increasing concentration . . . of capital, the legal owners were largely excluded from . . . management. . . . Once the legal owners are cut off from the real productive process . . . , their horizon narrows; . . . and finally the share which they still have in industry due to ownership . . . comes to seem socially useless The idea of a right with a fixed content, and independent of society at large, loses its importance." We finally arrive at "the loss of all rights with a determined content, a loss . . . given its fullest form in the authoritarian state." Max Horkheimer, "Traditionelle lmd Kritische Theorie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, no. 2 (1937), pp. 285-287. Compare Horkheimer, "Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, no. 1 (1935), p. 12. [m3,3]

The passage opens with the phrase "long experience" and by that we should understand traditional or artisanal experience, effectively the same type of experience to which storytelling refers. The passage sets out to compare the loss, decay, or shattering of this experience with the loss of juridical certitudes, a loss for which the balance of the passage provides, through a citation from Horkheimer, an illustration and trajectory or telos. From early to late forms, the steps in the process of this loss include: first, "legal ownership of the means of production;" second, development of technology and the rapid concentration of capital; third, the exclusion of the legal owners from actual ownership (here we can think of a company going public, taking on a corporate structure with a board of directors and shareholders); fourth, legal owners coming to feel socially useless, with specifically this

right of ownership but by extension all rights, all certitudes, being revealed as hollow and irrelevant. For the masses the certitude of any lasting value, of any certitude at all, is untenable, a shadow of a shadow, and it is into this vacuum that authoritarianism flows, both taking advantage of an absence of any real power structure and doing so by conforming to starkly, even primitive, values of control and order.

We might call this a semantic or straightforward reading of the text. But the passage also contains a theory of textuality that arises as soon as one understands the juridical certitude, specifically the “legal owner,” to also include that of another certitude or owner, the “author.” Here we see that long experience, tradition, as with storytelling, would be “generally associated with legal ownership of the means of production,” that is, with an artisanal version of the textual creation of things like “wisdom, oral tradition, the epic side of truth” (to quote m3a,5). And we can note that once more this role is defined in specifically economic or material terms. What happens to this role, this ownership of text from a certain perspective, is that it is confronted by technology and production on a mass scale, a “rapidly increasing concentration . . . of capital,” such that “the legal owners were largely excluded from . . . management.” That is, a text’s author is displaced by technology from that role as author; one of the processes of industrial capital is to displace the author, the story; as new economies and forms of capital take hold, in this way the certitude that was the author or story is displaced by different uses and understandings of text, specifically what we’ve been calling the “informational,” in contrast to storytelling. The exact model for this displacement of authorship is citation itself, specifically the way Benjamin is using it in the *Arcades Project*, at most stages declining to contextualize texts he quotes, appropriating, even transforming, at the deepest levels the meaning of these quotes as his own. According to this reading then, text’s tendency to obscure, devalue, or murder off its author as a component of capitalist progress leads to a vacuum that parallels or reinforces the political vacuum that leads to authoritarian states. What Benjamin also points to

with this passage is the way he himself is implicated in a kind of authoritarian coup, given that this passage, as so many others, is effectively one long citation, displacing the author role inhabited by Horkheimer. Indeed the multiple ellipses underscore this displacement, emphasizing the author Benjamin's role in picking and choosing what he wants of Horkheimer's text, using and abusing it, as it were. Benjamin's text, not his text at all, performs the very shattering of a certitude about which the text speaks, complains, warns. As a linguistic construct then, the passage contains within itself another version of the "about face" mentioned above, the turning away from the suspected meaning that values tradition or things like storytelling to an understanding of control as it operates through the informational and text as material. This event, then, is "given its fullest form in the authoritarian state."

We could take the analysis of what is effectively the allegorical nature of this passage further, but I'd like to conclude here by touching once again on how the *Arcades Project* exhibits three things I have been investigating in this paper:

- the experiential nature of informational text
- the way text tends over time to obscure, even as it retains, its primitive roots
- how we might expect societies saturated with informational text to succumb to authoritarian control

As we look at the analysis of m3a,5, it is clear that the mass social organization of industrial labor—and in the contemporary context we can look at post-industrial immaterial labor—is characterized by an extreme version of informational forms of communication. Informational text promotes and embodies this tendency of separation from any artisanal understanding of communication, even as it retains its roots in the artisanal, in sensation, in what is called storytelling, a direct connection to the mimetic and the primitive. Thus in kind of psychoanalytic conception of technology itself, there is a repressed entity that circulates in a technological unconscious. At moments, what we could say is the extreme state of the informational use of language, there is a burst, an

explosion, a resurgence of those tendencies informational language has obscured and buried, a resurgence characterized and brought on by the progressive “razing to the ground” of certitudes like “wisdom, oral tradition, the epic side of truth.” As we have seen in m3,3, this crisis of the artisanal is structurally related to the operation of capital. But into the vacuum left by these disappearing certitudes, and as an effect of the simultaneous resurgence of the primitive, naturally arises authoritarian forms of control that indeed circle back around to satisfy those still extant desires for the old order, which perhaps had attenuated to point of losing their distinctness, to the point of the decay of the memory of their inadequacy.

NP55 (Office for Metropolitan Architecture)

How contemporary is NP? How architectural? We can look at more developed citational practice to clarify. A recent project by Rem Koolhaas. Better: what generally is the citational relation? We can look at the Lafayette Anticipations art space, designed by Koolhaas’s OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture). The OMA is engaged in a “radical reconfiguration” of a “19th-century industrial building in the Marais,” as per Hettie Judah’s article in the March 2, 2018, *New York Times*, “A Newcomer in the Paris Art Scene Jostles for Position.” Koolhaas voices a reaction against “attention-grabbing buildings” and a broad objective of having “architecture insinuate itself into the fabric of the city.” The article continues:

[T]he notion that architectural preservation necessarily causes creative stagnation is, [Koolhaas] said, “simply a lack of . . . understanding of what you can do within preservation. So, for me, preservation became a very interesting field” . . . suggesting a new urban paradigm in which architects leave the existing architectural language of the street intact and reimagine those portions that are out of sight. “I think it’s also, in a certain way, an interesting, new, metropolitan style,” he said, “old outside but super fresh, new, inside.”

NP projects at existing institutions are analogous to the existing facade in the Marais. We leave projects intact but through producing them move behind the scenes as it were to “insinuate” the institutional formation of NP. The more those projects can be “cited” or left intact the more successful the publication project becomes. Indeed NP forms what might even be described as a non-innovative press to produce and maintain those projects. The building facade in this case has a double register, first the projects insofar as they are taken on by the new presses NP helps to initiate, and then the home institution itself, again in many respects a subject of “preservation.” In this way NP engages that living element of the fabric of the institution.

But this is only a preliminary assessment of the implications of “preservation” in this context. What primarily we would look to is exactly the mode in which Benjamin treats citations as a pre-existing building facade. As I have been hinting at and attempting to illustrate, the method of approach in a comparison of this kind is an actual reading of the *Arcades*, subjecting an actual passage to a close reading that will uncover Benjamin’s reading practice and work to further illuminate Koolhaas’s architectural practice as well as tactics for press formation developed by NP. This book has of course already engaged in a number of reading “demonstrations,” albeit from different perspectives, and it’s important to pause to ask how we might expect to incorporate such readings on an ongoing basis. That is, if in fact the reading practices at the heart of the *Arcades* are in many respects our dwelling place, how do we maintain such a practice without too-often returning to the *Arcades* as it has in fact manifested in book form?

I’m not sure an answer to this question exists. We could keep asking questions. For instance, is Koolhaas providing a model, and then can we extend that model to architectural embodiment itself? For instance, is the move to “architect” itself following an institutional impulse that aligns with any given textual imposition? Architecture has as its constant goal worldly or social embodiment. If we source the *Arcades* as a material truth for architecture, are we constantly reading the *Arcades*? What is it to

read the *Arcades*? To cite it? To cite citation? One truth the *Arcades* seems to offer is that the mode of writing we might call “telling,” informing, or explaining, is in many respects antithetical to that particular purpose of discerning how to cite, or build. What the *Arcades* will do is show, transmuting telling as itself a type of citation. A putting-in-place-of that doubles as a saying and not saying. Koolhaas shows us the same facade we have always known in Paris. We are left “reading,” experiencing, moving through the same structures as always (these structures part of Haussmann’s renovations, as it happens). And yet if we do give ourselves over to moving within these structures we then experience how they have been re-interpreted, re-read, renovated to participate in the present-day city “fabric.”

In some sense we remain fearless, immersing ourselves in reading after reading. A kind of test that life will keep going. E8a,2, a citation from an 1845 text that is perhaps already in dialogue with Koolhaas but within which we can also locate other forces of “preservation” as well:

“What fate does the present movement of society have in store for architecture? Let us look around us. . . . Ever more monuments, ever more palaces. On all sides rise up great stone blocks, and everything tends toward the solid, the heavy, the vulgar; the genius of art is imprisoned by such an imperative, in which the imagination no longer has any room to play, can no longer be great, but rather is exhausted in representing . . . the tiered orders on facades and in decorating friezes and the borders of window frames. In the interior, one finds still more of the court, more of the peristyle, . . . with the little rooms more and more confined, the studies and boudoirs exiled to the niches under the spiral staircase, . . . where they constitute pigeonholes for people; it is the cellular system applied to the family group. The problem becomes how, in a given space, to make use of the least amount of materials and to pack in the greatest number of people (while isolating them all from one another). . . . This tendency—indeed, this fait accompli—is the result of progressive subdividing. . . . In a word, each for himself and each by himself has increasingly become the guiding principle of society, while the public wealth . . . is scattered and squandered. Such are the causes,

at this moment in France, for the demise of monumentally scaled residential architecture. For private habitations, as they become narrower, are able to sustain but a narrow art. The artist, lacking space, is reduced to making statuettes and easel paintings. . . . In the presently emerging conditions of society, art is driven into an impasse where it suffocates for lack of air. It is already suffering the effects of this new norm of limited artistic facility, which certain souls, supposedly advanced, seem to regard as the goal of their philanthropy. . . . In architecture, we do not make art for art's sake; we do not raise monuments for the sole purpose of occupying the imagination of architects and furnishing work for painters and sculptors. What is necessary, then, is to apply the monumental mode of construction . . . to all the elements of human dwelling. We must make it possible not only for a few privileged individuals but for all people to live in palaces. And if one is to occupy a palace, one should properly live there together with others, in bonds of association. . . . Where art is concerned, therefore, it is only the association of all elements of the community that can launch the immense development we are outlining." D. Laverdant, *De la mission de l'art et du rôle des artistes: Salon de 1845* (Paris, 1845), from the offices of La, Phalange, pp. 13-15. [E8a,2]

It is only by reading citations that we come into citational practice. Straightforward informational prose is not citation in this sense, and is in fact antithetical to it. That said, we probably don't need to pull out every single strand of meaning or implication in each reading. But one thing that might be possible is to start from an "original" or surrounding context and work toward a citation of this particular example of citational practice. We can get this to make sense in the way we need it to in this specific context and use it as a base from which to reassess and reinform that original or outside context. This is reading and interpretive practice that itself structurally cites something like a visit to the interiors of Lafayette Anticipations. But this experience is a significant pause because how we are going to absorb citational practice into daily life is a question of considerable import.

Notable in the citation is that it emerges from the "offices" of La Phalange, a literary journal, such that the addition of "offices"

works to impute an air of the business world to the entire passage. The overriding concern is one of sensible architectural development within the city, the metropole, but also how to reinterpret interior spaces that exist within a monumental exterior. As the OMA website specifies about the project:

A late 19th century industrial building is refurbished for Fondation d'Entreprise Galeries Lafayette to house exhibition and production spaces, with a focus on creation, innovation and research. OMA has inserted an exhibition tower into the courtyard of the building in which two sets of mobile platforms will offer a large repertoire of spatial configurations; the programmatic flexibility provided increases the potential of the existing building. A production centre at the heart of the site underpins the Fondation, while the ground floor becomes a passage connecting rue du Plâtre to rue Sainte-Croix de la Bretonnerie and hosts the public programs.

The OMA's project is very much an attempt, to use the language of E8a,2, for "all people to live in palaces," to create "an association of all elements of the community," for "people to properly live there together with others, in bonds of association." The OMA resituates the interior of the existing building, bringing a radically opposed "present movement of society" to it. OMA creates an expansive, anti-"cellular" space that specifically works against "the tiered orders on façades and in decorating friezes and the borders of window frames." Life and art are effectively rethought within the ruin of the monuments of socialities "exhausted in representing." It is a move toward "public wealth" that is read precisely through its obverse, a world of "each for himself and each by himself." In the Laverdant citation, living in "palaces" is certainly not the problem, but how one goes about living in them, which is also the concern of the OMA.

Finally, citational reading practice is clearly what is at stake in the *Arcades*. Insofar as Benjamin's collection of citations itself is that "cellular system," a theoretically endless collection of textual particles representing the detritus of history, it simultaneously is exactly what gives the imagination "room to play," in terms of

the montage in which Benjamin does not need to “say anything” (N1a,8) and leaves it to his readers to draw connections as they see fit. So in this particular citation E8a,2 there is a way in which the characteristics of old-world monumentality still hold true, are still to be sought after. Those “private habitations” that ended up mirroring the limitations of monumentality in producing “more of the court, more of the peristyle,” are through citational practice now reset, giving on to vistas that might be said to be opposite in nature, where art no longer “suffocates.” It is that seeing of one through the other, as we “look around us” that most authentically opens out to the transhistorical.

NP56 (Buck-Morss and Perloff)

Here we read. NP has a commitment to reading as central to any activity. From this perspective the *Arcades* is brought in as a set piece. Or, the *Arcades* is given its due. Which changes everything. Broadly speaking, the first thing to attend to is exactly how the *Arcades* is not being read. This seems as simple as pointing out how those who have been most responsible for whatever contemporary place the *Arcades* holds in culture have in fact declined to read it. This text launched by zeroing in on the Harvard edition of that work, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, but at this point I’d like to briefly address the important work of Susan Buck-Morss and Marjorie Perloff, via a (finally cursory) reading of A1,1.

Anyone who has been reading this text will certainly see where I’m going with this. By citing a section of the *Arcades* we then study its text to a point of, to use a Benjaminian term, “recognition” of the complexity of that very study or reading process. As I think we have shown again and again, it is that recognition that forms, in all senses of “form,” a type of “explosion” or “dialectics at a standstill,” an impasse or dialectical image. All this constitutes the *Arcades*. All this forms a starting point for inquiry. All this is the reverse, as I’ll suggest with the example of Buck-Morss and Perloff, of treating the text informationally and leaving it at

that. There is certainly a purpose for informational reading, but such a modality should probably be referenced with utmost care.

In its entirety, A1,1 reads as follows (also including the German and auto-translate):

“In speaking of the inner boulevards;” says the Illustrated Guide to Paris, a complete picture of the city on the Seine and its environs from the year 1852, “we have made mention again and again of the arcades which open onto them. These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-paneled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of these corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the arcade is a city, a world in miniature (Flaneur), in which customers will find everything they need. During sudden rainshowers, the arcades are a place of refuge for the unprepared, to whom they offer a secure, if restricted, promenade—one from which the merchants also benefit.” (Weather)

This passage is the locus classicus for the presentation of the arcades; for not only do the divagations on the flaneur and the weather develop out of it, but, also, what there is to be said about the construction of the arcades, in an economic and architectural vein, would have a place here.

[“Wir haben,” sagt der illustrierte Pariser Führer, ein vollständiges Gemälde der Seine-Stadt und ihrer Umgebungen vom Jahre 1852 (.) “bei den inneren Boulevards wiederholt der Passagen gedacht, die dahin ausmünden. Diese Passagen, eine neuere Erfindung des industriellen Luxus, sind glasgedeckte, marmorgeiäfelte Gänge durch ganze Häuserrassen, deren Besitzer sich zu solchen Spekulationen vereinigt haben. Zu beiden Seiten dieser Gänge, die ihr Licht von oben erhalten, laufen die elegantesten Warenläden hin, so daß eine solche Passage eine Stadt, eine Welt im Kleinen ist (Flaneur), in der der Kauflustige alles finden wird, dessen er benötigt. Sie sind bei plötzlichen Regengüssen der Zufluchtsort aller Überraschten, denen sie eine gesicherte, wenn auch beengte Promenade gewähren, bei der die Verkäufer auch ihren Vorteil finden.» (Wetter)

Diese Stelle ist der locus classicus für die Darstellung der Passagen, denn aus ihr entspringen nicht allein die divagations über

den Flaneur und das Wetter, sondern auch was über die Bauweise der Passagen in wirtschaftlicher und architektonischer Hinsicht zu sagen ist, könnte hier seine Stelle finden.]

["We have," says the illustrated Paris guide, a complete painting of the Seine city and its surroundings from 1852 (,) "on the inner boulevards repeatedly the passages that lead to it. These passages, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-covered, marble-paneled corridors through whole houses, whose owners have combined to such speculation. On either side of these passages, which receive their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that such a passage is a city, a world on a small scale (Flaneur), in which the consumerist will find all he wants needed. In the event of sudden downpours, they are the haven of surprise for which they provide a secure but cramped promenade, where the salespeople also find their advantage. (Weather)

This passage is the locus classicus for the portrayal of passages, because they are derived from them not only the divagations on the Flaneur and the weather, but also what can be said about the construction of passages in economic and architectural terms, could find its place here.]

I'd like to simply begin a reading of this first passage. Again the method is to begin quite straightforwardly, informationally, with what seems actually to be meant, then to poke around until various architectures of meaning come into view. Not having read the entirety of the *Arcades* it's not clear that this second order reading is in play with all the passages, but I don't think that's very significant in any case. Enough of the passages open to that kind of depth to, in a sense, consider the Arcades "complete" in all of its ruined incompleteness. Of course the fetishization of completeness is a key trope of the *Arcades*.

The passage is a citation from an 1852 book entitled *Illustrated Guide to Paris*, a commercial travel book of some kind, a tour guide to the city, one that progresses at least in part by way of illustrations or pictures. The citation references the architectural structure of the arcades when in fact they were flourishing and in full operation. I'll note here that the Harvard translation seems

to confuse how the arcades “again and again” lead to the boulevards with an idea of mention of the arcades being made “again and again” in the guide being cited. The former seems to make more sense, providing a vision of the wide inner boulevards of Paris being accessed at many different points by these small access points.

The citation continues by referencing how the arcades came into existence as a product of “industrial luxury.” It then mentions the material out of which they are constructed—glass and marble—and that they traverse various territories or blocks and buildings in the city. These territories or buildings have “owners” who collaborate to bring the arcades into existence, to make these particular passageways. The citation then notes how “both sides” of the passage are lined or full of elegant (bourgeois) shops, which makes the arcade into a kind of microcosm or world in miniature, satisfying every possible desire. Finally, the citation mentions how the arcades serve as a place of refuge against the elements of the outside world, and how the protection they afford happily, for the merchants, leads to even more income.

The citation is then followed by a second paragraph. The text in this second paragraph is not technically citational. It appears to be the voice of Benjamin, to be commentary, like the text at the start of the passage designating Paris as the “city on the Seine.” What’s stated here is that the passage just cited is in fact the “locus classicus” for the entire “presentation of the arcades.” This is certainly a statement that would make sense at the beginning of this particular book, this particular project. Given the magnitude of the *Arcades*, it is a grandiose statement that gains even more emphasis with the Latin phrase. Reasons the passage is so important are then given as being that it serves as the source for material (“divagations”) on the flaneur and the weather, as well as being a source for anything that is to be said about the economic or architectural construction of the arcades. The auto-translate might be clearer here, since it says the passage is the source for “what can be said about the construction of the passages in architectural and economic terms,” keeping the

focus more on the terms, rather than the construction, or on the “vein” of the English translation.

And terms are quite central. We can start with an expanded reading by looking at how the term “locus classicus” is functioning. Again, it is a Latin term that raises the specter of classical literature of the ages, the greatest of that literature, which is in high contrast with the utterly mundane nature of the citation, which appears to be from a rag-tag tourist guide, a sales pitch for the city of Paris. The term also references a piece of text. This piece of text is also a passage, in some sense giving us a tautology at the start of this paragraph, which essentially says “this passage is a passage.” And that tautology expands through a branching and interlinking of the concepts of text and place, of the abstract and the concrete. The tautology, then, expands again with the word “arcades” (Pas-sagen), a place and material architectural construction; then again with the word “divagations”, or ideational side streets, and finally the last reference to all of this having a “place,” and a place “here.” Indeed the German for textual passage, Stelle, used at the start of the paragraph is the same word used at the end of the paragraph for “place.”

Leaving much in suspension, we can return to the opening of the passage. It begins in citation. The locus classicus is an elsewhere. But following the German we have to note Benjamin’s heavy emphasis on the word “sich” or “says.” Benjamin says here that what is saying or speaking is in fact that illustrated guide, that sales pitch for the city. But as even a cursory reading of the *Arcades* will reveal, any reference to a book, particularly a totalizing book that proceeds by the presentation of images, is immediately a cipher for the *Arcades* itself. What this means is that the elsewhere of that locus classicus is in fact, without much detective work, right here in front of us. Immediately in the *Arcades* then, the citational voice is recognized as Benjamin’s own voice. But as with our tautologies mentioned above, Benjamin’s own voice is purely and precisely the voice of the other, the cited. The thing saying is what’s in question with that emphasis (the nuance of which is lost in the English translation).

And indeed this is one of the first key emphases of the *Arcades*. Not unlike the opening line of Hamlet, “who’s there?”, we as readers are asked the question. That “says” is in many ways Walter Benjamin’s opening gambit in his life’s work, the *Passenarbeit*. We can return to a discussion of the implications of the letter A and the two epigraphs that in fact precede this moment, but for now the textual incarnations under discussion clearly form the opening proper of the work. The first moment of the text, then, is the punctuation of the quotation mark, serving to remove us as readers from the book and text in front of us, to yet another text and book, in this case from the distant past, 1852. Again, those marks would serve only to remove us to exactly where we are, the text in front of us. Their task is doubled in this way: shifting us away and toward, into the past and into a present whose immediacy is purely material, in some sense future-based since they would logically work beyond the moment of Benjamin’s deciding to use them. Hence, and I don’t say this unadvisedly given the transhistorical nature of Benjamin’s oeuvre, the first word “we” encompasses multitudes, far from simply the implied audience of tourists for the *Illustrated Guide to Paris*. This pronoun, used in this multivalent manner, is effectively the first word and moment of the *Arcades*, which given the obvious importance of the opening, should be given its due. And we could continue further with this analysis, assessing the “we” that is actually meant—which is the “we” of authorship that partly assumes a “we” within the audience as well—and what that “we” is doing, with its doing something “again and again,” “repeatedly,” a monotonous and mechanical laboring that is echoed in the thick mesh of tautologies mentioned above.

To return to the emphasis on “says,” and how exactly we’re assessing the subjectivity behind this word, or what it might point to or refer to. As I’ve mentioned it is clearly a reference to Benjamin himself as sayer, if completely indirectly. But to move back to a literal interpretation, it is a reference to the *Illustrated Guide to Paris*, or, in German, the *Pariser Führer*. Again, the author of this book is not mentioned, which is fairly uncommon in the *Arcades*,

to have a book referenced and not its author, which means we are left to an even greater degree with the stark emphasis on the word “Führer.” Of course Hitler is German fuhrer for the extent of the 1930s (starting in 1932), overlapping Benjamin’s most intensive work on the *Arcades* and as he was living in exile. To be clear: the *Arcades* was constructed in exile from fascism. Thus what we have, again at this most significant location at the outset of the entire project, is not only this unmistakable reference to Hitler and all he represents (though perhaps not quite as much as he came to represent after Benjamin’s death), most specifically authoritarianism and fascism, but an identification of Benjamin himself with this figure, a radical exchange.

Benjamin does nothing less here than introduce the key question of our time. One thinks, for instance, of Heidegger, his centrality as a thinker, directly alongside his embrace of fascism. Has anyone yet convincingly addressed that explosive coincidence? Perhaps it was only Rimbaud, in the epigraph here saying “for sale . . . what will never be sold,” alighting on mechanized commodity culture as the alpha and omega of the structure of reality. In any case, what transpires before us—starting with Hitler’s coincidence with the figure of the flaneur—at the outset of the *Arcades* exceeds this opening mandate of this blog post, if not the entirety of the NP project as well. As I said, this would be a surface reading (we have many miles to go), intended to get at Benjamin’s actual intent with the passage, perhaps nothing less than a modality of existence. This is a modality that defined the *Arcades* overall, a modality whose parameters have yet to be described (inasmuch as they also encompass the modality of description).

Make no mistake, we are more or less in that modality now, as close readers of A1.1. We “study” the passage. We somehow get closer to it. We feel the “inner boulevards” of interpretation. As any close reading of the *Arcades* turns up, all of what I’ve just mentioned in the first four sentences of this paragraph are the actual point of the *Arcades*, elusive as it is visceral. I want to say that Benjamin criticism is fully caught up in ignoring this point.

In *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (MIT Press, 1982) Susan Buck-Morss begins the book with the beginning of the Arcades, a long excerpt from A1,1:

“We have,” so says the illustrated guide to Paris from the year 1852, [providing] a complete picture of the city of the Seine and its environs, “repeatedly thought of the arcades as interior boulevards, like those they open onto. These passages, a new discovery of industrial luxury, are glasscovered, marble-walled walkways through entire blocks of buildings, the owners of which have joined together to engage in such a venture. Lining both sides of these walkways which receive their light from above are the most elegant of commodity shops, so that such an arcade is a city, a world in miniature.”

What’s quite excellent here is that Buck-Morss retains the exact opening punctuation and two words “We have,” in a literal version of the German. Differences however then proliferate from there. My point in quoting Buck-Morss’s quote, these first words of *Dialectics of Seeing*, is to underscore the actual complexity of what is being introduced, as per my above, cursory reading. The initial words then of Buck-Morss’s own text are as follows:

Comments Walter Benjamin: “This quotation is the locus classicus for the representation of the arcades [Passagen],” which lent their name to his most daring intellectual project. The Passagen-Werk was to be a “materialist philosophy of history,” constructed with “the utmost concreteness” out of the historical material itself, the outdated remains of those nineteenth-century buildings, technologies, and commodities that were the precursors of his own era. As the “ur-phenomena” of modernity, they were to provide the material necessary for an interpretation of history’s most recent configurations.

What’s happening here is Buck-Morss is taking Benjamin at his word. Benjamin apparently says that this passage is the locus classicus for the *Arcades* and *Dialectics of Seeing* thus launches with a presentation of that key passage. Of course there is no mention here of fascism. What there is at the very beginning however is an untheorized demarcation put in place between quotation and commentary, a back-and-forth between what Benjamin cites and

what he himself “says,” his commentary. As we have just seen, who it is (“who is there?”) that creates or says this commentary and its distinction from citation is the central question of the *Arcades*. Buck-Morss begins her book by ignoring that point altogether and using Benjamin’s text informationally. Then, rather than any attempt to actually read Benjamin’s passage, A1,1, Buck-Morss prioritizes characterizing Benjamin as a person (“daring”) and importing hackneyed philosophical concepts that Benjamin elsewhere specifically addresses: concreteness, material, “outdated remains,” and so on. These two tendencies, plus the unnecessary introduction of a highly unlikely explicatory schematic for all of Benjamin’s work, are what define *Dialectics of Seeing*, not any type of on-the-page close reading of what Benjamin actually put to paper. Unpacking the reading process itself in real-time is nowhere to be found in Buck-Morss’s work.

Nor is it in Perloff’s, a major critic who nevertheless claims for the *Arcades* a defining place for contemporary experimental writing. I’m referring here to chapter 2, “Phantasmagorias of the Marketplace: Citational Poetics in Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades* Project” in Perloff’s 2010 book *unoriginal genius: poetry by other means in the new century* (University of Chicago Press). And make no mistake, Buck-Morss’s and Perloff’s work represent achievements without which thinking about the *Arcades* in this text would not have been possible. But what I’d like to show is that even in this important work there is a deferral and deference to more or less mainstream academic discourse that sidetracks these analyses away from the type of reading demanded by the *Arcades*. Or not necessarily demanded but opened up. With Perloff, it may be that the desire to align the *Arcades* with the internet, web surfing, and sampling overwhelms a closer look at what Benjamin actually wrote—which in some ways works against a more in-depth assessment of contemporary technological practices—but A1,1 is cited from the English translation and given a completely cursory, if interesting, assessment.

After citing the first paragraph of A1,1 in the Harvard translation (Perloff also cites the epigraphs, in their original French and

in translation, but lops off the epigraph sources), the immediately following paragraph then makes a nearly identical move to the Buck-Morss (which Perloff often cites), writing:

And the author now adds his brief commentary

then citing the entirety of the second paragraph in A1,1, following this text with a new paragraph that begins:

Benjamin thus introduces his subject matter and points to the cross-references or links: “The Flaneur” (M) and “Weather.”

And we leave A1,1 behind almost entirely. Here it is notable that the cross references, while extremely interesting, are a feature of the text that is only very occasionally used and really disappears as the *Arcades* progresses. What Perloff leaves us with here is indeed a lesson in misreading, or not reading at all, even as the materiality of Benjamin’s text, its particular relation to linguistic nuance, and the importance of the original German and French are touched on throughout the essay.

We’re left asking not only what is being left out or ignored, but why two of Benjamin’s central commentators are not engaging the substance of what Benjamin actually wrote? I think that in this section there is a very modest approach to an answer to the first of these questions, even as it may be the answer to the second, which I’m not at the moment venturing, that may be equally interesting.

NP57 (*Arrival*’s study)

To have opened the space for reading and recognition. For reception. “Arrival isn’t a visionary movie, an intellectual rebus, or a head movie.” This is Manohla Dargis in the *New York Times*. But shouldn’t something be said? Or at least to mention what’s in the movie that has to do with study? It’s clear at the opening scene that the main character Louise Banks (the heptatods “bank” their language with her) lives in the ship, her bourgeois fantasy encased behind the plate glass of her house, giving on to the vista of the

natural world, the black trees behind the glass evoking the aliens themselves, the natural world finally radically alien, cinematic. Her “back yard” is the one in which the alien appears, where an exchange takes place, bounded temporality swapped for eternity and “coming back.” The black-skinned and blurred nanny, with the wedding ring echoing Louise’s, momentarily holds Louise’s baby Hannah, like Hannah’s name the palindromic world going back and forth inside itself from one extreme edge to another, black to white. The caretaker is her double, as much as this woman holds the same position as the trees outside the window. The bourgeois ideality includes and insists on the nanny, central figure in a plantation-type landscape finally not unlike the one in Jordan Peele’s *Get Out*.

For this is a movie of and for the white, bourgeois woman, finding the otherness of blackness as her most authentic transport. The black of the alien ship, the blackness of the aliens and the blackness of their writing, finally Louise’s black commanding officer, the General, an institutional authority who first gives Louise passage, a pass, top secret, to be in physical proximity to the heptapods. Blackness also seems to appear in the scenes of global unrest that result from the alien invasion, but these aforementioned are the primary manifestations that form the nodes in the network of blackness that defines Louise’s life, which finally is defined by her ability to allow interpretive passage between languages, entities that might be, among themselves, “other.” Like all translators, she traffics in otherness. The reason she excels is that her equanimity remains intact.

Perhaps the interpretive study, the close reading, Louise does of the alien graphemes isn’t so much black study as the study of what is perceived as blackness. But we can bracket those concerns and note that the close reading, which manifests as an analytical assessment (using protractors, rulers, etc.), of that other language induces hallucinations that in fact are the reverse of a personal psychological condition, even as they double as messianic, averting global nuclear engagement and producing a “universal language,” a capitalist bourgeois hallucination par excellence (one

thinks of “Universal Studios”). In any case, the mental activity of close reading in this film accesses and doubles as transhistorical vision and viewing. Life itself redounds to an issue of reading. For some reason we’re apparently meant to understand that as a result of this reading, this study, Louise can see only her own, for the most part, immediate future, that involving her yet-to-be conceived daughter, and not only still be able to do nothing to affect that future, but also not be able to access other potentialities of the temporal, such as her own death, or the temporality of other people. She in some sense leaves the boundedness of the present for only a slightly less bounded version of herself, one that revolves around a heartrending loss but one that marks any number of mundane Hollywood productions. “Can’t we all just get along?” is a question that impels the macro-socialities of this movie, impels us by way of the movie, but how are we understanding blackness then?

Louise’s study here is clearly Benjaminian in scope. Technology as screen occupies the womb of this movie. It is the life-giving death (of Hannah) in life. It makes life worth living by seeing the immanence of death. In any case, our life, technological life, must maintain the centrality of the screen. Materiality incarnate, the stone-like, textured, black ships themselves, constantly destabilizes its own monumentally solid appearance and status by visiting multiple locations at once, by being surrounded by and finally disappearing into mist, by hovering just a few tantalizing feet above the earth’s surface, by housing at its core a completely indeterminate central tableau or scene of whiteness, screen, mist, organic matter, and shifting symbolic language. Louise’s institutional, militarized, bourgeois cohort enters the hold and body of the ship, emerging through its passage out, a veritable birth from blackness and otherness itself, with images of linguistic formations that, even as they are treated as scientific specimens, effect in the world a peacefulness that finally confirms the bourgeois status quo.

NP58 (Film)

A friend made a film that is still not possible to comment on publicly because it was part of a personal email with no hint of permission to speak about it outside of our exchange. The film also has a number of aspects that are perhaps incomplete, raw, unformed, as much as those qualities are also integral to its aesthetic. I'm going to speak of this film with little explanation or qualification, as if anyone reading this text had not only seen the film but had the ability to do stop-motion analysis. This text is thus a public display of a dialogue, if I can call it that, only the filmmaker or those who do have access to the film could be expected to follow. In this sense, I am free as writer, as viewer, from a whole universe of rational expectation———

I want to say that the first dancer (D1, who has an ongoing duet with another dancer, D2) is the mystic center of the film, the alter-ego conjurer opposite the filmmaker, but that she persistently exceeds the film; the film is still looking for ways to track her, to have her in its world; she is therefore fugitive, even D2 (that second spirit of the filmmaker) in pursuit, her gaze doubling exactly as giving life or value to the film alongside destroying it by being what the film cannot attain. In that way she is a certain impossible iteration of black beauty, to quote the film, black people as "the most beautiful creatures in the whole world." Film tracks, attempts to apprehend, can't do anything but set and reset its resetting.———

"Hers is an amazing medley of shifts, a choreography in confinement, internal to a frame it instantiates and shatters." —Fred Moten writing about Harriet Jacobs in *Black and Blur*

The end of the film here is instructive, the end of the film is study, it is Fred's text and the sound of his voice, the constant clarity of his aporias. There are certain camera moves here, a choreography of what happened, cinematic shifts, in relation to D1 and D2. These shifts are pronounced when they follow

the dancers, with, for example, the upward move at—jumping back to the start—5 secs., which actually draws D2 to mirror, his hands framing his face, the body of the filmmaker, to bring that person, whom we happen to see sitting buried in the grass and woods just as D1 and D2 are always buried in sculpted parkland, into the overall “adjustment” that defines movement here, a bringing into focus, a “bringing it out,” to quote the stuttering refrain of the film again (and again)———

or there’s the panning left at 2:40 to follow the solo dancer (D3) as he scrapes across the floor, and in fact with this dancer there is much greater camera movement, coming in and out of focus, that echoes the chaotic soundtrack but here might be more in line with the staccato robot movements of D1 and D2, even as the fluidity of this dance is far more trackable than the robotics———

But this might be a point of discussion, since we can see that insofar as the world and dance express or have a recognizable fluidity, the camera, even if only through the body of the filmmaker, finds its participation, can be experienced as participating in or grooving with its object, in fact becomes all the more interesting for its updating that object with a mechanical expansion or in fact escape through the machine, it becomes able to anticipate and “adjust” in such a way that it gains agency, since agency and groove co-create, even as its participation is always already dislocated from the performance because the performer himself, particularly with D3, is dislocated from any true awareness of the filmmaker, and particularly the camera———

The opening shot is D2 performing a gaze through this divide but the omniscience of filmmaker and viewer are all about their own control———

To repeat, all this is complicated by our status as viewers, of “getting” all this groove and complicated adjustment of machine and human in our ultimately entirely (assumed) stable, objective,

static position in front of this screen, a staticness demanded by our always “not being there.” This is precisely technology’s violence, its capture, as it materially commands us into the guise of being subjects but subjects who are all the while possessed as objects. This seems to be a space in which “blackness” can then make this unsteady assault and re-framing that has as much likelihood (and its unlikelihood is what keeps us riveted) as D1 pulling back her skin to reveal an inside full of wires and circuitry. As viewers, we’re given, or we track, or we capture insight into the world in front of us, announced as “blackness,” but unlike the filmmaker and certainly unlike the dancers we remain utterly disembodied, the true gift of cinema, finally technology itself, to convince us that we are that, even and maybe especially because the film overall represents a call to be re-embodied, to “bring it out”———

notable here as well is that when D3 takes on the mechanical moves of D1 and D2 the filmmaker seems to be reduced to becoming still: mechanical dance stills the machine, this dance happening within a space so confined and detailed that in that fact of confinement it evades capture, it throws off a beauty and excitement that the camera can only guess at in its lost over-expansiveness and overly singular scope, can never yet participate in as also a body, cannot be embodied in the presence of. Limited movement as the surest way to the body’s expansiveness; what the filmmaker pursues is exactly what can’t be filmed; its stillness, which contradicts the concept of motion at its core, is awe and entire dysfunction, losing sight of itself in a translucent citation of what’s in front of it, this losing sight also the dispersal of the apparatus at the very moment of the transcendence of the apparatus, again paradoxically, in the very body of the dancer.———

High culture will look like an audacious dance. —Fred Nietzsche

But at the very end of the film there is an extended stasis, a seizing up, a getting lost or inability of the camera’s body to track, to pursue what’s going on, D1 and D2 at far opposite

edges of the path, of foreground and background (intense communication across this space nevertheless). The honoring and updating of human and machine caught in/by the human/machine mix of camera/filmmaker gets inhibited. We can deal. We have to. We're still on it. But it's a principle. It's like an explosion of overkill that's the substrate, read as fault or failed aesthetics but on the other hand the most true in the constant framing the dancers don't escape, perform fealty to, and film frames itself with them and therefore disappears there, that liminality of "blackness." At 11:29 the stillness breaks and the camera makes it over, anticipates and joins the dancers, who are anticipating and joining each other, in shift right, then back left and slightly up, right up to the crop of closure. The film and groove birth the camera here, a random stranger appearing down the path in the background, perhaps a cipher for the ghosting in of techné and outtake.

NP59 (Secretions)

Ashon Crawley's *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (Fordham University Press, 2017) is a wide- a free-ranging work of complex engagement with what he calls blackness. I want to attempt to intersect that work here by considering a small part of chapter 2, "Shouting," as it relates to a key feature of NP, forming what are finally otherwise socialities or communities.

(I'll say just quickly that Crawley is visiting Counterpath to talk about this book and to present other work. Leading up to his visit a reading group is holding two sessions, the first discussing the introduction and the last the balance of the chapters, divided up among the group. A foray into a particular version of study, one that creates a multitude, if briefly and small, within the formation of and thinking through NP.)

What Crawley accesses is the rationale for exilic communities. He comes at the topic from a number of directions, using variant if quite similar terminology. We can adopt almost all this terminology in a consideration of the formation of new, and by new we

must necessarily always mean alternative, presses within already-existing institutions. For instance, Crawley writes:

Blackpentecostals believe one fundament of experience is to be in the world, for the world, as an agent of radical alterity. It is an openness to others while also establishing oneself through a claim for moving through the world differently. Yet this difference obtains by way of its being excluded. Is this difference categorically distinct? Can it be maintained? Is it pure? And what are the grounds for such thinking? (87)

First of all, the answer to the question of the last sentence—“what are the grounds for such thinking?”—is iteratively developed over time by NP, by and as the program of study. As much as a re-approach to the form of the press is reinstated with each new approach to an institution, what happens in the program of study, whether on the blog, in actuality at Counterpath, or otherwise, all the way to modules of study within new presses and their host institutions, is permanently under revision and reinvention. The grounds are renewed. Renewal as ground is the inherent challenge of study and the essential structure of a full absent structure that is the business model.

But the complexity continues, and this relates to how Crawley describes here a being “in the world, for the world” yet also being an “agent of radical alterity.” We want to pick up this same model. The world comes to NP in the form of projects that are already formed, forming, or under way at a given, pre-existing institution. In this sense it is “in the world.” NP is also “for the world” in that the benefits of presses and projects do and will finally redound to those projects and institutions. All of these individuals will benefit in some way. We’re not sure how, but this will happen. This happening is part of the plan of NP.

But simultaneously NP itself and the presses it forms, and this may well inform any press, the nature of a press at all, perform as agents of “radical alterity,” they oppose, they resist, in the sense that they have been excluded and must regroup, re-establish themselves as an other and exterior within the very locations they inhabit. And

this is not a (if there is such a thing) simple alterity, but one that is “radical.” The press must in some sense form an antagonistic relationship to that out of which it emerges. Its sociality will exist as a type of undercommons in relation to its host institution, the which it finally comes to benefit, though at the behest of forces of innovation, rather than conservatism, that are the drivers of institutional formation in the first place. NP presses grapple with this dialectical crucible as an ongoing mode of operation.

And it is ongoing, constantly revisited, even as this revisitation is subject to forces of stasis and forgetting. In this way NP is a kind of memory. It would then associate itself as well with the very idea of the “African-American” as discussed by Crawley, by way of Nahum Chandler. I’ll quote another passage from Crawley, but here we would associate the “new” of NP with the “African” in African-American, and the “press” with American, or conservative, institutional, white:

The thing called America is structured by an assumptive logic wherein that which is so named bears the weight of producing ontological difference for the thing that would obtain for the negro—for the black—in time and across space, as African-hyphen-American. The assumptive logic renders America a neutral zone and inhabitation for that which is never in need of, nor in search for, that which comes before the hyphen such that the very designation African-hyphen-America/n would bear a similar ontological necessity for defining itself constantly in relation to this America, and designating what it means to be rendered irreducibly different from, and thus fundamentally disorienting for, this America. (87)

The impulse behind NP then can be seen effectively to cite, participate in, theorize, redefine, re-experience, or rehearse a problematic that runs through and grounds American blackness in this sense. NP presses are arranged as socialities of alterity, the charge of NP’s central office being to maintain through re-theorization that suspended commitment. As Crawley attempts to make sense of the formation of these socialities, communities, multitudes, he refers to them as “secretions.”

NP60 (Poetics of Siri as ruin)

[as part of a reading given April 13, 2018, in Fort Collins, CO, at the Wolverine Farm store and arts space]

I wanted to catch the moment. I read in the news that devices would be listening at all times and that we wouldn't need to say, for example, "Hey, Siri," before a microphone was activated and recording, datafying the present. Every device is hot. But then, not yet, patents still pending. We still need to say something, now, but clearly in the very near future that need would be obviated. What would replace it?

I remember watching short news videos on the web when the voice-recognition feature came out. They were tech videos, savvy, hip, the people in them, what they were describing, the life they were pointing to. This was our new friendly relationship with our phones, the affective register almost as unbelievable as the technology. It doesn't seem complicated any more, voice recognition combined with behind-the-scenes web search. But we all knew that the AI was intent on never revealing its sources, on protecting them to give us what we wanted. We all, tacitly, knew that. We experienced a kind of magic. We showed our friends, they showed us. There was an element of self-congratulatory bourgeois boredom, of wishing, of a glimpse.

I'm writing about the experience of a ruin. The devices that surround us no longer need us to announce ourselves. The devices we in many cases have literally taken into our bodies no longer need a particular on/off switch. All that learned behavior, all that language, all that affect, has become useless, outmoded, in equal measure as it is still right here in the room with us. But still we are saying and doing it, hearing it, forced to perform to get the thing to work, the patents not having been approved. What is a patent? What is the form of questioning of the patent? Does capital necessarily patent the patent, that is, acquire rights to the unconscious production of the obvious? What is it to now keep saying "Hey, Siri"? It was a performance that was requested. We all know how

this particular version of “hey” works: the announcers say it to each other on NPR, the announcers and reporters, the investigative journalists, trapped in war zones, bombs bursting, they come on with a “Hey, Steve,” “Hey, Maura.” We know the drill. Does that change now too, or is there a not yet? Is there a patent pending during which we go to the grocery store, we process a “while you wait,” we get along to get along?

No more speaking, that’s for sure. The code works better without it. We’re that much closer to brain-to-brain telepathy, like the bulbous-headed Talosians in the pilot episode of *Star Trek*. But who’s the loser now? Is Siri now uncool, defunct, the world having exceeded it? What could happen now? I like poetry because it puts me at the place where anything can be said. That’s poetry’s point. And there it is that we must address the ruin, which is us since we were all along the ones doing the performance. But now there is this language that has effectively disappeared. We are left holding the bag by the total automation of voice recognition. What does it feel like to be left holding the bag, the complexity of language threading through performance and history? But this was never much living, these were things that hadn’t finished being upended by the other thing.

NP61 (K1a,3)

We certainly do come to the whole project, as with many other projects, as a “task of childhood” (cf. “task” of the translator, or “werk” in *passagen-werk*). Note the sense in which the project is a new reading each day, another revolution, or a mix of multiple levels of new readings with multiple levels of “old readings.” And this task is, within this matrix, to bring forward this new reading, which is here phrased as “to bring the new world into symbolic space.” Again, this is not one thing, but happens multiply. The immediate implication is that the technological forefront of the current world is not yet in symbolic space. Life consists of multiple levels of the emergence of symbolic space. There is a whole category of “things” that are present for us here, things created by

adults, that are in a realm of really existing things that are not in symbolic space, but are in fact slated for it. They are in a holding pattern, presumably waiting for children to recognize them, or children to somehow be incarnated, born into recognizing them. Child/adult of course simply the ciphers for collective and individual consciousness. But even in their not yet recognized state things still have an effect in the world. A grownup effect. And there must be at all times the possibility that these new technological objects will not be recognized or brought, by childhood, into symbolic space at all, ever.

What is it like to live in that attenuated world? What is that brand of consciousness? Is that the world we're confronting or trying to change? Is it inevitable that childhood recognizes everything, every object, that appears to each new generation? We are working with a type of symbolic space, a way that meaning takes place or happens, or does not. And that is the space of the present, how we take the present moment and transform our reading of it, these various presents and non-presents happening in multiplicity. And what's extraordinary is that the transformation has taken place, but well beyond notice, at least for now, as if it happened and is now in a place of waiting to be noticed. There are works that point clearly to the new world, the new reading, but they pass by the bored consciousness, unselected, unrecognized. That bringing into symbolic space, moreover, is the image. The "discovery" of these new images is "in order to" bring into the "image stock"—the "visual treasure"—of "humanity." It is apparently not required that objects or entities enter that image stock or treasure, that they become "human." This is simply how humans operate, not necessarily the world itself, the non-human.

And what's clearly stated is that the adult cannot recognize, or perform the crucial recognition of, that new world, will be in the position of passing over it, another kind of passage, even though the adult is privy to symbolic experience of the old technology, the old world, the symbolic realm they themselves developed at the appropriate time. And this is explained as the way what happens to us in childhood automatically enters a symbolic space,

an entering-into that is barred from the adult's experience or accomplishment in term of whatever technology has in fact developed, presumably at the behest of adults, after the time of their own childhood. This is explained in terms of particular states of technological advance, the contemporary versions of which are recognized for their symbolic character by the child who is contemporary with them. In childhood, there is a kind of symbiosis between the human and the most "advanced" state of technology, both operating in a symbolic register, but without the child that technology is denied its human symbolic status or potential. Over time there is a generational shift, with a particular technological era aging into the past exactly alongside the generation that experienced that era in its own childhood. Once those people and that era obtain to a certain age, or once they are superceded by another generation and another wave of technological advance, this older generation can then only recognize in new technology a "new, elegant, modern, cheeky" surface or "side." This perceptual state of affairs is in itself quite interesting, since it would characterize the general state (all "adults") of contemporary society, with the newest versions of technology and nature not able to become imagistic or symbolic. "Grownups" can "absolutely" not recognize the "new" in this way. The new is that technology created by adults but not in fact consumable by them as symbolically meaningful. The only chance they have of so doing is under the auspices of children, or perhaps a childlike consciousness.

But at this point we enter into a discovery of a kind of valence of the "new" (certainly not forgetting NP in this context) where the word "new" simply does not mean what it says, or not only that, what we might come to expect of it. As with the different modalities of technology in the passage, the word "new" will have primarily a symbolic meaning or a meaning that is not that, not symbolic, more informational, perhaps "elegant, modern, cheeky." To read the passage, we have to be quite careful about what is new and what isn't, which goes hand in hand with a consideration of exactly what the child is doing vis a vis the adult. For the world the child brings to us, presumably enables adults to recognize,

is exactly the “new” world. Indeed this is the “task” or work of the child, which is a contradiction of child labor immediately at the outset of the passage. This is a work infiltrating the state of childhood, this “bringing” of the new world back, as it were, to adults. In some sense we hire ourselves out, as our own children, to bring technology back to us as ourselves or what we know or recognize as human. The status of the word “new,” therefore, is compromised to this degree. The childlike, innocent consciousness that would like to achieve recognition of the “new world” is in fact doing a kind of worldly work, which to the extent that it is worldly is contradictory to the entire conception of the child. “Child” and “work” are antithetical, as much as “child” and “adult.” That we would need or utilize the child to realize anything that was “worldly” is problematic such that it calls into question the status of what might be “worldly” or not overall, what we even mean by “child” if our conception of a child is as a being whose defining character is as a worldly worker. Our “new” worlds are to this extent cursed from the outset.

But how do we step this reading through the balance of the passage? I would say slowly and carefully, not unlike doing a difficult crossword puzzle, filling in the empty spaces as logically as possible, using what we presume we know to confirm the likelihood of our various hypotheses. It is the living process of meaning-making, or a reading process, a building that constantly builds itself “anew” by doubling itself through the symbolic and back again through a perception of the world as non-symbolic or surface. As here: we no doubt construct the “symbolic space” of the word “new.” We see its promise, in the building of a symbolic space, in its introduction of the worldly to the worldly, but we also simultaneously conceive of its inherent contradictions, first and foremost the destructiveness of child labor, or the assignment through capital-based “work” of a task of making the world in fact worldly, in all of its negative connotations. The symbolic is that which is persistently missing and must be rebuilt and reintroduced, and here the force that removes the symbolic or causes it to be forgotten is the biological force of encroaching “adulthood.”

As it stands, as it is in the world as it comes to us or is brought to us, the process of maturation is structured by both the removal of the symbolic valences of meaning or truth but also the ongoing presence of a need to remember or reconstruct that meaning, an awareness that a certain brand of meaning is missing.

When we speak of NP, when we enter into a world-building that is NP, we engage a reading of this passage. We look to the new according to multiple structures of participation. NP is very much a response to a new technological world, often termed the “digital humanities,” and how that world manifests within a context of outmoded communicative technologies such as the book. NP is in some sense a technology to recognize or humanize technology, inasmuch as the child is also that same technology. What we want to do is read digitality into the *Arcades*, even as the *Arcades* works to interrogate specifically book technology. Our theory is that in many ways the material link or doubling of the reading process within the mechanical holds a contemporary resonance that need only be updated, at least in terms of the bodily activity of communicational organization as a liberatory building block par excellence, and that the permanent reset to which NP commits itself resurfaces a kind of childlike process of recognition of the new, but all the while (and all the more effective by way of) being a conduit for governmentality and capital accumulation, admitting the technologization of childhood and the very definition of the human. When we speak of NP we travel informationally but with a more or less permanent fixation on symbolicity, on reading what we can.

Recognition of symbolic space is recognition of open space, yet as soon as we become agents in the realization of the open we enter the circuits and transformations of capital. To this degree we ourselves become capital transformation, the possibilizing of the multitude but at the service of the ultimate ends of capital expansion. To think we can combat this expansion is nonsense: what’s left for us is to become agents of alignment between how the world operates or manifests as worldly, and then who we are or what our chosen activities in fact are. This passage, which

concludes with a cross reference to “Method” (a nonexistent or not completed separate convolute), more or less succinctly puts in place discrete worlds and the trespass, transference, or communication between them. It is also a showing how those worlds exist simultaneously, each appearing one within the other at all times. Each has its own phenomenological status, which forms a placeholder in an effectively Marxian circuit of nominally different worlds. Most basically, these worlds are past, present, and a hypothetical future, but there is more to say.

There is a past. And look how it functions . . . Our yesterday is one in which we ourselves were children, though we will have been children in the context of a past generation of adults, grown-ups. It is also a yesterday of an earlier mode of technology, specifically of transportation, the locomotive, a yesterday when that modality itself was an innovation, in its infancy, in the context of even more outmoded technologies. In some sense we were born with it, alongside it. What seems to be the case here is that Benjamin has tied major eras of technological advance to the progress of generations, half centuries, even full centuries, his intent being a documentation of the nineteenth century from the perspective of the twentieth, a look back from, for instance, the era of automobiles to that of trains. But here is where a particlization comes in, since these larger cultural trajectories have become annihilated over the course of the twentieth century and the high pace of technological revolution or turnover that specifically defines our own experience. So here in some sense we are “post” technological revolution because change has become so ubiquitous, ongoing, thoroughgoing that it is nearly beyond description, that language has in some sense always been suspiciously too slow, that is, using the old terminology for that description. Our era is defined by the “worker as pure and simple (automatic) extension of the (automatic) machine” (Althusser, 40). The past here functions as an earlier iteration of the construct past/present/future, a formula or form that holds across time. We are persistently experiencing it and it constitutes who we are, how we perceive who we are. We have reference to our own past, when we were children and before

which we did not have a past in this sense, as a time in which we did certain things, namely, related to adults whose pasts were fully in play. The past relates to the present inasmuch, exclusively insofar as, it finds its updating in the present in this precise manner.

A question arises here, how much, in the creation of presses as part of the NP project, do we need to come to terms with the relationship of past to present? How much do we need to theorize how the new becomes in fact new? Or how much do we need to complicate our understanding of the new, show precisely how any given understanding of the new is constructed? Another question is in what way does a particular understanding of the past and construction of the present as the new take hold, in what way does that conduct or direct our embodied movement of communication and adherence to the present time? One thing we can say NP is doing is attempting to access this childlike symbolic thinking that does indeed bring a new world, or make a new world legible. NP is following the specific method referred to in K1a,3 (a crucial statement enabled by the actual reading of K1a,3).

And, to draw toward a conclusion, what is my time of “assessment”? This means the quiet concentration of close reading and transport into “what might happen,” into critique that supposedly leads outward. The pure time that enters other times and remains in the remains of what time there is to enter into, for me and the not me that’s far more me. In any case, this question is addressed by K1a,3 if only one cares to talk about it, if only one has the time, and having the time is exactly in question. That is a “having” then, that is in itself a “colonization” and a grasping, and exclusion perhaps. Another question: is my reading, or exegesis itself, childlike? In close reading the *Arcades* do I obtain to a childhood that is sufficient to recognize, humanize, or image-ize new technology? Am I hereby fulfilling my mandate? Or simply the design of the *Arcades*, precisely its explosion of informational content, itself citing the world-annihilating fascist appropriation of the totality of human informational being?

NP62 (Hydra Slaughterhouse)

The goat video in the slaughterhouse made sense. The slaughterhouse really just a room, about 100 yards from the center of town, a town that is a port. One large unlit room with rusty iron beams running front to back about 8 feet up and midway between floor and ceiling. An artifact of the nineteenth century it seems, though a local resident confirmed that it was used into the 1980s, when European Union health policy dictated that it be closed. Now it's a "project space," owned by the DESTIE foundation, in which an artist, David Shrigley, has installed a video of creatures who may well have been slaughtered there. The goats. Of course these are not the goats that in fact met their death but members of the same species, goats who are likely alive and well today. Our funny friends—the exhibition title is "Laughterhouse"—whose cries sound uncannily human and remind us of our own. They sound like the bleats of small children.

The slaughterhouse is made of concrete and stone and is extremely clean, both in overall design, perched on a spectacular cliff-edge some 20 feet above the Aegean sea, and inside and out, its walls in good repair and not crumbling, like so many other buildings on Hydra, the inside cleared of all except a simple viewing bench, a facing screen, an air conditioner, and a projector. The slope of the long driveway, dirt and gravel, gently descends from the main path to town. There is a crispness to the metal doors leading in and out, one from where a gallery attendant sits outside, another leading from the back corner to the small bathroom down a flight of iron steps, which are painted grey. The building has no identifying signs, either archival, for itself as slaughterhouse, or contemporary, for itself as project space. All this being said, the primary impression left after one is inside is of a bleak dungeon or torture chamber.

The goat video is site specific, like every annually invited work at the project space. This indicates that the work includes some reference to the history of the site, and one would assume to the municipality, to the history of Hydra. The goat video, the clean

and aesthetically accomplished film, brings back to presence within the former slaughterhouse members of the species—or you could simply say “animals”—who presumably ended their lives there, on the way to becoming goat meat (but who eats goat?). Many goats graze on the island and are used for milk, but the goats brought here would have been for slaughter. And because of the extremely small population of the island it is presumed—historical details, when it was constructed, etc., of the slaughterhouse are nowhere to be found near the site—that the one large metal door opening directly from the room into the open air would have exited the eviscerated bodies of goats onto waiting boats headed for the mainland, the larger population of Athens and the world beyond. The island residents almost certainly did not need, for their own consumption, a slaughterhouse.

One of the main components of the piece is the amplified coo’s, bah’s, stuttering eh’s, and playful screeches its subjects emit. Much of the video in fact zooms in on the mouths of the goats as those mouths are making these sounds, as they shape their tongues and lips around, over, and through their quite human-like teeth to enunciate the sounds that enter our ears. The look of these filmed goats but quite particularly the sounds—though still the look and sound registering as cute or funny—are meant to ghost in the doomed goats and animals of the past, as well as ghost in the human selves that presumably never were brought in, ghosted in to save the fabled slaughtered goats. Viewers are encouraged to imagine what it must have been like for goats brought to the slaughterhouse to die and the filmed acoustics bouncing from wall to wall must certainly, certainly be the infinitely gentler version of the screams of horrified desperation echoed in that same chamber not long ago. Art is making something palatable.

Gallery goers are presented with laughter’s dual edge. The sounds of “joy” the goats bring, the sounds of joy we ourselves bring. This is what’s muffled about contemporary experience: the point, and it’s not clear that the artist intended it, that contemporary art itself intends it, as much as use of “the animal” imports a type of pure credibility, is not simply that goats were mistreated

here, or that they are still mistreated now, or that animals are not recognized properly as worthy of every ounce of respect humans can muster, but that the mechanism of the slaughterhouse is as alive and well as the goats that died here are as alive and well as the goats that are not dying here, that are all technologically represented through the subjects and sounds of subjects in the film. In this sense, representation is confronted head-on.

Precisely in the same mode as the film, the slaughter is, then, on continuous loop. The material reality of the ruin of the slaughterhouse introduces us to its status as a paradigm for (primarily immaterial) practices of later eras such as our own, where far more humane conditions—reference Temple Grandin—have been incorporated into the processes for ending the lives of animals, or making use of them. The slaughterhouse is an architectural, visible, material instance of what took place. Everything it's possible to note about it, not least things like its distance from the town center, its lack of windows (presumably to contain aural and visual, humanistic screams, the blood-red carnage), serves to characterize the array of forces still at work today and that were germinated in such structures. Indeed the slaughterhouse asks us to consider how humane values do not serve to overcome carnality, savagery, barbarism, but only to displace all these, to remove them from the realm of immediate sense. Humanization, always a technical apparatus, technically induced, serves to obscure in this way. "This way."

The art foundation and the artist take pains again and again to describe the film as "funny," in many respects channeling and promoting the sentimental popularity of animal videos on social media, a modality of labor that forms our artistic zeitgeist and hence a rubric of slaughter that must not only inform but command this Hyrda ruin as project space. That is, one senses how that characterization of "funny," deeply condescending, might win acceptance from the local population, the ongoing audience for the project space, which might otherwise be dubious about this particular slaughterhouse project. But we know, and anyone visiting it immediately realizes, that saying the video is funny is a

lie, marketing copy par excellence. It's possible to ask, then, what is the characteristic thinness of that lie? How much distance is there between it and the intellectual capacity alive and well in the masses, what they actually think? How much distance is there between that lie and both the real and marketed lives of the artists and curators? Does it in fact reside between those two groups, art world and locals? Didn't one group emerge from the other in the first place?

What's clearly brought to bear by the piece is, though it might not be its conscious intention insofar as it is funny, the genocidal mechanized death of industrial production, and the place of that lie of being funny, that particular use of the communication apparatus of language and affective technology, within this production. That's the seed, the brick by brick mental construct, the base that comprehends the superstructure of a contemporary dispersal of the slaughterhouse into the micro-slaughters of public policy and self-discipline we permanently enact, as groups and selves. That's who we are, we say. We said. NP forms, at this juncture. The room is a chamber of death, perhaps not one bit removed from the Nazi gas chambers used throughout Europe in World War II. We know what apparatuses are and do. We sense their astonishing formal variety, its unstoppable, so that what we become is in reference to that transformation that very nearly affects the idea of transformation itself.

In this sense, the sound is crucial. Because the sound of goats dying here must have been intensely loud, easily penetrating to the outside of the slaughterhouse building and most likely echoing into the surrounding population, echoing through the hills. And here I'd like to invoke the profound silences of Hydra, since it is a place that, though it may have contained the industrial artifact of the slaughterhouse, has laws against cars and motorcycles and thereby enjoys a preternatural quiet. The most prominent sounds are of air and sea, domesticated animals, insects, human conversation. There is no airport, no large hotels. It is a miniscule place of some 2,000 year-round residents. Everywhere people go, they walk. After the braying donkeys (used as taxis),

cicadas, barking dogs, and crowing chickens mostly come to rest at about mid-day, a quiet descends on the island that could be imagined as nearly unbearable, that in fact seems miraculous for anyone recently in a city. The most prevalent sound on Hydra after dark is the scrape of a fork on a dinner plate or the clink of a wine glass, sounds that literally carry for blocks. Bringing the goat video into this context thereby underscores the human-like screams that necessarily must have filled the island when the slaughterhouse was fully functioning. The film project, the goat video, functions then as an accusation, a way to underscore how local, everyday populations, raised in such silences, will ignore and thereby abet industrialized violence in their midst. We are left to consider how all this happens even through a de-technologized yet nevertheless bourgeois communion with nature.

But there are multiple contexts and lenses through which to read these same actualities, these same theories. Of note here is the idea that slaughterhouse workers will have represented the particular working-class populations of Hydra, a population represented probably most clearly by the taxi drivers, or donkey drivers, many of whom, unlike the majority of tourist-centered employees on the island, speak little to no English. And then even putting aside the issue of who might be more fluent in English, the general population of Hydra will consist of blue-collar or service jobs, effectively extensions of the working class. I say this mostly since the slaughterhouse project space, even though donated by the municipality, is owned by an international art conglomerate and imports works, "projects," that are typically seen as "high concept" or otherwise removed from working-class concerns. Not to essentialize any one group but the dynamic being referenced is quite common, even cliché. The works that infiltrate the slaughterhouse project space originate in and communicate to the highly educated international art community. They may well be of high quality, but we have to ask in what way they will resonate with the general population of Hydra? There seems to be a tacit assumption that they don't.

At this point, the particular critique the video enacts is instructive. I have already referred to its designation as “funny” and how that self-characterization may be seen as facilitating a relationship with the local population and the general audience of tourists who might attend the show. We might call this the defusing of the general antagonism. There’s a way that showing a goat video in that space and not calling it funny might be seen as far too simplistic or macabre as an actual art show, be seen as something like “bad conceptualism.” But removing the “screen” of this simplistic description the true didacticism of the piece comes to the fore. The intention, the critique the video enacts, is highlighting the way the slaughterhouse, and slaughterhouses in general, necessarily disengage from the particular human qualities of goats, even as those qualities are anthropomorphized. The project wants to bring forward, in the space in which it was destroyed, the animality of goats. It wants to reveal how that construction, that historical truth, that run-down and rebuilt and useless ruin, operates as a recognition of what it needed to be blind to. The project wants to bring to this space a genuine creaturely respect for goats. To engage and enact this mission it cites or appropriates the slaughterhouse and puts in play a critique of its owners and operators, those who were responsible for its daily functioning, those who killed the goats, many of whom likely still live right there on Hydra. Blame is placed on those who made a living working in the slaughterhouse, in fact those who facilitated its operation in any way, all the way to the meat-eating patrons of the local restaurants (and indeed part of this project engaged those establishments with an extension of the installation as follows: “there will be a small intervention on the tables of the cafés on Hydra: customers at these establishments are invited to season their food with “Invisible Dust” sprinkled from a specially created ceramic vessel.”)

Those living souls, or their descendants, are required if ongoing interest in the artwork is to be generated. The project space wants to hold itself to account in their eyes. It plays at being an affront to their wrinkled, wizened collective gaze, which

functions phantasmagorically in their deadly hunt for approval. The actual workers of Hydra might not get to the show, and even if they did they would not feel welcome there, despite the fact that everything conceivable will have been done to produce that sense of welcome, specifically for them. Surely they grasp what it is to be “funny.” But I need to tell you what funny is. I need to tell you that this art is fun. I need to tell you how everyone can do it. Laughter is the opening, the ushering in, of course. We laugh and cross the barrier just on the other side of which lurks the critique. The outsider who never lived there, operating at the pulse of capital, then makes the point that what the nineteenth-century slaughterhouse forgot, the epiphany here, is that yes it forgot the specific beauty of the humanity of the goat. In any case, the artist takes the side of the goats. He says in his interview he tried making his video using goats being kept at still-functioning slaughterhouses, but they were not happy, they weren’t really the best subjects for the project because they seemed depressed. He says he videoed goats in Sweden who weren’t intended to be used for meat and were clearly in a great mood.

We’re all in a great mood. What now is the status of slaughter? That’s a question language seems to repeat for itself. I want to get at the auto-repetition of that question. I think that’s quite possible as long as we keep repeating it. For instance, right now the slaughterhouse has been refurbished to look like the old slaughterhouse it was. But what did it look like new? What does the New Press look like new? Then on top of that as a kind of overlay we broach the bringing in of the international art world conscience. It’s ready to go. The call goes out. The call for site specificity. The art consciousness reads a Wikipedia article. We all go black and blue as the pith of the non-resident bleeds into the water, into our swimming holes. The sea taxi heads off to the “deserted” beach. An art show lasts like one month. In this case, closes in September. I get all these details into a single paragraph. For instance, the art world will have continued its singular control over the animal. It will displace the suffering of the majority of goats for a certain time span, during which the majority of visitors will be told they

need to laugh, going away thinking there were goats there, let it go. The slaughter gets displaced. Every single slaughter is at a distance. Today it will be attentional distance, what's been placed outside of town, down the road where the real goats are, whereas here in the art world consciousness condemnation of the local inhabitants as ciphers for who they grew up with, family, here you have the happy goats for contrast and to make the point of what goats might be without your interference. There is no subject matter devoted to where the goat meat went and where the money came from to buy it, the flow-through to the island circuits of silence and warm water.

Once in while you ask about the status of slaughter, the silence of it. I'm a slaughterer and call myself a slaughterer/d in a slaughterhouse right now. The art world consciousness makes a video of a goat and projects it onto a screen on an interior wall of a slaughterhouse chamber. People who have been given birth to by goats are invited to attend. What happens is that the sounds are then compared to the output of a speaker and all that humanity is turned up loud. The crucial details are the lips, tongue, and teeth of the healthiest of goats, our mothers and fathers. None of the goats are baby goats but they all gorge at disembodied teats. You get it where the scream emanated into the hillside populations who did nothing about what you're getting. You must have been mothered and fathered by the not getting it. The crisp visuals of the screen play perfectly into the naturally cave-like dark, no one needing to turn off the lights in there. You wonder what the goats saw. At one point in the video a goat shoves his nose into another goat's ass hole, then the scene cuts to a goat shoving his nose into the camera lens, a blurry close-up one reflexively shies away from seeing. The overwhelm of technology repeats itself again in the fenced-off structure of the living goats' barn, where the film crew stumbles over extension cords and shows us how to laugh at that too, a cut not made to edit out the backstage banter and the real-world faces of the film crew. What's going to happen to them? What are they doing? Were they flown in for the opening?

Franco Moretti publishes “The Slaughterhouse of Literature” in 2000. Here the violences of exclusion implicit in canon formation are portrayed as subject to remedy by the digital revolution. Distant reading begins to capture what the market had relegated to obscurity, if not perfect oblivion, what the mainstream evolution of taste had “slaughtered.” Moretti speaks of the complete disappearance of “99 percent” of literary writing, citing the fact that there are a mere “200 novels” in the British canon, novels that we now slowly, carefully, and closely read. Doing the math, this percentage puts the total output of British novels at about 20,000 for the entirety of the nineteenth century. Approximating those numbers for today, on a global scale, there are somewhere near 100,000 literary works published each year, so for example the twenty-first century as a whole would produce 10 million such works, all of them added to what was already previously archived. Taking into consideration the British population of the nineteenth century and the global population today, all this puts per capita literary output at 2% in nineteenth century Britain and 1.5% now, globally. To think of a true assessment of these works, to think of a process, a memory, that did not “slaughter” these works only makes sense from a non-human (as we call it) or digital perspective.

Theoretically, close reading denies the multiplicity and sheer mass of output in and for the humanities, which is thereby barred from corporate scaling up, preternaturally useless. It slows us down into workers in the old-school sense. We are handicrafts, veritable human ruins. Our productivity needs updating. In this way I want to associate close reading, just as Moretti does, with what I’m speaking of as slaughter. What it “leaves out” it forgets and by extension kills, savagely. In this way we carry within us ideologies of where and when not simply the text of literature but the text of the world makes its way through to us. These are viscerally exclusionary architectures of sustenance. Our daily awareness has only so much capacity to include the potential products of perception so that collectively there are exclusionary tactics that have been accepted and operate as norms. There is a canon

formation of daily life and it's possible to speak of a silencing or slaughtering of what is not allowed through. Moretti speaks of the silencing or forgetting of works that are most nearly like the works that are finally part of the canon, that these are what is most decisively excluded by the "market" in a long-term sense. In any case, it's possible to see how an affective attentional economy takes shape. Also present in Moretti's article is his own positioning of himself and his theory at a canonical juncture within literary studies, in fact performing a type of slaughter right before our eyes as he focuses on texts entirely by men and dismisses female scholars. Slaughter has its subtleties.

NP63 (B9,1, Wave 1)

I want to speak my way toward a consideration of Benjamin's conception of the feminine, to see if it's a perversion, or an inversion, equally an artifact of reading as anything, a textual gendering or sexuality. Do we blame the text? Something to note is that the fashion convolute falls at nearly the very beginning of the *Arcades*, letter B, and considerations of fashion, even as they consistently reference the masculine, are primarily considerations of the feminine. This argues for the textual nature of gender. Insofar as fashion also reappears again and again as a thematic throughout the *Arcades*, so too the object of desire in that work is feminine sexuality, the subject of Benjamin's thought is women. And it is equally to this degree that the overall conception of the *Arcades* evinces a grappling with ideas of femininity, up to and including the numerous ways "passagen" (Passagen-Werk) equates to the birth canal or birth passage. In what way do we determine that passage is not deprived? How can it have been articulated by a man, an exiled European Jew of the 20s and 30s?

First and foremost in B9,1 it's important to note the performance by the text of the very fetishism that's at issue in B9,1. Reading here—the "decision" to read—is an entering into, a participation in, an opening to the fetish (again, from where exactly? Of course from the fetish, that world...). Note the steady, loud,

obsessive drumbeat of generalization constituted by the word “every” or “each” (“jeder”): “each generation” plus “every fashion” used a total of four times in this brief passage, a heavy-handed framing device, neurotically driven, like any fetish. If generalization is a kind of death, an overlooking of specificity and singularity in preference for what appears to be linkages and commonalities, in preference for totalizing theory, then indeed the passage itself is “radically” in that mode, performs a “ruthless perversion” in that it repeatedly and mechanically locates this death in its very object of study, fashion.

Thus what we are presented with, what is performed, is the fetishized or reified consciousness, from the outset of this passage. Each category of distinction or modality of judgment is compromised by the fetish, including the very idea of judgment itself. When we read a phrase or term such as “each generation” (“jede generation”), we know we are already in the phantasmagoric realm of the fetish. The idea of the generation is thus a figment, a figure. The succession of generations is a figment, a figure. And these equally as much as fashion holds that same value or status. They circulate within the general fetishization in play or at work, in the process of logically constructing itself, even if this is a tortured logic. We come to or arrive at the passage as already in progress, in the state in which it actually is, always already inside the fetish, which is exactly where language resides, where communication rests or activates. And the implication we cannot put aside is that indeed we have come to the text from an elsewhere. In a sense the more the text performs its own status as an artifact of fetishization the more it then highlights its obverse, the mysterious, and perhaps quite material, space between passages, the white void of paper signifying our own “off site” existences, or by extension the realm of contemplation or imagination this fetishized text works to assume. The text is the material container of the assumption of a version of a generalized imagination, a being that the text, perhaps as much as anything else, embodies, contains, implies, or, in truth of fact, gives birth to, provides passage for.

What does the text ask us to do? What does it contain? What life resides in that object? Who goes there? In B9,1 what finds itself born into our readerly, if reified, consciousness is, simply by raising it as subject, “the most radical antiaphrodisiac imaginable.” (Even as we’re asking about the status of already-reified biological birth.) The passage revolves around our ability to hold such an entity in mind, in fact it gives passage to that very entity, in the manner of the progress of fashion itself. The text introduces or incarnates this entity, then, not only as subject but also as object. For here we are asked to go to the absolute ends of the imagination in order to grasp the sequence of generations as fashion is passed from earlier to later. Here a more literal translation of the German, substituting “what just passed away” for “the one immediately preceding it,” provides better clarity. The status of that earlier generation is as the dead body, the lifeless object, the corpse, the inorganic (or no longer organic) object that appears later in the passage. Death itself holds that place of the antiaphrodisiac, the most radical one we can imagine. B9,1 suggests that death itself is that figure, or the way in which death operates in a fetishized economy of thought, understood as pure fashion, that is, operating according to a rubric of femininity or organic emergence.

NP64 (B9,1, Wave 2)

The passage births death as an object of the imagination, as much as that object is the subject of the passage itself. Text brings force to immaterial instruction. It is the work of generations, though appearing as the movement of the fashionable, a change of clothes. Death of course is our future but we have to have it in place as an experience by way of the actual contours of our imagination of the death of those who come before us. We garner that anti-aphrodisiac, which is our own lives, from the lifeless object of the past, or, that is to say, by arranging to experience the past as lifeless object, by arranging our own sense of lovelessness. We place the loveless in a very specific economy of the sign, equally

as much as we place the imagination in that same economy. And placed alongside this version of the imagination, the one that gives birth to death, is judgment itself. The judgment referred to is identical to the radically imaginative (and loveless) consciousness the text has recently invoked, nearly as if the “judgment” were itself the succeeding generation to the imagination, or in a parallel relation. The key sentence, which comes just after mention of the “imagination,” is: “In this judgment”. Thus that judgment, judgment itself, is specifically the anti-aphrodisiac, the imagined. And here a typical Benjaminian tautology enters with the word “annehmen,” translated as “suppose” but that also translates as “to imagine.” Thus judgment and imagination seamlessly swap roles.

There are two additional important points to be made before moving on to the balance of the passage. First, the passage contains a key characterization of the ruin as Benjamin seemed to be using it. The ruin was always a type of death in life, a shell or reminder but one that does still really exist and thus possess a life force, standing in for any object whatsoever, perhaps for “objectivity” itself. In B9,1 the “experience” of a generation takes root or is enlivened by, in just this way, the negative. A “radical anti-aphrodisiac” is still a motive force. Indeed the ruin of the previous generation, of the past itself, forms a limit beyond which even the imagination cannot go. It is a lifeless substance, a corpse, a pure object that determines how we comprehend and experience the present. For instance, we have no idea what death means outside of our backward-looking glance, perhaps a fetish, perhaps an artifact of economic forces, at the temporally absent or disengaged. Of course the ruin is death, but that death is all we can ever know of life. Particularly when we consider materiality, of which text forms at the very least a subset, as universally a ruin, one that is technologically enhanced and carries with it or presupposes the commodity fetish, the implications are many in terms of perceptual environments that are more or less auto-generated.

Second, we have to contend in this passage with the idea that something is attempting to “hit a mark,” or hit well, get something right. The introduction of the radical anti-aphrodisiac and

the sentence in which it appears is seen overall as a judgment that attempts to characterize exactly how fashion works, how generations behave toward one another in terms of fashion's development. The statement here is that the first statement may quite easily be seen or imagined as "off the mark," simply incorrect. We are asked here to imagine both that the statement might be completely untrue, or, and this is more likely, that it might only be partially true, that perhaps the past isn't seen as such a radical negative force, but one that works in an attenuated manner, infiltrating both positive and negative. The mark may have been hit. But certainly we won't be sure, won't be certain, and we need to, and aren't I would say, contend with the in fact radical destabilization that results from that uncertainty, which announces that the positive in itself is either a remnant or an advanced force or indicator of the fetish.

In the midst of this uncertainty, however, almost as if to clear it up, we arrive at the repetitive (and positive, affirmative) "every fashion" clause (which in fact in the German repeats the word "each" rather than "fashion"), drumming away all doubt with the steady beat of declarative statements, each one a new "hit" in itself, such that the passage enacts a nearly physical response or reaction to its own tentativeness, attempting to correct itself. There are a total of five sentences and six clauses up to the end of the passage. As with many of the passages in the *Arcades*, the surface or informational meaning can be taken in one way, the symbolic meaning perhaps in another. The idea is to closely track both at once and note their transformation into each other, which is neither more nor less than an inversion. To track the manner in which one dismantles the other, particularly in light of the fact that the passage overall is a performance of the fetishism that is its central concern, or in light of the fact by buying into and performing that tracking we then do the work of the generations dismantling and emerging out of each other.

NP65 (B9,1, Wave 3)

The first clause—"every fashion is to some extent a bitter satire on love"—justifies or reflects the introduction of the aphrodisiac to the consideration of fashion. Here it's possible to build a network of meanings of "love." There is natural love and there is the love created by the aphrodisiac, which is inorganic, drug-induced. Both of these are found in both "generations," the "just passed" generation—always coming into being and always outside the status of "being" since it has passed—that holds the status of the ruin, and the present generation, which enacts the "bitter satire" on the love exhibited by the previous generation. Thus four categories circulate, (a) the natural love of the present generation, (b) the inorganic love of the present generation, (c) the natural love of the old generation, and (d) the inorganic love of the old generation. The clause here makes the case that "fashion" manifests itself through a mix of these categories at any given time, in fact time itself is constituted by their interplay. Inasmuch as generations are defined in and through fashion, they will be seen to address themselves to the fashions of an earlier era as a natural expression of love that is revealed as in fact inorganic, artificial, or dead. It is that recognition, which is the "bitter satire," of the deadness or inadequate relation between fashion and natural love that, purely through a negative relation, exactly as we get in the form of satire, constitutes the life force, the livingness, indeed the "sex appeal" or aphrodisiac that impels fashion within the contemporary. Insofar as the contemporary gains any traction, its love is the "most profound" or "most radical" inversion of what it perceives as the love of the immediately preceding generation.

Indeed this tactic is "ruthless," ranging through the ruins of the previous generations to uncover every last shred or fragment of what might have been considered natural and calling that merely a fashion, not love but the inorganic, a string of perversions. "In every fashion perversions are suggested by the most ruthless means." The perversions are cataloged. The dead bodies are counted. What is seen through those bodies is precisely the

present moment. The method echoes and finds its parallel precisely in the method of the *Arcades* overall, which constructs its history via citation from the textual body of the past, which as I have mentioned repeatedly is a material past, a physical now beyond which there is no other, no “imaginable,” way to conceptualize the present. Citation as satire is taken account of here, as carving out a space within the already existing, a space that constructs a new world but only by intimating one, by indirection. Indeed the passage constitutes a full theory of the citational as a relation to what we perceive to be the past, the dead, the inorganic.

Here we can begin to consider how the citational operates, a tactic Benjamin so clearly fetishizes in the *Arcades*, one whose repetitive drum beat is nothing if not ceaseless, ruthlessly repetitive, in an encyclopedia of passages clearly intended to cite the infinite nature of information itself. The implication is that the citational takes the “already existing,” what might already have that status of being in the world, and imputes to it a particular status of being dead, not being in the world, hence being inorganic. Once what is being cited takes on that status, it obtains to a certain use value, is subject to the fetish, the general cultural fetish of citation. What citation is primarily concerned with is “dead matter,” not so much anything that might legitimately and truly be dead, but that which is able to be treated as such. For instance, there is no way to know if what is being cited is being accurately cited, if for instance the author is living or dead, if the words accurately reflect what was written, and so on and so on, but what’s true is that the material is in the citational position, which is consistently being characterized in the *Arcades*. In B9,1 that position is “just passed away,” or being “immediately preceding,” which might indicate a whole massive archive of a previous generation or indeed the entirety of historical evidence as a massive ruin, or might indicate anything whatsoever that obtains to the status of being visible or thinkable. Thought in relation to itself is citational, it cites itself in conversation with itself, since what it can think has just passed out the status of being thought,

as soon as it is “held up” to scrutiny, indicating an arm’s length distance of thought from itself.

Any given cited material is consistently the “old life.” But the way we use that cited material is precisely as that negative exposure, the reverse of which by implication characterizes how the present operates. It is only to the extent that we can see that old life as perverse or dead that the present time takes shape. To see what is cited as dead matter means that it obtains to use value, that we can then use it to offset the here and now. A “radical” or “profound” or “thorough” anti-aphrodisiac means that our behavior becomes absolute, “bitter,” in satirical rejection, even as this is also a fashion statement. Yet what satire does is illustrate in perverse detail the thing that is hated. It is those details, and absolutely nothing else, that come to shape and serve as a foil for the new world, the new fashion, the very concept of the new, finally of the organic, of life itself. The new is life in this very particular way, a life that relies in every imaginable detail on the perfectly inanimate or dead, which is everything that is citable. Citation circulates as this move between “generations,” between young and old but also between one work and another. We could indeed rephrase the first sentence of B9,1 as “Each work experiences . . . the one immediately facing it” such that Benjamin the citational worker comes face to face with countless textual fragments of the past, each one its own perversity or dead matter since it is not only inorganic, which at least partly indicates dead matter of paper and binding, but also in most cases pertains to a dead author. Citation then fully inhabits its decontextualized quotation by turning that quotation’s meaning toward its own fetish. It merges, ingesting the true aphrodisiac, with the past to the degree that past and present lose all distinction, starting with the ability to tell which might precede the other. “Every fashion couples the living body to the inorganic world.” The true perversion or fetish begins to take center stage. To this degree, “fashion defends the rights of the corpse.”

NP66 (B9,1, Wave 4)

I'd like to double back a bit in the passage and look at a certain semantic slippage that itself characterizes much of Benjamin's writing and points to how his work carries with it an internal destabilization that itself points to the operation and non-human intention of the commodity fetish. The subject of the passage is initially "the most radical anti-aphrodisiac imaginable" and we have seen how this entity crosses into and through the idea of that imagining existing as itself an objective judgment. The ostensible purpose of the balance of the passage is then to dismantle the tentative nature of that judgment, employing a series of declarative statements. The first statement seems pertinent to the anti-aphrodisiac in saying that fashion is a "bitter satire on love," so the old generation, what has passed, what is dead, may be seen as ridiculous, unrelated, truly dead and unworthy (associated with the inorganic). This love of the older generation is not true love but perverse, and the ways in which it is perverse are enumerated by the current fashion. "[I]n every fashion, perversities are suggested by the most ruthless means."

It is with the next sentence however that this reading is exposed to error, is turned on its head, reversed, even as its overall tenor is one of building a case, of a construction, of a force of logic. The sentence is in the mode of reinforcing the point, offering new and incontrovertible evidence, starting with the phrase "every fashion" ("jede" in the German). Yet rather than saying, "Every fashion stands in opposition to the organic," would we not expect it to say here the "inorganic" (a word used in the next sentence)? To think that fashion was in opposition to the organic would mean among other things that the "bitter satire on love" was in fact a satire on true love itself, or a satire by the present generation of the present generation (where one presumes true love might be experienced). This seems a difficult case to make, though the qualification "to some extent" begins to be more sensible in this context. In any case, exactly within the rhetoric of logic that is instantiating the case that the younger generation turns away, as not containing

life, love, or the organic, from the passed away or older, now that generation as itself part of fashion will take the side of the inorganic. It has made a dialectical flip right before our eyes, a phantasmagoric transmogrification that appears to happen almost as a result of the vehemence or fetish character of that very argument.

The following sentence then modifies the stance further, providing the synthesis to the preceding thesis/antithesis. "Every fashion couples the living body to the inorganic world." This particular sentence in fact documents the merger I have just referred to. Here there are not oppositions or two sides, "anti" or "pro," but a communion, bodies mating, a sexualized universal theory taken account of by fashion, which here seems to be a living body, protean, impossible to pin down. Finally, the passage shifts back, shifts out of or emerges from, this coupling and zeros in on simply "the living," as if at this point we had any sense of what that, those people, might be. To read the passage closely we will have been thrown completely off kilter, though indeed that destabilization may well be what it is to be alive in the first place. So here, to these people, to this generation of confused souls, to the living, fashion will simply make a case, will argue, for rights (recalling the earlier legalistic "judgment"). "To the living, fashion defends the rights of the corpse." Truly what takes place in the passage is a resurrection, perhaps the "most radical imaginable," of the "just passed away" to a position of not only presence but of legal power, which fashion itself will then engage as a representative.

The case has been made, by fashion, but the last stroke of the passage is to invoke the fetish. "The fetishism that succumbs to the sex appeal of the inorganic is its vital nerve." The total rerouting of the passage is complete. The argument's definitive conclusion is that, far from being an anti-aphrodisiac, the corpse, the inorganic, the passed away are the primary locus of "sex appeal" (in English in the German, though the Harvard edition editors do not note this). The lifeblood, German "Lebensnerv" or "life nerve," of fashion is indeed fetishism itself, since the fetish in its very definition is that merger with the inorganic, with the object,

spiritual or otherwise. To jump to a conclusion, the fetishism of the Arcades is the lifeblood of the commodity.

NP67 (B91,1, Wave 5)

It's possible now to return to the idea that this passage starts and stops within the performance of the fetishization that is its very topic. The passage's logical argument and generalizations, even the concept of the "generation" or generalized group of people, are symptomatic of a fetishizing personality disorder. The passage performs its own containment in this way such that we, exactly as its readers, are implicated as co-conspirators, inasmuch as the passage appears to us within and as a body of nominally dead citations—the Arcades Project itself—the totality of which forms the fetish's "succumbing to the sex appeal of the inorganic." My relatively close analysis and reading can't help but be the primary evidence of my own weakness, perversion, and downfall, even as the life of this writing works fully as an inscription on the inside of, within, the anti-aphrodisiac of textuality's dead letter.

The new thing now is NP, whose position vis a vis its institutional casings will be as the present-time generation uncovering as many details as it can of "what just passed away," that is, anything and everything that exists before it gets there/here, what it must both stand in opposition to and recover. All of that inorganic material, which in fact is both the living and the passage to the living, can be seen as the portal through which the newness of a new press is recognized at all. But we also take our own fetishization to heart, as our lifeblood, which in this context means that as much as the local entity or press is wholeheartedly embraced, so too the final instrument or obsession of the fetish is newness itself, which is not the localized (new) press. The final motive and end of NP's commitments reach outside of any realized form or institution and necessitate its radical and "ruthless" interruption, which in effect is a crossing outside of and beyond any previous commitments as if they were in fact earlier generations, as if we had fallen out of love. Again, this has no real difference from

falling in love, but the passages and presses shift into a type of before/after that can legitimately be passage or presses again. And this whole extra-local motivation of what looks like abandonment but is really recovery, which has everything to do with resistance, is such that without it none of the qualities or recognizable possibilities of local engagement would have materialized to begin with. None of this other stuff would be here.

NP68 (Not a discursive formation)

Baudelaire soon forgot the February Revolution. Telling evidence of this fact has been published by Jacques Crépet, in “Miettes baudelairiennes” <Baudelairean Morsels> (*Mercur de France*, vol. 262, no. 894, p. 525), in the form of a review of the *Histoire de Neuilly et de ses châteaux*, by the abbé Bellanger, a review which Baudelaire probably composed at the request of his friend the lawyer Ancelle, and which at the time presumably appeared in the press. There Baudelaire speaks of the history of the place “from Roman times to the terrible days of February, when the château was the theater and spoil of the most ignoble passions, of orgy and destruction.” [J1a,2] [Eiland/McLaughlin translation]

[Baudelaire soon forgot the February Revolution. An instructive testimony to this was published by Jacques Crepet in the “Baudelairian crumbs” *Mercury of France*, 46e year volume 262 No 894 P 525 in the form of a discussion of a “History of Neuilly and its castles”, written by the abbé Bellanger, Baudelaire wrote probably at the request of his friend Ancelle notary and that was probably then published in the press. Baudelaire speaks of the history of the place »from the Roman period until the terrible days of February when the Castle was the theater and the prey of the most ignoble passions, the destruction and the orgy.«] [Google translate]

This needs to be a practice of in effect reading backward from the textually material image created by Benjamin and his ghosts into new discursive formations in the present, in some sense gathering the present by way of these repositories. The simplest interpretive act is crucial and constitutes a way in. This dynamic I have

mentioned before and will probably need to mention again, to infinity. To mention the need for a simple, informational, communicative reading is its own form of preparation, a way to regard the world in front of us. It is both a way into immediacy, a “just the facts” attitude, and a strategy of delay, since what one is up to is put aside, the intention being to resist those “point of it all” statements, even as one feels them percolating and approaching, feels them on the way in, in fact even as one is well aware of their guiding influence. You place a passage from the *Arcades* on display as “exhibit A” and then do whatever is possible to avoid referencing it. The research object is only there as backdrop, safety net, a lesson in what not to do.

How much do I know about the February Revolution? Its centrality to the *Arcades* will have been evident from commentary in blog posts on passages such as D1a,1, referencing the “dust” that settles on or in fact gestates revolutions, which finally resolve into victories for capital and repressive bourgeois values. Here the revolution was one Baudelaire reportedly participated and believed in: according to the notes to the Harvard translation of the *Arcades*, he appeared on the barricades and hence was committed enough to enter the streets in protest. But one of the most notable aspects of the February revolution was its failure, in the sense that middle class opposition was quickly dominated by conservative forces and the founding of the Second Empire. It may well have been a revolution to forget, or at least that institutional forces of history consigned to oblivion.

But in this passage there is confirmation, in the first sentence, that Baudelaire did in fact forget the revolution. It is a firm and direct statement and, once we read through the intervening material in the passage, the evidence for that statement is a citation from Baudelaire’s own writing where he characterizes the “days of February” as “terrible” and seems to be defending the nobility, complaining that their “chateaux” had been invaded by the “ignoble.” We’re left here to draw this conclusion: what must have been a positive experience of protest has, specifically through forgetting or Baudelaire’s moving on to other concerns,

converted into a negative view of those same revolutionary forces.

Perhaps we leave it at that. Perhaps I should, since where we need to arrive is at a discursive formation that might be incarnated as a university press. And perhaps here all along we've been making the case that the university press is not a discursive formation. We seem to be quite far off topic, lost in the characterization of a few days of protest in February 1848 in France and how a nineteenth-century French poet felt about them, read through an early twentieth century cultural and literary critic (le vrai poète). We leave it at this passage's being a mere "note" in an incomplete work. We take this passage for what it says it is and watch for how indeed Baudelaire's views seem to have changed, that he was, turns out, not the revolutionary some may think he is. This understanding of J1a,2 contributes a small portion to a much larger picture, a history of a nineteenth-century architectural formation known as the arcades, precursor of the modern-day department store, perhaps the internet itself.

But then, as I keep rehearsing, there is a move to an elsewhere of the passage. It is not unlike the "otherwise possibility" invoked by Ashon Crawley and discussed in an earlier post. That elsewhere in fact constitutes the rationale for conjoining the two projects of a "close reading" of the *Passagen-Werk* and the formation of the contemporary publication entity as we have been discussing it. As it happens, that elsewhere cannot exist without, is formed and portrayed by, what arrives with us as text in the Arcades, and insofar as we watch the nuance of that arrival we delineate a present-time manifestation of material guidelines for organizational formation. In some sense we provide evidence for those guidelines, realizing how they have already been incarnated before the exact initial moment of their incarnation, realizing that their first moment of being can only hold that "firstness" insofar as it works derivationally in this sense. Again, the university press is not a discursive formation (nor is the university).

I want to propose that the last sentence of the passage, the citation from Baudelaire, does not support the first sentence of the

passage. It is in the “role” of research, scholarly or textual evidence, but in fact works to undo that for which it is positioned to be a support. It thus both supports, through a kind of erroneous logic, and dismantles. The fact of its contradictoriness placed Benjamin in the role of theater director, since, without logic, performance comes into its own, as irreducible. He raises the specter of the simple statement then plays out the implications of needing to provide evidence or proof. But this is not a simple or in any way obvious project in itself, but one that happens (a kind of Happening) by way of a series of subtleties related to the language of objectivity, which happens to be the language of remembering to begin with. What’s being proposed is an unfolding relation between memory and forgetting, between actuality and dream, and the position of political configurations as part of that context or transversal of time and understanding. As in many places in the Arcades, what is structurally important is the idea of the dream or the literary, a position held by the poet Baudelaire, and the multiplicity of ways it intersects a project of objective proofs, intersects the tactics employed and the assumptions and underlying rationales of and for those tactics. Technologies of citation come to the fore. The world is constituted by the declarative statement followed by an architecture of evidential performance, or a dance of carefully getting it right, really a series of feints, weaving through modalities of publicational authority, authors, books, journals, presses, topical contexts, all redounding to an accumulating mood of conviction, until finally a coup de grace, a quote that can’t but seal the deal. We must continue.

I’ll point out that, what’s likely already obvious, by recognizing these aspects of the passage we enter the exilic community of elsewhere, we enter a kind of larger or extra-textual topological resistance that is the same as that at the heart of alternative publication and exhibition strategies, which themselves redound to and pass(age) through these very same dialectical textual formations. This is a complex matter that in fact exceeds the very text I am writing but it is one (I believe) we obtain to, possess the possibility of approaching, by “living on,” continuing a reading,

actually participating in the remove of analysis, in a movement of consciousness that does as much. I referred to a breach in an earlier post, and this is it again. This is the non-acceptance of the status of a passage in the *Arcades* as merely a “note.” We get on both sides of the issue, which as we quickly realize is exactly what’s happening in front of us, the *Arcades* itself as viewing itself as a note at the same time as it breaches that status, as it were self-critiquing its way out of it.

For it is that middle material in the passage that characterizes its overall impression as much as anything else. We note how this material is in fact constituted by one citational “portal” after another, in a hunt for evidence of Baudelaire’s forgetting of the revolution. To list them: the publication by Jacques Crépet; the appearance of that publication in the *Mercur de France* (and here we note the extensive reference information, “vol. 262, no. 894, p. 525”); the “form of a review”; the context of the history written by abbé Bellanger; the actual review by Baudelaire from which the quote is taken; the context of the request/commission for a review by “the lawyer Ancelle;” the “probable” appearance of this review in the press. The specifics of each of these valences of access to or arrival at “evidence” might be discussed (here perhaps giving way to another blog post on the function of the “press,” of publication, as documentary citational portal of informational content but also, as we’ll come to see, being “of the body”) but for now one thing to perhaps settle on is that the best possible descriptor for the multitude of colliding and interpenetrating forms and figures is found in the quote from Baudelaire: “orgy.”

As I’ve suggested previously, and this is of a piece with the interpretation of the passage as a whole, if we allow into our interpretation the idea that Benjamin was performing a kind of citational orgy with the passage, we then need to take the step of asking exactly what use he is “in fact” making of the Baudelairean text to begin with, when he cites it. Since of course we admit that neither Baudelaire nor his later scholarly interlocutors will have had this particular “usage” of the citation in mind. Benjamin comes to inhabit the text in a certain way, and what the *Arcades* affords

us is the ability to discuss in what way that inhabitation takes place. Benjamin studies is all about how we engage or speak to this particular brand of appropriation. What is being done here? Is Benjamin completely, nearly criminally, re-routing the original meaning of this “evidentiary” moment or text of what must be described as one of his most cherished objects of study, Baudelaire? What does it say of the present if in fact the past can be abused in such a way? Is Benjamin doing something as pedestrian as saying nothing can be said of anything, that evidence does not exist?

Much could probably be made of the fact that what we should likely call, using a Benjaminian term, a “phantasmagoria” of intermingling and interlinking publication strategies, formats, contexts, and specifically scholarly, textual portals of the foundation of objective “evidence” is metaphorically associated with the bodily free-for-all of an orgy. One should probably oneself make much of the implications of such an implication. For it certainly holds up, and becomes of a piece with a critique of the Arcades overall, any reading of which we will immediately admit is an orgy of citational practice, the macrocosmic version of it, with J1a,2 (and so, so many others) being a microcosm. In fact, this becomes a formal insight unlike any other, where objective historiography is not only entirely at stake, but given the lie, at least for what it proposes to be, in terms of evidence gathering and the like. We should flatly acknowledge that one of the basic working terms of Benjaminian cultural critique is that scholarly objectivity is debauchery. This is an idea from which we can actually work backward, as it were, through this passage, to “fill in the blanks” of the analogy, of the metaphor, the allegory that finds its constant activation in the Arcades.

We need to approach and read through this allegory, what our relation to it happens to be. Such an emergence of a readerly consciousness might not happen right away, but (I believe) it can be pieced together, layer upon layer, perhaps, of textual bodies. Which way do we turn? What am I re-memorizing in this interpretive incarnation I am logically “proposing”? The time stamp

keeps shifting. What we're talking about here is that, for these "notes," we are in the process of acknowledging a level of craft and intentionality that radically resets, first of all, the notion of "Benjaminian" criticism, but also resurfaces a radicality of the *Arcades* that is still nowhere near any type of fruition, even ignoring, forgetting, the fact that it unequivocally bars itself from scholarly treatment (and I'm justly accused, even as I'm looking for a way out, of contributing to the infinite number of blanket statements made about the *Arcades*). One of the main problems with the translation of the title of Benjamin's manuscripts as "The Arcades Project" is that it loses, from the German *Passagen-Werk*, the word "werk," which needs its own entire *discursus* that builds on its appearance here as well as in essays such as "The Task [i.e. work] of the Translator" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," and indicates that precisely this building up of various layers of citation is that "work" of this reading, "werk" also translating as "act," "creation," "work of art," "factory," "labor," and so on.

To continue: the concluding citation in J1a,2 does not indicate that Baudelaire "forgot" the February Revolution. The "evidence" here is, to the contrary—evidence working specifically against itself—that he remembered it, and very precisely. Because in this citation he is in fact describing the revolution in detail and placing it quite specifically in a historical continuum, regardless of whether he characterizes it as "terrible," which characterization again is not forgetting it. The passage, then, sets itself up with its opening declarative statement to offer evidence of that statement, to prove it, but what ends up happening is just the opposite. The passage disproves its opening statement; the passage in effect, precisely through its citational layering, works or enacts the "forgetting" of that first statement. It buries it. What happens is that the textual mention of the forgetting of the "February Revolution" is itself forgotten, by the end of the passage, inasmuch as it is flipped on its head. The evidentiary move to substantiate that disappearance contained in forgetting in fact works to re-surface, even in a dialectally inverted state, what it proposes is gone.

The passage in many ways becomes about historical evidence of any kind, in particular perhaps how a revolution is documented or maintains its relevance. Indeed much could be written on Benjamin's working concept of revolution throughout the *Arcades*, all the way to the *Arcades* itself being a revolution, a "Copernican revolution in historical perception" (K1,2), as Benjamin put it in convolute K. It is through the carefulness of the building of a case, through the objective specificity of compiling evidence, through the "orgy" of objectivity, that the original object becomes obscured, elided, forgotten, inverted, reversed, contradicted, and "destroyed." Couched within, then, and at the heart of that grand and noble "chateaux" of scientific and legalistic objectivity is the stage-by-stage dismantling of its very concept, an imperial "Roman" house that becomes invaded by barbarians, what is exactly outside of law, "ignoble," in many ways the specifically revolutionary subject, which is here both contained and brought to recognition, forgotten and remembered. Our methods of remembering, of constructing facts, are paradoxically "passionate" affairs whose direct outcome is not only the contradiction of what must be proved true, but its consignment to oblivion. All this constitutes the elsewhere of the passage, of our passage as readers/passengers into the passage, into an embodied assessment of what we are doing as readers, with such embodiment serving as the opposite or antidote to textual exegesis.

But there are many threads and themes that come into play, exceeding the discursive format of this section, or anyway my ability to wrangle them into straightforward prose. It's possible to restart, for instance in another post. But it's also important to note, quite briefly, that a major goal of the work of NP and its underlying study is not to generate wave after wave of text, of commentary, but to turn insight directly toward the "outside world," to build and engage in a sociality of knowledge that is "more accurate." The hypothesis of the project is that the *Arcades* is a blueprint for such activity, and so astonishingly constantly, we must recall, never forget, that neither the *Arcades* nor the university are a discursive formation. That is our revolution. That

activity, that passivity and passive/active emergence of the symbolic through the informational and vice versa, is what we're investigating, proving, forgetting. So as much as we're keen to "get to" these insights, to assess the text, our result is the bodily in the present, the social, the community, where the present is valued, for which we take already designated forms of capital to be equally as much a guide, even as we glimpse that same revolution through these already existing forms. As in K1,2, discourse has heretofore been built on the "fixed point" conception of history (all discourse being historical discourse), with now the hunt in some sense being for the "dialectical reversal" within that point. It is a relation to facts, with in a particular way history being determined by the now, rather than a determination of what happened "back then."

And we can again pick up the thematic thread introduced above of what exactly Benjamin is doing with citation, using just this passage as a guide. What we're doing is delineating a network of tactics employed in the *Arcades* that theoretically have their parallel in the formation of extra-textual or worldly consciousness on both an individual and collective level. Indeed this "zone" of discussion of the *Arcades* is one of the most significant and deserving of extensive treatment. For what we're witnessing (our status as witnesses permanently under interrogation) is an attempted documentation that both obviously fails and succeeds, a microcosmic attempt that we are clearly meant to model as the larger movement of any attempt at documentation, to model as the very concept of the document, textual yes, but specifically at that place where the textual doubles or reveals itself as the image. By living that small piece of history, Baudelaire will have been in the position of documentarian of the revolution. I want to come back to what it might mean to document a revolution, but for now we can note insofar as Baudelaire's work, quite specifically as a literary figure, is the work of documentary, the moment it gets out of the gate here it manages to contradict itself, to cross and cancel itself, as a forgetting. One of the points of the commentary here is that the very kernel of the evidentiary

effort to document is a forgetting, which is the overt and main subject of this passage, a subject the passage itself, Benjamin himself, goes on here to attempt to verify, offering a panoply, an orgy, of “telling evidence”, modalities of documentation that work to prove that opening declaration but, as we have seen, specifically work to subvert it. Indeed the process of documentation is so elaborate here that over the course of our reading process, and the point is that this is the actual effect of reading, that thing that was the object of the documentation, forgetting, is itself forgotten and contradicted. What is illustrated here, through our very reading process, of course entirely personal, internal, emotional, perhaps an “ignoble passion” in that it tracks this “orgy,” through the theater of citation in the house of our minds, what is on display as a kind of counter-revolution that has already been forgotten and buried is that the entire apparatus of legalistic evidentiary documentation, that cultural activity of vast implication, has as its primary effect the denial or “destruction” of that which it loudly, declaratively proclaims to offer proof. Forgetting here, and by implication the modality of the literary as well, is in this way a dialectical envelope that to an objectivist fantasy functions as “spoil.”

But still we want to continue a look at citation and do something like indicate the implied subject position of the citer, invoker, reader, writer, documentarian, historian, poet (how could a historian possibly be a poet? The answer seems to be in front of us, in the role of the document in a time of revolution, or in a time that is decidedly not revolutionary, that has forgotten revolution.). Specifically what is being done here is that a quote from a review written by Baudelaire is taken to be evidence that he “forgot” the February Revolution. As we have noted, that quote in fact proves the opposite, it proves that he remembered the revolution, simply in a particular way. This contradiction or seemingly unintended use is of course something we run into all the time. A good term for it is “shabby scholarship,” inaccurate, failing at its own documentary impulse. But what we’re far more concerned to point out is exactly how this otherwise reading

of the passage works its way into and through the diction and positionality of the citation itself. For as has been shown when we read the word “orgy” it now seems obvious that it will have, in addition to its direct informational meaning indicating actual historical events, we now see that this particular word is referring back in this passage to a phantasmagoria of documentation or performed “objectivity.” This otherwise meaning, which forms our exilic NP community, is nowhere to be found in the intent of quotation itself. It is imported by Benjamin specifically into the passage in its very role as objective historical documentation. It lurks inside it.

The implications of this subjective positioning begin to unfold, for what’s manifest here is that Benjamin as author is resituated within the subjectivity of another author insofar as that other subjectivity is assumed to manifest as part of this piece of textual evidence. Like the flaneur, “Benjamin”, and indeed he is always under erasure in this way, always crossing himself out, enters the crowd of historical personages in this way, in order to make his own (non)point, to become himself and nobody all at once, making a material, textual point that the self obtains exactly to the extent that it denies or forgets itself, can become wholly other, give itself up. His citation is a forgetting of himself in the present in order to offer evidence of a historical declaration or point, but in the time of that point being made it flowers into what may be said to be an inaccuracy, which all the while qualifies as its accuracy to the importation of seemingly alternate meanings.

There is little the university press setup conveys if not a perception of objectivity, of offering up what has been agreed to be of value. What I’m saying here is that this objectivity is two things: first, an outcome of the total administration of the contemporary university insofar as it manifests digitally; second, it in fact runs counter to the liberatory affordances of that same version of digitality. If the contemporary university is a digital artifact, it manifests in these ways. If digitality is a manifestation of the citational structure of language, the university is a

linguistic artifact in these ways. What we have in the *Arcades* is the self as the phantasmagoric theater of authorship and it is what I've been calling this otherwise reading that actually opens out to or treats that dynamic. That reading becomes the only way there, the only possible passage to what the *Arcades* is in fact doing, but the moment we let the *Arcades* manifest as itself in that way, we are firmly on the track and trajectory of our own author function, we are implicated in every way. And it's at that point as well that we might be welcome to deny an otherwise reading. It's "too much work." We need to fall back. But we have also to acknowledge that our fallback point, nothing more nor less than an informational reading or worldview, is thoroughly accounted for within the structure of the *Arcades*, starting from its arrangement as an encyclopedia and frequent self-characterization as a collection of mere notes, or in this case perhaps these "Baudelairian morsels." This the truly radical, shimmering double-bind of Benjamin's oeuvre.

My Semblance, My Brother: Reading the Flaneur in *The Arcades Project*

So I was takin' a walk the other day, and I seen a woman—a blind woman—pacin' up and down the sidewalk. She seemed to be a bit frustrated, as if she had dropped somethin' and was havin' a hard time findin' it. So after watchin' her struggle for a while, I decide to go over and lend a helping hand, you know? "Hello, ma'am, can I be of any assistance? It seems to me that you have lost something. I would like to help you find it." She replied: "Oh yes, you *have* lost something. You've lost . . . your life." [Gunshot]
—Kendrick Lamar, "Blood" (2017)

This calls for a work whose urgency is still hardly grasped.
—Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1* (1994)

We are all chimeras.
—Donna Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985)

What kind of entity is the flaneur in the *Arcades*?¹ Is it a man, or a woman? Is it a scrap of language? A gun? Is it a historical figure or a mere abstraction? I want to speak here about what the flaneur might be, but I also want to acknowledge a certain flanerie in the desire to speak itself, in the very reading of this figure. I want to bring forth the constitutive flanerie of language. Are such things possible? How do I write and read a text at the point at which writing and reading are implicated? Have I already failed? Is that aporia the actual relevance of the flaneur, the thing to which the figure, the form, the conception of the flaneur provides access?

The characterization of the flaneur here will be recursive, a performance of reading itself. Our access point is in fact convolute M, “[The Flaneur],” in the *Arcades*, but it could perhaps be anywhere, if in fact our reference is to an “outside the text.”² But of course this begs the question: what is this text in relation to which we might possibly be “outside”? We’ll break in to the text then, with no other intention than to break out. The flaneur is that fugitive figure, an outlier and outlaw, and the text beyond which we locate him is: the crowd. There is no flaneur without a crowd to pass through, and as many shapes as the flaneur takes in the *Arcades*, the crowd takes just as many. We break into the text at M21,1:

Description of the crowd in Proust: “All these people who paced up and down the seawall promenade, tacking as violently as if it had been on the deck of a ship (for they could not lift a leg without at the same time waving their arms, turning their heads and eyes, settling their shoulders, compensating by a balancing movement on one side for the movement they had just made on the other, and puffing out their faces), and who, pretending not to see so as to let it

1. The project, on which Benjamin worked from about 1927 until his death in 1940, was first published in German in 1982. Benjamin referred to the work as “the theater of all my struggles and all my ideas.”

2. Keeping Derrida’s remark that “there is no outside the text” clearly in view.

be thought that they were not interested, but covertly watching, for fear of running against the people who were walking beside or coming towards them, did, in fact, butt into them, became entangled with them, because each was mutually the object of the same secret attention veiled beneath the same apparent disdain; their love—and consequently their fear—of the crowd being one of the most powerful motives in all men, whether they seek to please other people or to astonish them, or to show them that they despise them.” Marcel Proust, *A l’Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (Paris), vol. 3, p. 36. [M21,1]

We want to follow a process of uncovering the meaning of this text, and I’ll say now that that immaterial process of reading and recognition is posited throughout the *Arcades* as the constitutive nature of material itself: it is where both spirit and matter coincide, change places, exchange roles. The crowd is found nowhere other than in physicality, and our location of this crowd, our filtering through it, is inherently “violent,” cast within a dialectical machinery. To continue with this excerpt then, we see how “all these people,” designated by the opening comment as a “crowd,” are engrossed as a group in a tragicomic physicality of dialectical responsiveness, passing through each other and intermingling as any movement is compensated “by a balancing act” with some other movement. But even with the elaborate avoidance tactics, the members of the crowd still “butt into” each other, in fact become “entangled” with each other, an entanglement that is the effect of an immaterial force, their own attentiveness to each other.³ Through their attentiveness, an extension of their negotiation of physical proximity, they draw on and absorb one another through an affectivity of love and fear that is “one of the most powerful motives in all men.” While there is a performance of objectivity, of being distinct individuals, there is beneath this

3. As Ian Hodder writes, “Entanglement is compounded by conceptual abstractions and bodily resonance.” (206). *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationship between Humans and Things*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

surface a subjective desire for de-individualization. The “secret attention” and the “apparent disdain” are the “same” in all members of the crowd. The flaneur will pass among this crowd, but it’s important to continue mapping our reading process here and uncovering the progressive layers of referentiality in Benjamin’s presentation of language.

I want to note how the crowd is circumscribed by a built environment. The first is the large, stable structure of the retaining “seawall,” a public construction that holds back the natural force of the ocean. This wall is then metaphorically contrasted with the quite unstable and undulating “deck of a ship,” on which we should imagine the crowd sloshing back and forth as they butt into each other and intermingle. Even as they promenade along the wall, they also in a sense ride, “up and down,” the surface of the water, living out the rise and fall of the waves as they circulate within the structure of the ship. It’s useful here to cite a nearby passage, M21a,2:

The most characteristic building projects of the nineteenth century—railroad stations, exhibition halls, department stores (according to Giedion)—all have matters of collective importance as their object. The flaneur feels drawn to these “despised, everyday” structures, as Giedion calls them. In these constructions, the appearance of great masses on the stage of history was already foreseen. They form the eccentric frame within which the last privateers so readily displayed themselves. (See K1a,5.) [M21a,2]

The seawall would have been a building project on a mass public scale, with “collective importance” as its object. It parallels the “railroad stations, exhibition halls, department stores,” as well as the arcades themselves, the glass-covered promenades on which Benjamin’s text is modeled. An important aspect of these structures here however is the way they are the product of (capitalistic and egotistical) foresight. The nature of the crowd is in some sense pre-ordained by the built environment, which supply another element within which the crowd, and hence the flaneur, operate and interact. This “thing” (to again cite Hodder) by which

they are defined and in which they are physically contained—and which protects them from nature, in some sense defines the contours of the natural world—predicted their arrival in the mode of an infrastructural logic, space of anticipation, or “technological unconscious,” as described by Nigel Thrift, “whose content is the bending of any cognitive inputs, a pre-personal substrate of guaranteed correlations, assured encounters, and therefore unconsidered anticipations” (213).⁴ What is happening here as well is that distinctions between ego or individual and collective begin to recede, since it is the “privateer” who makes the collective frame in his own image, eccentrically, bringing the masses onto the stage of history according to his own will. Hence the flaneur does not appear as either individual or member of the crowd but someone or something that circulates between and among the two forces.

To return to M21,1, we can continue our reading—in some sense the progress of our embodiment as flaneurs—by emphasizing two additional points. First, highlighting again the notion that the seawall (and in many respects the ship deck) are stand-ins for the communal structures of the Paris arcades themselves, we then extrapolate to the book that is the *Arcades*.⁵ We engage here in a

4. Nigel Thrift, *Knowing Capitalism*, Sage, 2005. Thrift also cites Tim Ingold as stating that “the environment of persons is no more reducible than is their organic existence to pure molecular substance. It is not merely physical, and it is certainly not blank.”

5. Here I’d like to point out that, contrary to the explicit and implicit statements by the vast majority of Benjamin commentators, *The Arcades Project* exceeds any designation as simply a “collection of notes” toward some other project. It is structurally constituted by its character as a labyrinth and by the “poetic act” of negotiating that labyrinth. Two consecutive passages bear out this theory quite clearly, M9a,4 and M9a5:

“To leave without being forced in any way, and to follow your inspiration as if the mere fact of turning right or turning left already constituted an essentially poetic act.” Edmond Jaloux, “Le Dernier Flaneur,” *Le Temps* (May 22, 1936). [M9a,4]

“Dickens . . . could not remain in Lausanne because, in order to write his novels, he needed the immense labyrinth of London streets

kind of allegorical reading of reading itself, where “all these people” are in fact “all these passages.” the *Arcades* is of course a vast collectivity of passages that consists almost entirely of the voices of other people, in the form of citations. It is a “collective structure” created by Benjamin, bringing these “great masses on the stage of history” through his role as “author” or “privateer.” What the Proust passage is an allegory for is the interaction of these passages, how they intermingle and co-constitute each other through thematic links and symbolic connection. The passages “butt into” and become semantically “entangled” with one another throughout the book. Like the individuals and crowds being referenced, they exist both individually and as a collective, making clear the convergence of linguistic constructs, material structures, and human personality and behavior. In this context flanerie comes to have multiple locations, within Benjamin himself as creator but within any given reader as well. The network of meanings coincides with and is superposed with a built environment that is at once historical, literary, and taking place within our own minds, the implication being that our reading of passages, and passage through reading, is as much reflected in material constructs as it will have been in any “past” we might encounter.

where he could prowl about continuously. . . . Thomas De Quincey . . . , as Baudelaire tells us, was ‘a sort of peripatetic, a street philosopher pondering his way endlessly through the vortex of the great city.’” Edmond Jaloux, “Le Dernier Flaneur,” *Le Temps* (May 22, 1936). (M9a,5)

As with Proust, the association of any given literary figure with the flaneur continues here. But the “turning right or turning left” is obviously associated with the experience of navigating a labyrinth, envisioned as the city streets, as the labyrinth of the crowd itself. It seems overwhelmingly clear that *The Arcades Project* is set up as such a labyrinth, intended to be navigated in precisely this manner. Of course this does not mean it is not also a collection of notes, and indeed passages often reference their ephemeral nature (eg. m1,1), but this is a considerably different sense of the word “note.”

But this reading falls short if indeed we fail to expand our notion of the crowd into what we could say is the “ocean” of the historical past, as the citational format invites to us to do. It is clear throughout the *Arcades* that the word “crowds” always invokes this wider conception, such that the present is always infiltrated by and negotiating both the ruins of defunct structures and the ongoing impact of the dead, a material and immaterial impact that, again, consistently destabilizes the very distinction between the two. The linguistic practice of citation consistently broaches notions of space and time to expand the “crowd” exponentially. This circulation of all possible citational “particles” is the implied ocean in the Proust citation in M21,1 and the true substrate of the *Arcades*, the ground from which it is constantly arising and receding.⁶ M20,2:

6. I'll point out in this context that the use of bold type to distinguish citations in the *Arcades* as published in English by Harvard University Press seems utterly random. For example, Y6a,4 (not bold) vs. Y6a,6 (bold): there is effectively an equal amount of commentary and citation in each, both being primarily citation. It's as if the editors were well aware of how tenuous the distinction between commentary and citation was and then distributed the emphasis scattershot. But indeed it's a reading of the book, a window into the editorial apparatus that's been applied to the work that is the *Arcades*. It is an intervention into Benjamin's text, which according to any interpretation he meticulously planned. The editors drape their conception of what is and is not a citation all through the book, giving the impression of a clear-cut oscillation. As we can see in the translator's foreword, the bold text derives from the German edition of the *Arcades*, where a larger typeface was used to designate “Benjamin's reflections in German,” or, the commentary, and a smaller typeface “for his numerous citations in French and German.” Again, “the larger type was used for entries containing significant commentary by Benjamin.” Thus Rolf Tiedemann, the editor of the German edition, must have either introduced or at least approved of this technique of visually assigning one role or the other to certain pieces of text. The translators of the current edition, while they note that all this is “without textual basis in Benjamin's manuscript” (!), go ahead and maintain the technique, only now using the bold text

“London Bridge.” “A little while ago I was walking across London Bridge and I paused to contemplate what is for me an endless pleasure—the sight of a rich, thick, complex waterway whose nacreous sheets and oily patches, clouded with white smoke-puffs, are loaded with a confusion of ships. . . . I leaned upon my elbows. . . . Delight of vision held me with a ravenous thirst, involved in a play of a light

rather than text of larger or smaller size to divide up commentary and citation, assigning bold to “citation.” They say that using bold avoids the “hierarchical implication” of “privileging” “Benjamin’s reflections over his citations,” but in fact that’s not the entire issue: as one can see in the text itself, the issue is distinguishing commentary and citation at all. Obviously it’s not that the translators have no sense of how commentary and citation merge, but they do allow this massive formal element of the book as published to go forward, not only misleading readers into thinking that commentary and citation are distinct but not, as I’ve mentioned above, doing a very good job of it! To be fair, the translators state that “what Benjamin seems to have conceived was a dialectical relation—a formal and thematic interfusion of citation and commentary.” This is quite true, but given this why let stand the deeply misleading use of bold for “citations,” if in their dialectical relation to commentary they become by definition indistinguishable from commentary? “Seem” is troublingly tentative, and they then again tentatively reference J75,2 as a way to draw out or expand what they mean by this interfusion. But we look at that passage to find a Fourierist characterization of work not as inauthentically exploitative but as a form of children’s game play: “all places [both citation and commentary] are worked by human hands, made useful and beautiful thereby; all, however, stand, like a roadside inn, open to all.” Here, the “act would be kin to the dream,” not separated from it, as in inauthentic labor. The passage itself is in the mode of commentary (and not in bold), though in fact it is a citation of Fourier and Baudelaire (the last unacknowledged, as the translator’s point out). The passage itself is perhaps thus an illustration of exactly the problem of working (an inauthentic labor), and asking the reader to work, to bring an inauthentic distinction between citation and commentary across the whole of the *Arcades*. We are left with the impression throughout the *Arcades* of a misperception or misunderstanding by the translators and editors of the very thing that is the defining characteristic of the entire project.

of inexhaustible richness. But endlessly pacing and flowing at my back I was aware of another river, a river of the blind eternally in pursuit of [its] immediate material object. This seemed to be no crowd of individual beings, each with his own history, his private god, his treasures and his scars, his interior monologues and his fate; rather I made of it—unconsciously, in the depths of my body, in the shaded places of my eyes—a *flux of identical particles*, equally sucked in by the same nameless void, their deaf headlong current pattering monotonously over the bridge. Never have I so felt solitude, mingled with pride and anguish.” Paul Valéry, *Choses tues*, pp. 122–124. [M20,2] (*italic in original*)

While the built (and contaminated and corrupted) environment of the present, of London Bridge, is full of implication and sensation, it is overwhelmed by the infusion of the vast crowds of historic potential. This is indeed the “landscape” of the opening Mallarmé epigraph for convolute M, “A landscape haunts, intense as opium.” Again, the “particles” are not only the individual—and deindividuated—souls of the collective but the individual citations and passages in the literary and historical production of the *Arcades*, each also functioning as “dialectical images,” or material compositions that open on to historical truth but that also enable that truth to materialize as the present. Passages again and again treat this dynamic in some form or another, as for instance with M20a,2:

Beneath the roofs of Paris: “These Parisian savannahs consisting of roofs leveled out to form a plain, but covering abysses teeming with population.” Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin*, ed. Flammarion, p. 95. The end of a long description of the roof-landscapes of Paris. [M20a,2]

This passage immediately precedes the Proust passage quoted above, M21,1, so that the theme of “abyss” is echoed in the vision of the ocean beyond the seawall. But again here the built environment, now the roofs of Paris, or, that is, Paris, the city itself, is seen as a container of the living multitude that is the Parisian population. At this stage in the flâneur convolute however we understand the crowd, the idea of population, to also encompass

the no longer living. These are the true “abysses teeming with population.” This crowd is not anchored to one moment in time or another, not anchored to any particular city. Here is a force that, as with the Valéry citation, emotionally overwhelms its perceiver with both a heightened sense of life itself but also a kind of loss of consciousness, as the root of one’s individuality is dispersed into a transhistorical collective. This is the act of reading, a relinquishing of consciousness into the linguistic flux of citation, since all language is citation in the way that built structures are these “eccentric frames” (M21a,2). We note how the Balzac quote is in some sense a climactic moment, the “end of a long description,” and indeed the idea of surface, skin, skein, is reflected in the book’s very title, *La Peau de chagrin*.⁷ And the architected environment, the network of the city, is metaphorized, here as elsewhere, in natural terms—the savannah, the plain, the skin/peau in the Balzac title—calling into question the status of literary language in relation to the informational “descriptions.” Here our outline of the flaneur, for whom figures like Balzac and Proust are in many ways ciphers, takes the shape of one who might use or access language to achieve these literary pathways into alternative visions of denotative history.

Much of what we’ve discussed so far relates to the Deleuzian notion of assemblage, as discussed by Manuel DeLanda:

Assemblages have a fully contingent historical identity. . . . Because the ontological status of all assemblages is the same, entities operating at different scales can directly interact with one another,

7. It’s important throughout the *Arcades* to acknowledge the linguistic status of bibliographic information. Book titles, author names, the names of publishers, place of publication, dates, even it seems volume and page numbers, achieve the status of portals into the same citational substrate as any other modality of language that arises in a passage. The Benjaminian vision of the material of the book, the status of any bit of language, the status of documentation, exists parallel to and integrated with the fluidity and transparency of other concepts, like “crowd” or “flaneur.”

individual to individual. . . To properly apply the concept of assemblage to real cases we need to include, in addition to persons, the material and symbolic artifacts that compose communities and organizations: the architecture of the buildings that house them; the myriad different tools and machines used in offices, factories, and kitchens; the various sources of food, water, and electricity; the many symbols and icons with which they express their identity. The day-to-day practices of neighbors and co-workers take place in well-defined locales populated by heterogeneous material and expressive objects, so any concrete community or organization, when treated as an assemblage, must include these locales explicitly. (*Assemblage Theory*, 19–20)

As we've seen in passages such as M21a,2 above, Benjamin's crowd operates within a machinery that is nearly identical to what DeLanda depicts here. The built, the social, and the symbolic filter through individual and collective identity almost seamlessly, particularly when we highlight the citational, since when we take the linguistic entity of the citation into account it reveals, in this core translatability of language, the merger of authorship with the disappearance of that same authorship, the merger of historical personages with the living present, the merger of the idea of human population with the population of available meanings from which to cite or translate.

I'd like to return to M21,1 to open further this citational dimension of the discussion before looking at other elements of how the crowd and the flaneur co-mingle and co-constitute each other, how we can bracket a distinct though relational identity of the flaneur. As readers, we must note the particular intertextuality and cognitive textual world that Benjamin puts in play as the core performance of the *Arcades*, as history itself, as historiography. This reading, this absorption and projection, is how we come to know the flaneur. We've looked at M21,1 from a number of perspectives, but this additional angle exists at once at the most tactile surface level and at an impenetrable depth. It is the polyvalent textuality of the Benjaminian citation. M21,1, really any "particle" or passage in the vast encyclopedia of the *Arcades*, is

something material that Benjamin presents as an example of the overall thrust of the topic of a convolute, of this convolute M. In this case he detaches from the book *A l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleur* by Proust a citation that of course he then inserts within his own argument (indirect argument, to be sure, yet all the more cogent for its indirectness) for a certain status of the crowd and the flaneur. He frames the citation as a "description of the crowd in Proust" and yet the informational mode of objective "description" is also upended by the status of Proust's text as literature, a figurative use of language. And this destabilization is prelude, an opening act, to what we will witness as the citation progresses, since what we imagine and emulate (a requirement of reading) here is two things: (a) the scene in which Benjamin sits and physically copies out the passage from the volume of Proust, and (b) his own reading, which infiltrates, a potentially violent act, Proust's text with the thematics that are operative in the *Arcades*. For instance, Proust would not have been thinking, when he mentioned the seawall, of the myriad implications of communal building structures, as discussed above, that the presence of this text in the *Arcades* imports; nor would Proust have considered, say, the particular way his text would enact a butting into and entangling with other fragmentary texts. As we have seen, even the rudimentary notion of the "crowd" is taken in a number of directions Proust would not have engaged. But along with this idea of the act of reading and citation as the imputing of outside meanings, in some sense we can say that it's also true that Proust *would* have imagined or intended such things, and Benjamin's activation of his text, as with the vast majority of citation and commentary in the *Arcades*, and as the sine qua non of Benjaminian citation itself, points at this underlying substrate of language and meaning themselves, where many of the texts actually do touch on the interpretive structures seen as inherent to language, what Benjamin refers to in "The Task of the Translator" as "pure language." It is in this way that the passages in the *Arcades* acquire as well what Benjamin refers to as a "nonsensuous" correspondence ("On the Mimetic Faculty"), or a correspondence that

exceeds perception to the degree that it constitutes that very perception. Hence this “copy” of Proust enters the citational crowd as in part its own flaneur, jostling against all the other citational bodies of text, all the while “covertly watching” and containing a “secret attention” that is a type of secondary reading that taps into their pre-ordained commonality with every other type or use of text.⁸ We must imagine the flanerrie of our reading of and entry

8. A lengthy note of sorts makes sense here, to address the complexities of the physical citational practice as it is referenced in Benjamin’s 1929 text, *One-Way Street* (Harvard University Press, 2016) specifically the section “Chinese Curios,” which I’ll quote in full:

These are days when no one should rely unduly on his “competence.” Strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed.

At the beginning of the long downhill lane that leads to the house of ———, whom I visited each evening, is a gate. After she moved, the opening of its archway henceforth stood before me like an ear that has lost the power of hearing.

A child in his nightshirt cannot be prevailed upon to greet an arriving visitor. Those present, invoking a higher moral standpoint, admonish him in vain to overcome his purdery. A few minutes later he reappears, now stark naked, before the visitor. In the meantime he has washed.

The power of a country road when one is walking along it is different from the power it has when one is flying over it by airplane. In the same way, the power of a text when it is read is different from the power it has when it is copied out. The airplane passenger sees only how the road pushes through the landscape, how it unfolds according to the same laws as the terrain surrounding it. Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands, and of how, from the very scenery that for the flier is only the unfurled plain, it calls forth distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects at each of its turns like a commander deploying soldiers at a front. Only the copied text thus commands the soul of him who is occupied with it, whereas the mere reader never discovers the new aspects of his inner self that are opened by the text, that road cut through the interior jungle forever closing behind it: because the reader follows the

movement of his mind in the free flight of daydreaming, whereas the copier submits it to command. The Chinese practice of copying books was thus an incomparable guarantee of literary culture, and the transcript a key to China's enigmas. (27–28)

This section, while it holds at its core a possible model of textual interpretation, is a play of reversals. The subject matter of each paragraph is fragmented, meaning that the paragraphs seem to have little in common with each other. We can see the central theme of “indirection” but our reading might be said to become quickly allegorical, a building up of equivalences, as we read. And we are reading here, not “copying,” which is praised so highly, so that perhaps Benjamin's move to a much more citational style or method finally made more sense.

The first paragraph is reminiscent of Benjamin's praise of “immersion” or lack of “intention” in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (Verso, 1998). The “decisive blow” must be delivered “left-handed,” or indirectly: one lets go of any expectation of “competence” and works improvisationally, letting details float in and out as they may (not unlike the flaneur). Approaching an object directly is a mistake, since we make too many assumptions about what that object might be in the first place. But we should note the way the paragraph starts, “These are days when,” which brings a lighthearted air to the whole section. The second paragraph moves into a more overtly allegorical mode, almost dreamlike, showing how Benjamin now approaches the house of his lover only indirectly, after she has moved, become inaccessible, as a kind of ruin. Here the “text” is an absence, but a nominally receptive one, a persistent shape of meaning. Next is the portrait of the child who struggles with what is appropriate, how direct to be, swaying from the extreme of the complete indirection of non-engagement and absolute refusal to give any greeting, to appearing naked before a group of strangers of “high morality.”

This trajectory concludes with a description of two types of reading, normal reading and copying a text, or in other words quoting it, citing it. This latter is the mode of reading that uses indirection, presenting (re-presenting) words that are not your own in order to make your point or to engage a reader in a particular way. We need to note here that, the way the paragraph is set up, it seems that “normal” reading is going to be praised. We're not really aware that copying is going to be preferred until later. The contrast is between walking the road and

into the citational crowd of the *Arcades* at this particular level, at this remove that is simultaneously a closeness to the perception and generation of meaning.

I'd like to take a brief moment here to touch on the way in which this paper itself is progressing, which is through an analytical reading of a section, M21,1, of the *Arcades* that is openly, obviously, or directly citational. Simply put: it has quotation marks around it, a bare minimum of text introduced by Benjamin (that opening clause), and carries along with it its bibliographic information. I want to point out that this mode of analysis is almost entirely absent

flying over it. Benjamin sets up a parallel with reading and copying, in that order. Thus walking is the same as reading, flying over is the same as copying. The qualitative judgment comes only with the sentence "Only the copied text ... whereas the mere reader ..." Indeed indirection would apply to airplane ride here, not to a direct experience of a road "cut through the interior jungle."

This is certainly a nuanced treatment of citation, and of how we should approach text in general. Copying comes in for high praise, as a way to "discover new aspects of his inner self that are opened by the text." But with "his" we also think back to the boy standing naked and incomprehending in front of his parents' morally superior guests. What is Benjamin doing here? Where have we been led? The "curios" of the title by the end of the section are great Chinese "enigmas," and we're somewhat abandoned on a country road, far from the city street. We indeed are the readers of this passage, "following the movement of our minds in the free flight of daydreaming" (improvisation in fact, which Benjamin would otherwise recommend we'd think), our reading now more nor less than a copying, as we stand outside the house of our erstwhile paramour. Benjaminian allegory leads to an embodiment of something we start off by calling text but that has "lost the power of hearing," or speaking. The presentation of text invokes a dream of how text presents itself (in a dream of how text presents itself as text). The idea allegory leads to is an image, this contradictory, dialectical image we refer to now, a wisp of life at all times eluding any "competence," our textual stories, our histories, built around a nearly lifeless shell, a mask, a *facies hippocratica* at the heart of allegory.

from the criticism of Benjamin's work, including of the *Arcades*. As I've tried to show, however, it is not only by following the traces presented by such quotations, but by theorizing the process of following those very traces that the core identity of the *Arcades* as a kind of living entity comes to the fore. Without entering into the multivalent referentiality of these concrete citations we miss the direct contact with the phenomenon of material/immaterial reversal, with what Benjamin terms the "phantasmagoria" or "dialectics at a standstill" (that is, moving motionlessness) that defines at once contemporaneity and technology. We cannot become the flaneur without opening this portal and crossing through. In almost every instance where scholarship either treats Benjamin's work as a primary or secondary source, one sees the reliance on what is thought to be his direct voice. This tendency, which is in fact didactic, denotative, and informational, and can be seen in all of Benjamin's major commentators, from Rolf Tiedemann to Susan Buck-Morss to Samuel Weber, comes through in the analyses of the *Arcades* as the unquestioned gravitation to discussion of convolute N, the first half of which includes passages framed as straightforward methodological statements. These statements are quoted and discussed in a straightforward manner, with no irony or assessment of how they filter into the larger concerns of the *Arcades* (even as many of these passage touch on those larger concerns). What Benjamin clearly asks of us is quite different from the tack criticism has taken thus far. As he writes:

Say something about the method of composition itself: how everything one is thinking at a specific moment in time must at all costs be incorporated into the project then at hand. Assume that the intensity of the project is thereby attested, or that one's thoughts, from the very beginning, bear this project within them as their telos. So it is with the present portion of the work, which aims to characterize and to preserve the intervals of reflection, the distances lying between the most essential parts of this work, which are turned most intensively to the outside. [N1,3]

Citing convolute N and guilty now of what I'm taking issue with, I'd like to simply read the surface of this passage to point out that

Benjamin not only here mentions how he intends each passage to contain “everything one is thinking,” what we can take as multiple valences, aspects that we can see operating in M21,1 and other passages quoted above, but that the “present portion of the work,” convolute N, should be taken, not directly, but as “intervals of reflections,” “the distances,” and that the “most essential parts of this work” are in fact the citations, “turned intensively to the outside.” Criticism of Benjamin’s work needs to find here its starting place and the citational monument of *the Arcades* says nothing less. Given Benjamin’s centrality to the discourse of technology and to modernity writ large, this absence in our consideration of his work is stunning.

I’d like to pick up here as well another key component of the operational space of the flaneur, that is, the interval between passages. In N1,3 Benjamin is referencing a period between working on separate passages, a point at which he is only considering how various passages might work, which passages to choose, a period where he is, perhaps, not sitting at a table and laboring to copy out a certain text. He wants then to capture these extra-citational thoughts and record them as part of the *Arcades* itself. He is concerned with his experience that is “outside the text” and duly brings it into the text. This is an extremely interesting process in itself but I want to suggest that it implicates what our own experience is as well, between passages, after for instance we have “read” and fully assessed, even lived through, something like M21,1 and before we move on to any other passage, for instance the very next passage at M21,2. With the passage between each passage, we can’t anticipate where Benjamin or we ourselves are going to end up, resurface, what link he is going to make, what theme is going to be continued, expanded, or introduced. We are constantly, within a kind of shadow text, re-presented with our own spectacle of great anticipation but also the spectacle of our own ignorance, our own basic need to re-imagine, a reading that is over and over an arrival in the world anew. So that reading is the fundamental experience of our own ignorance, and if reading then is the producer of knowledge, then it is this knowledge, of the experience of

not knowing and what that brings forward in the mind, the love and consequently the fear (M21,1), the possibility, the radical un-linking from pre-existing forms of knowledge that then crosses into the radically linked textual experience of the passages. We could even say the more thoroughly each passage is linked or leads out to multiple levels of meaning and connection, the greater the “intensity of the project,” the more this contrary experience can then take center stage or enter into the dialectic. In the dialectical image there’s certainly a passage through something like pure language, but there is as well this “external” dialectic happening between text and the absence of text, text’s negative or shadow, or citation and its opposite, non-citational being. Benjamin refers to this in “What Is Epic Theater?” when he writes, “interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring. It goes far beyond the sphere of art. To give only one example, it is the basis of quotation. To quote a text involves the interruption of its context.” In many respects, we need to theorize this space as one that both defines the flaneur and within which he/she/it operates. This certainly does not mean the flaneurial is not a space of the commodity—in fact one of Benjamin’s key points is that it is pre-eminently commodified, may well be the commodity itself—but it is quite central to how we make sense of modern society, constantly performing each our own flanerie. Judith Butler treats the interruptive moment in *Parting Ways*:

If, following Benjamin, we are to allow the memory of dispossession to crack the surface of historical amnesia and reorient us toward the unacceptable conditions of refugees across time and context, there must be transposition without analogy, the interruption of one time by another, which is the counternationalist impetus of the messianic in Benjamin’s terms, what some would call a messianic secularism that relates clearly to his work on translation: how does another time break into this time, through what vessel, and through what transposition?

Is the flaneur an interruption? In many ways with Butler we are “beyond the sphere of art.” But what we can do here is associate

the inter-citational, interruptive and immaterial energies of reading, which we are identifying with flaneurial consciousness, with both that building and breaking of context. Indeed what Benjamin would like to say is that this “surface of historical amnesia” is not only broken but built, insofar as the flaneur is in service of the commodity (an idea I return to below). Here what we can note is the way in which our notion of the crowd extends across time, that the landscape, the geography of present experience is in every way haunted by both material and psychic forces (co-constitutive as they are), such that we are not so much remembering dispossession as constantly enacting it. The refugees are always already flowing into the very temporal structure of experience. Benjamin speaks in “The Task of the Translator” of the supplementarity of all languages that contributes to the existence of pure language, and a key transposition that we can apply from this citation of Butler’s comment here is the way in which linguistic translation works according to the same conceptual structure as does national identity. The idea of pure language is also the idea of a unified global identity, as much as this is transhistorical and brings past reality into the present as a wholly living moment in all its dispersion and distinction, “without analogy.” If the figure of the flaneur is not interruption itself, or its catalytic force, then certainly the flaneur bridges these contextual and non-contextual zones of force.

Before moving to a discussion of the flaneur in relation to the commodity, I’d like to look at the passage immediately following M21,1 in the *Arcades*, M21,2, and consider how some of these themes reach into that next passage, to consider what goes into suspension and the type of work the reader is asked to do, distinctions to be made, landscapes to be constructed (both the perceptual and generative work of the flaneur). M21,2:

The critique of the *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires* which Armand de Pontmartin publishes in *Le Spectator* of September 19, 1857, contains a sentence that, although aimed at the overall character of the book, would nevertheless have its rightful place in an analysis of the “man of the crowd”: “It was certainly there in a striking form, that

implacable democratic and American severity, reckoning human beings as no more than numbers, only to end by attributing to numbers something of the life, animation, and spirit of the human being.” But doesn’t the sentence have a more immediate reference to the *Histoires extraordinaires*, which appeared earlier? (And where is the “man of the crowd”?) Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, Translations, *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires*, ed. Crépet (Paris, 1933), p. 315.—The critique is, at bottom, mean-spirited. [M21,2]

Placing us even further in suspension, before looking at this passage in detail I want to ask, what is scholarship? I’ll point out some of the ironies at work here, as a way to build a context or groundwork for this question. *the Arcades* is a work of scholarship. It is a work of the telling of history. What does that mean? Part of the answer is perhaps what I am engaged in by citing this passage, the centrality of which is another citation. What I have just done is sit with the physical book *the Arcades* in a way that echoes and extends the physical act or performance of the historical figure in question, Walter Benjamin, sitting we presume with the 1857 copy of *Le Spectator*, which itself was the text of a writer sitting with the Baudelaire translation of Poe’s book *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires*. These readings echoing across time are in this very moment, whichever it is, echoed in your reading, whoever is reading this paper, if anyone is, positioning some sort of physicality of text before you. The refugees Butler speaks of are these other-dimensional texts that are really landscapes, that are really cities and populations. And perhaps as Butler defines it, scholarship is that borderless letting through. How do we build our worlds there? This seems to be an area for substantive consideration, since what has scholarship made of these far-reaching implications for its own mode of discourse as outlined in *the Arcades*? And then setting aside actual responses and engagements, potential new or experimental modalities for the presentation or conception of research or what research is (crucial at a time of digital transformation), there is the perhaps separate story to be told of the resistances of scholarly discourse and outputs to these larger circumstances.

We are crossing, cross-dressing, translating, transgenering, everything that is the contemporary and that holds its own contradiction in the conservative movements playing out through figures such as the flaneurial Donald Trump and seemingly deposed Marine Le Pen (from the perspective of the commodity as well as the return of European fascism). A reading of M21,2 can most productively begin from questioning what it says and why, and again we want to end up at a point here where we can highlight the interruptive moment and activity between M21,1 and M21,2, as a single example of how we characterize both the *Arcades* and the activity of reading that presumes the presence of the flaneur. Simply put, the quote from de Pontmartin is taken to apply to the “man of the crowd,” rather than the book *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires* as a whole, to which the critique was originally directed. Benjamin displaces the quote in this way, but then he in some sense returns to the idea that the quote applies to a whole book and wonders whether the quote makes more sense in the context of an earlier Baudelaire translation of Poe, *Histoires extraordinaires*. He then wonders, in parentheses, how to apply this latter idea to the “man of the crowd,” if it’s true that the quote applies more to the earlier volume. Benjamin then includes a full bibliographic citation of the later Baudelaire volume (in fact published in a 1933 edition), after which, at the bottom of the passage as it were, he critiques the critique itself, whether of the book as a whole (either edition it seems) or of the “man of the crowd,” as “mean-spirited,” presumably because it was not inclusive of the earlier volume or because it discounts the actual value of either the book or the man of the crowd.

On its own this passage might seem inconsequential, in the mode of almost pure notation of a curiosity, even containing at its end two casual unanswered questions that don’t seem much related to the first part of the passage. This is an important point, since it would define a type of generic, informational reading that plays a significant role throughout the *Arcades*, which after all is arranged like any encyclopedia, the quintessential informational format. This type of reading is what we would expect in

a journalistic document, like *Le Spectateur* wherein the review is published, with here in this passage the precise numerical date of publication given, an obvious piece of information. Indeed we can note that the appearance of the literary document of *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires* within an informational context will run parallel to the content of the de Pontmartin sentence that questions the treatment of “something of the life, animation, and spirit of the human being” as a piece of numerical content. One modality of reading and life is folded tightly within the other, just as above in M21,1, there is the idea that members of the crowd are “covertly watching,” observational behavior that the publication title *Le Spectateur* references, or have “secret attention.” Entangled modalities, each emerging and acting through the other, is a common theme in both passages in this way. What we should watch for more than anything else, however, is perhaps the treatment of the book as a generic entity interchangeable with the human figure. This is a construct that in fact begins Poe’s story “The Man of the Crowd,” which is referenced throughout the flaneur convolute, with the statement, comparing the man of the crowd to a book, “it does not permit itself to be read.” In M21,2, the enclosed citation is said to refer to “the overall character of the book,” *Nouvelle Histoires extraordinaires*, and this commentary actually has its “rightful” place phrased in terms of the man of the crowd. The book itself and the human figure, which we might understand as the flaneur, change places, and since as we’ve seen in convolute M the crowd is indeed a transhistorical and multi-localational figure, this brings to light the way in which the secondary displacement of the sentence with a temporal reconfiguration onto an earlier edition makes sense, Benjamin declaring that the “more immediate” reference is in fact to an older volume. The “implacable democracy” of the de Pontmartin citation will pick up the theme from other passages, particularly from M21,1, of the wider conception of the crowd operative in the convolute, which as we’ve seen includes the citational passages themselves, making it apparent that the “extraordinary history” in the book title resonates with the *Arcades* itself. The passage then informs us that it

is the *Arcades* that functions as a man of the crowd. It is the body of the flaneur that we hold in our hands as the *Arcades*, even as we will never grasp it. In this way the intervallic progress from passage to passage points directly, purely through indirection, at its own material presence. It is no more than material, no more than a number in that sense, and yet, as we've seen, anything we know as life, animation, or spirit is contained here as well. This dynamic feeds through the chiasmic structure of M21,2 so that as with the Proust in M21,1 Benjamin implies, through another author's words, his own project, all the way to the superposition of the *Arcades* and the citation of Baudelaire's "*Oeuvres complète, Traductions, Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires.*" He steals Baudelaire's body of work in this way, in this passage, as the actual underlying import of what appears to be a footnote of thought.

It is the performance and play of these outer-directed, "turned most intensively to the outside," citational passages that bring the flaneur to presence, that make the point of the *Arcades*, that both dispense with the old and form a kind of new scholarship. To pick up on the entanglement of journalism and literary writing, and to bring in another important element of how we think of the flaneur, the commodity, I'd like to investigate M16,4:

The social base of flanerie is journalism. As flaneur, the literary man ventures into the marketplace to sell himself. Just so—but that by no means exhausts the social side of flanerie. "We know," says Marx, "that the value of each commodity is determined by the quantity of labor materialized in its use value, by the working-time socially necessary for its production" (Marx, *Das Kapital*, ed. Korsch, p. 188). The journalist, as flaneur, behaves as if he too were aware of this. The number of work hours socially necessary for the production of his particular working energy is, in fact, relatively high; insofar as he makes it his business to let his hours of leisure on the boulevard appear as part of this work time, he multiplies the latter and thereby the value of his own labor. In his eyes, and often also in the eyes of his bosses, such value has something fantastic about it. Naturally, this would not be the case if he were not in the privileged position of making the work time necessary for the production of his use value

available to a general public review by passing that time on the boulevard and thus, as it were, exhibiting it. [M16,4]

At this point we should note our actual real-time approach to this passage, having worked through a number of passages already and expecting a certain type or layering of meaning to emerge. We have a certain set of expectations perhaps. There's a way in which we take the immediate or surface meaning with a grain of salt. We anticipate more than the surface, watching for connotative connections to other passages and frameworks of meaning but also a connection perhaps to the very architecture of *the Arcades* as a whole. The passage should be performative in this way. I'd like to suggest that the character of this expectation is the product of the interval as I've discussed it above, that it indirectly designates, in its approach to the world, to any thing or person in the world, a flaner that is of the here and now, contained within each reader, equally as much as it is contained in this wider conception of language itself. Flaner is that openness, which takes on the character of a dream or a drug, an openness to the operation of meaning itself. We are ready for the "appearances of superposition, of overlap" [M1a1], the "colportage phenomena of space" [M1a,3], the "true masquerade of space" [M1a,4], we have achieved the "category of illustrative seeing—fundamental for the flaneur" [M2,2]. I'll include here another citation as we continue to anticipate a look at M16,4:

We know that, in the course of flaner, far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment. When the authentically intoxicated phase of this condition announces itself, the blood is pounding in the veins of the happy flaneur. [M2,4]

Our "outside the text," then, our intervallic experience, is both hallucinatory and viscerally of the body. A dichotomous dynamic we have witnessed with other passages, it is simultaneously an experience of complete abstraction and chthonic grounding. This is the place at which thinking and experience meet. We might put the seminar room in this context, but also expanding outward

into the periodicity of educational experience itself, the rhythm of classes for instance, as this shapes and anticipates how participants processing instruction outside the classroom and between classes.

To cut back to M16,4, we immediately note the entanglement of the journalistic—that informational discourse for the crowd, the masses—and the literary, to which the flaneur has special access but also a singular ability to bring the literary into “the marketplace.” This passage works to show the contours of the flaneur’s incarnation as such a commodity, both selling himself and his journalistic product, as much as we lack any way to distinguish between these. Indeed the social here is shown to be that multiple and crowd-like element of the flaneur, what is outer directed, what is of the open market, but this is complemented by what is held up as an in some ways hidden sociality, a “secret attention” (M21,1), whose blueprint is provided by the quote from Marx, one of his key statements on the commodity function. Thus Benjamin moves to define what we might perceive as an immaterial aspect of reality as precisely what exhibits the laws of the commodity. And then of course within that definition of the commodity it is entirely the way in which something, labor, is “materialized” that is at stake. We’re presented, then, with a number of binaries that are operating at once, journalism/literature, in some sense outward/inward, immaterial/material, and a bit further on in the passage labor/leisure.

All of this forms the basis of the Chaplinesque humor that suffuses the passage, where the social display of leisure is taken as work, taken as the work of the energetic display of non-work. M5,8: “The idleness of the flaneur is a demonstration against the division of labor.” This throws into relief the equivalence of the status of the flaneur and the status of the commodity itself. Just as the “literary man” behaves as the flaneur to make a sale, so the journalist puts on his flaneur act as well. They both make a living by, as it were, reading Marx and behaving according to his tenets, using them as a script. The journalist and literary man behave “as if” they are “aware” of Marx’s statement. *Das Kapital* reads as

the sketch for a comedy routine, one that makes money. Finally the end product, the commodity, that thing that all production and use value are calibrated to, is the pure evanescence of a show of “working energy.” The secret to success is to “let” any leisure hours “appear” as actual working-time, within, according to Marx, the social register. Thus the improvisatory back and forth between work and leisure is in fact the flaneur transparently tracking the movement of the commodity itself, to the point of their indistinguishability. And in this case it is in fact a bourgeois “privilege” to merge with the identity of the commodity as performance, not as we might expect as an aspect of the proletariat. Here what we see functioning through the flaneur is not simply the production of journalism or literary texts, or the presence of a certain character of and within society, but the institution of the illusion of capital itself, the business of the leisure-time exhibition of business. Here we cast back to our own reading practices as they wend their way through the marketplace of the *Arcades* passages and realize exactly what part we play as we translate leisure-time reading hours spent on this particular boulevard into something our bosses might approve of, whether with scholarly output or simply returning to our daily lives with a rejuvenated sense of imagination and the possible. That is, textual input and output is always going to be center stage. M16a,1:

The press brings into play an overabundance of information, which can be all the more provocative the more it is exempt from any use. (Only the ubiquity of the reader would make possible a utilization; and so the illusion of such ubiquity is also generated.) The actual relation of this information to social existence is determined by the dependence of the information industry on financial interests and its alignment with these interests.—As the information industry comes into its own, intellectual labor fastens parasitically on *everymaterial* labor, just as capital more and more brings *every* material labor into a relation of dependency. [M16a,1] (emphasis in original)

Baudrillard writes that “the pressure of information pursues an irresistible deconstruction of the social. Thus information

dissolves meaning and dissolves the social, in a sort of nebulous state dedicated not to a surplus of innovation, but, on the contrary, to total entropy” (*Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, 1994, pg. 81). But there is a decidedly different theory at work in this passage. First we note that the flaneur is identified, through the spectacle of uselessness that is the topic of the immediately preceding passage M16,4,⁹ with information itself, its circulation through the social network paralleling the circulation of the (anti)humanistic energy source that is the flaneur. Whereas with Baudrillard there is an overall destructive entropy that seems to be tumbling out of control, with Benjamin we track something more strategic: the financialization of uselessness, idleness, leisure time as an extension of literary or literate activity. What we have in this passage is the infusion of the flaneur as literary/informational connoisseur with the intimate capitalization of the social. The machine is oiled at every level by the coordinated performances. The superposition of the flaneur with any or all of these opposing forces is neither here nor there, just that they circulate in a type of suspension, even as it is a suspension picked up, located, and read by the flaneur.

We can see at this point where Benjamin might position himself in relation to things like Roger Burrows’s 2009 comment that:

the ‘stuff’ that makes up the social and urban fabric has changed—it is no longer just about emergent properties that derive from a complex of social associations and interactions. These associations and interactions are now not only *mediated* by software and code they are becoming *constituted* by it. (emphasis in original, quoted in Thrift)

Clearly Benjamin was already working in the 20’s and 30’s with the idea of the co-constitutive nature of the technological and the social, with the added complexities within which he would contextualize that co-constitution, its perception and suspension (by the flaneur), and the material outputs of that perception as a performance of

9. Note as well the start of M20a,1: “Basic to flanerie . . . is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labor.”

capital. The work in which he couched these insights, *the Arcades*, would have as one of its overriding concerns the interrogation of its own status as a function of this identical performance.

Rather, more to the point here would be the way the flaneur, particularly with reference to the flaneur's status as information or as actual medial content, parallels the status of "mediality" as described by Jonathan Sterne:

communication technologies are a fundamental part of what it means to speak, or hear, or to do anything. . . . Mediality simply points to a collectively embodied process of cross-reference. It implies no particular historical or ontological priority of communicative forms. . . the mediality of the medium lies not simply in the hardware, but in its articulation with particular practices, ways of doing things, institutions, and even in some cases belief systems. (10)

Benjamin is suggesting an extremely similar status for the flaneur as a medial entity that intersects materiality where it informs and emerges as an episteme (though I don't think he would use the qualifier "in some cases" when referring to belief systems). Benjamin sees informational and literary "communicative technologies" and the dialectic between them as implicated precisely in this "collectively embodied process of cross-reference," one that also extends materially and affectively across space and time. The critical component of *The Arcade Project* is that the project itself at every turn, unlike any scholarly work produced before or since as far as I can tell, points to its own self-awareness as a node within this medial network, an awareness that runs in parallel with its embodied reader, not to mention the reader's own awareness of the very idea of embodiment. The flaneur is truly the book that will not be read.

And let me emphasize that "not reading" once more, that inter-vallic detachment that synchronically speaks to different worlds at once. This is articulated in M4a,1 as follows:

The peculiar irresolution of the flaneur. Just as waiting seems to be the proper state of the impassive thinker, doubt appears to be that of the flaneur. An elegy by Schiller contains the phrase: "the hesitant

wing of the butterfly.” This points to the association of wingedness with the feeling of indecision which is so characteristic of hashish intoxication.

I won't unpack this passage to any degree other than to note this intervallic hesitation and distance, here interpreted as a component of song and the natural world, is a wingedness that echoes in the central image of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front to his feet.

Perhaps no paper dealing with Benjamin would be complete without a reference to the Angel of History, but I think here we can make the case that indeed the flaneur is that irresolute angel, wending through the crowds of history. Has this paper been about the Angel of History all along? If our primary critical project is to figure out the basis of our entanglement,^[10] then the flaneur may be that (non)method. We can also return here to Judith Butler and the appearance of the unconscious in the hesitant space between technological repetitions:

If every performance repeats itself to institute the effect of identity, then every repetition requires an interval between the acts, as it were, in which risk and excess threaten to disrupt the identity being constituted. The unconscious is this excess that enables and contests every performance, and which never fully appears within the performance itself. (quoted in Thrift, 225)

With our reading of the flaneur we need to both confirm and take issue with this statement at almost every turn. We have

10. To quote the opening sentence of the syllabus for John M. Ackerman's seminar "Readings in Communication and Technology."

discussed, for instance, the superposition of the performance of the flaneur and the commodity, the way that they in important ways trade places, so the performative character of reality needs to be seen as a central component of capital itself. These repetitions, which are neither more nor less than the repetitions of the passages of the *Arcades*, the incarnation of the flaneurial body, achieve what Benjamin might term the technologically based phantasmagoria of identity, which to perhaps anyone but the flaneur might be repulsive. On every level these repetitions imply the synaptic leaps that lead into and out of them, not just at an entry or exit point, but at every level of our engagement, or our reading through them. Those intervals are not just between repetitions or passages, but uncovered in the very substance of each material node, so that even as we “use specific locations in the network to track the intersection of different flows,”¹¹ we hold these entry points in suspension as well. The threat of risk and excess is present, but not simply in the intervals, and not simply as threat. We need to keep in mind that whatever identity has been formed in the nodal landing of the flaneur has already been interrupted and that what we’re theorizing is in fact the phenomenology of the disruption itself, which takes the contradictory form of immaterial contemplation and, as Butler seems to indicate as well, is entirely an extension of the same performance. Whether we can locate the “unconscious” in this intra-identity phase seems still to be an open question, unless as Thrift seems to suggest that unconscious is technological, which seems apt in Benjaminian terms since anthropomorphizing technology and hence capital by attributing to it the obverse of human consciousness is to perhaps work with the arche of thinking itself. What Benjamin actively and, crucially, formally invokes that Thrift, Butler and others fail to do is the additional overlay of the flaneurial consciousness in the construction of the arguments for the nature of language, materiality, or interruption. As we have seen, the *Arcades* not only invokes this

11. Nicole Starosielski, *The Undersea Network*, Duke, 2015.

additional element but *structurally performs* it. The new scholarship will have nothing less. As Donna Haraway writes:

No layer of the onion of practice that is technoscience is outside the reach of technology or critical interpretation or critical inquiry about positioning and location; that is the condition of embodiment and mortality. The technical and the political are like the abstract and the concrete, the foreground and the background, the text and the context, the subject and the object. (quoted in Bowker and Star 2000)

Our performances are situated at every level, though as the flâneur circulates through technoscience and the like there is also the awareness that the layering itself is a component of technics. Here we keep in mind that once we reach either an experience or understanding of “the condition of embodiment and mortality” we remain firmly in the grasp of the realization that embodiment and mortality are “nodes,” that therefore an alternating force will return us to the equally operative experience of abstracted disembodiment, and that what we have been discussing as the inter-vallic space between these two is ripe with the excess and risk described by Butler. Indeed what Bowker and Star describe as the dynamics of boundary objects within information seems to capture this multiplicity:

A fully developed method of multiplicity-heterogeneity for information systems must draw on many sources and make many unexpected alliances. If both people and information objects inhabit multiple contexts and a central goal of information systems is to transmit information across contexts, then a representation is a kind of pathway that includes everything populating those contexts. This includes people, thing-objects, previous representations, and information about its own structure. (Bowker and Star 2000, 293)

Here there seems to be an expansive notion of what Benjamin might term “the crowd,” even while this formulation is perhaps less haunted than Benjamin’s, alongside a need to theorize a more or less conscious conceptual framework or pathway that circulates as a function of representation among a vast dispersed

multiplicity, which we might think of as the arcades, Paris, or the city itself. Again:

Boundary objects are those objects that both inhabit several communities of practice and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them. Boundary objects are thus both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. They are weakly structured in common use and become strongly structured in individual-site use. (Bowker and Star 2000, 297)

Of course the flaneur would at least momentarily be overjoyed here at the prospect of steady employment.¹² And the comic or Chaplinesque nature of the boundary object makes sense here, since as noted above the use value derives more from exhibition than anything else. Benjamin theorizes the flaneur as boundary object but identifies or superposes it with commodity structure. Here I'd like to continue by citing M1a,1 (more on my trail of citations in just a moment), one of the primary passages in *convolute M*. It is not technically a citation but it references how elements, members, or particles of what we are understanding as the

12. See "He Discovered the Secret to Living Rent-Free" in the *New York Times* for a contemporary version of flaneur as boundary object. John McGill lives in New York City as an artist rent-free by negotiating short-term deals with a variety of building owners for otherwise unused spaces. It is important to recognize, however, McGill's relation to the city real estate market as an extension of white male privilege, since his situation would be radically different for a woman or person of color. Which brings us again to the transgendered quality of the flaneur in Benjamin, who is not simply, as the flaneur appears in Beaudelaire, metrosexual or fluidly gendered on the surface, but in fact indistinguishable as either man or woman, based on analysis of passage such as M21a1, where the flaneur appears as "a woman of high rank," or others where female prostitution becomes the operative metaphorical framework. Gender circulates as a meme among other memes. (April 30, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/28/realestate/he-discovered-the-secret-to-living-rent-free.html?_r=0)

crowd appear and disappear, and how a flaneurial consciousness, the dream or drug state, in fact intersects what is quite close to a type of technological unconscious of the city:

The appearances of superposition, of overlap, which come with hashish may be grasped through the concept of similitude. When we say that one face is similar to another, we mean that certain features of this second face appear to us in the first, without the latter's ceasing to be what it has been. Nevertheless, the possibilities of entering into appearance in this way are not subject to any criterion and are therefore boundless. The category of similarity, which for the waking consciousness has only minimal relevance, attains unlimited relevance in the world of hashish. There, we may say, everything is face: each thing has the degree of bodily presence that allows it to be searched—as one searches a face—for such traits as appear. Under these conditions even a sentence (to say nothing of the single word) puts on a face, and this face resembles that of the sentence standing opposed to it. In this way every truth points manifestly to its opposite, and this state of affairs explains the existence of doubt. Truth becomes something living; it lives solely in the rhythm by which statement and counterstatement displace each other in order to think each other. [M1a,1]

This passage is effectively a guide to the appearance of the larger conception of the crowd as discussed above, particularly with reference to Valéry as flaneur in M20,2. The vision is one of resemblance and superposition of both present and past dispersed as material and immaterial forces. Here Benjamin references the heightened consciousness of the flaneur as brought on by hashish, which is an intoxication he invokes throughout the convolute. M1,3: "An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets." M1,5: "The anamnestic intoxication in which the flaneur goes about the city not only feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but often possesses itself of abstract knowledge." And we referenced earlier at M2,4 the "authentic intoxication." We have to keep in mind that the very definition of the flaneur is as the figure who consistently enters or exists within this realm of similitudes, who sets out across

the oceans of unlimited “faces,” or populations as we referred to them at M20a,2 and M21,1. It is in this way that the flaneur is a boundary object, constantly at the “boundless” point of entry into appearance. This passage, M1a,1, introduces the concept of similitude to this phenomenological process of appearance, “similitude” occupying a central place in Benjamin’s other writings, such as “Doctrine of the Similar,” where he outlines a history of the capacity for generating similarities, which is finally a form of reading the world that makes its way into the experience of language itself. Here at M1a,1 there is the radical notion that “everything is face,” and what this indicates is that each object of perception rises out of and leads into some similarity with some other nominally distinct object. But of course the experience is one of pure subjectivity, each object in effect another “face” so that in fact with the flaneur the more appropriate term is “boundary subject” rather than “boundary object.” The processual nature of reality becomes clear to the intoxicated, a condition which itself echoes or is a similitude drawn with Poe’s “Man of the Crowd,” where the “convalescent” narrator slips into the oblivion of trying to capture the “decrepit old man” in his description, effectively attempting to “search his face.” I believe there are a number of readings of M1a,1 possible here but I want only to point out before moving on the way in which the passage clearly references *the Arcades* itself, each passage, consisting of words and sentences, a type of face, registering its own similarity to those “opposed” or adjacent to it in the book. As readers we ourselves then become flaneur figures (if we weren’t already) by participating in a modality of language that “lives” in this realm. The truth of *the Arcades* is that the multitudes of faces of the passages are reading themselves in this way and that by becoming intoxicated readers with our participation we also actually “live” in any comprehensible sense of that term, living our way into the ruin of history, living our way into a timeless identification with, a lostness inside of, the crowds of appearance of all kinds.

Indeed I want once more to point out the ways this paper participates in this same “searching of faces.” I track the flaneur

or man of the crowd, just like Poe's narrator, only in this case it is also pursuing Benjamin himself in some sense, also needing to pass into the labyrinth of the broader notion of the crowd, history itself, to do so. Only by the close reading of "outside" texts are we able to do this, so that the progress of citations herein mimics that same type of citational accumulation and interpretation in the *Arcades*. In a very real sense here we create each other as "boundary subjects" as well, since I look to whoever my reader might be to participate in exactly the same (non) method. In all idleness, we pass the pipe. But that too is how we materially attain to truth and life, that is constantly our work, a performance that finally makes completely indistinguishable the concrete and abstract, use value and leisure, the commodity and the human person. We are this "existence of doubt" and "hesitant wing," how we understand theory wrapping itself into how we understand the body, and vice versa. As Butler writes, a "topographical or even architectural regulation of the body happens at the level of theory," and this process is in fact a performance of capital in the *Arcades*. It is good to keep in mind in this context the Rimbaud epigraph that opens convolute A on the first page of the *Arcades*: "For sale the bodies, the voices, the tremendous unquestionable wealth, what will never be sold." It is always the case that as readers, again, we are never outside the text, that it is exactly what we imagine as "what will never be sold" that is in fact "for sale," and that the text is decidedly a department store. This equates to a kind of death in life.

There are many ways the emergence of life here parallels life's emergence via technics as discussed by Bernard Stiegler. As he writes in *Technics and Time 1* (Stanford University Press, 1998):

There is an indecision, a passage remaining to be thought. At issue is the specificity of the temporality of life in which life is inscription in the nonliving, spacing, temporalization, differentiation, and deferral by, of, and in the nonliving, in the dead. (140)

It is true that in the crowd, or in the time of the crowd, what Stiegler calls “epigenetic sedimentation,” or the infiltration of what we know as the human by the technological down to the level of its genetic makeup, has already long since occurred. It is the “already-there.” But to truly grasp this emergence in *the Arcades* we need again to consider citation and the singular manner in which it embraces language as technology, the invention of which for Stiegler is indistinguishable from the invention of the human. What we see Benjamin doing in *the Arcades*, and this constantly defines both the figure of the flâneur and our own readerly embodiment as I have been discussing it here, is simultaneously inventing the human and the technological.

[T]he human invents himself [sic] in the technical by inventing the tool—by becoming exteriorized techno-logically. But here the human is the interior: there is no exteriorization that does not point from interior to exterior. Nevertheless, the interior is inverted in this movement: it can therefore not precede it. Interior and exterior are consequently constituted in a movement that invents both one and the other: a moment in which they invent each other respectively, as if there were a technological maieutic of what is called humanity. The interior and the exterior are the same thing, the inside is the outside, since man (the interior) is essentially defined by the tool (the exterior).

Benjamin, the flâneur, circulates within this maieutic, where the human is almost palpably inventing itself but at the exact point at which language and technology do not simply participate in the process but guide it, and this exactly at the point at which that process is most authentically human. To refer back to the Proust citation in M21,1, the crowd is a function of the techne of the seawall. Here citational reading, the flâneur, puts us at the place of their co-constitution, where *différance* doubles as and bridges the human and the built. This provision of agency to language can be seen in Benjamin’s work as early as his 1921 “The Task of the Translator,” where he points to the moment in translation where

language moves from a kind of tool nature as conduit for what is symbolized over to an agential force capable of symbolizing:

Whereas in the various tongues that ultimate essence, the pure language, is tied only to linguistic elements and their changes, in linguistic creations it is weighted with a heavy, alien meaning. To relieve it of this, to turn the symbolizing into the symbolized itself, to regain pure language fully formed from the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation. (261)

The play of agency contained within the technology of language itself is quite clear from this passage (as much as, on a close reading, there are a series of reversals taking place, matter for another essay). I want to posit that *the Arcades* and the flaneur, the city itself, circulate where this exchange and double appearance takes place, the constant handoff from the human to the technological and back again. As Stiegler points out, we recognize this moment, the very framing of history, as mere appearance, semblance, performance:

This double constitution is also that of an opposition between the interior and the exterior—or one that produces an illusion of succession. Where does this illusion come from? . . . [L]et us say that it comes from an originary forgetting, *epimetheia* as delay, the fault of Epimetheus. This becomes meaningful only in the melancholy of Prometheus, as anticipation of death, where the facticity of the already-there that equipment is for the person born into the world signifies the end: this is a Promethean structure of being-for-death, a structure in which concern is not the simple covering-over of *Eigenlichkeit*. This the question of time. (142)

In its most radical remembering, we must remember, citation is an equally radical forgetting of the self, the concept of authorship, the trademark de-individuation of the flaneur. The promethean technological leap cannot be other than the moment of death, the pure facticity as pure language that citation reaches, which as we have seen is a matter of the deconstruction of time itself. The intoxication and lostness of the flaneur, a reading enacted by

capital, plays at this deadly crossroads, even as it is a vision of life itself.

As Donna Haraway writes, “This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.” She uses her 1985 essay “Cyborg Manifesto” to describe a figure, the cyborg, that has great affinity with the flaneur. “The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (292). While mapping a logic of repression, Haraway makes a quite flaneurial argument for “pleasure in the confusion of boundaries” between human and animal, between organism and machine, and between physical and non-physical. “Cyborgs are ether, quintessence.” “They are about consciousness—or its simulation.” But one of the key elements in the way Haraway’s essay functions is in its relation to capital itself. While as in the *Arcades* this relationship is confronted again and again, Haraway’s essay remains formally contained within scholarly discourse as we have known it for decades. Her radical message does not infiltrate her own subject position vis a vis language or material output. Capital is in many respects placed on the shelf as nearly irrelevant:

The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential. (293)

Even as Haraway states that “‘advanced capitalism’ is inadequate to convey the structure of this historical moment,” this statement assumes that those fathers were ever present to begin with. And there is finally little grappling with the exact genetic, following Stiegler we might call it epigenetic, implications of this particular heritage, which is admitted. Haraway critiques earlier theories of technological determinism and its prioritizing of the organic body, but even as she resolves these issues with the idea of the cyborg the discussion does not consider exactly how technics and the human constitute each other at the deepest level, how the

“who” and the “what” will not appear without each other. But all of this aside, it may be that what makes Haraway’s work so crucial is her ongoing awareness of the urgency of her project, of the possibility and the need to demarcate zones of resistance within a contemporary landscape of de-acquisitioned subjectivities, of being female without possibly in the least bit being female. I want to say here that Benjamin works with that same technology of resistance, that same rescue mission for what must in the end be humanistic values. The love for the radical is how these projects take shape, their only avenue. Haraway cites the “oppositional consciousness” of Chela Sandoval’s “women of color”: “Sandoval emphasizes the lack of any essential criterion for identifying who is a woman of color. . . . Thus, she was at bottom a cascade of negative identities” (296). This is what Haraway calls “learning how to craft a poetic/politic unity without relying on a logic of appropriation, incorporation and taxonomic identification.” Again, “what kind of politics could embrace partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves and still be faithful, effective—and, ironically, socialist-feminist?” (297)

In many ways Haraway can show us here how it is only by situating our project within a tradition of resistance to the “matrix of dominations” that we can legitimately approach any type of methodology, unless of course our aim is strictly “management.” Not unlike this paper, her manifesto is an “attempt” and a “sketch” toward “an epistemological and political position.” The approach to “household work” and the “feminization of labor” within a context of late capitalist economies reinforces, though I would argue does not extend, Benjamin’s formal performance of the labor/work dialectic through the flaneur, which radically implicates the reader and the reading process itself. As much as Haraway discusses how “microelectronics mediates the translations of labour into robotics and word processing, sex into genetic engineering and reproductive technologies, and mind into artificial intelligence and decision procedures,” there is a type of linearity and stopping short in the analysis of the cyborg, even in the midst of its “powerful infidel heteroglossia” and flaneurial *joi de*

vivre, a resistance in fact to the exploration of the full implications of embodied form and language, a version of historical amnesia seen particularly clearly when we integrate large-scale technological evolution and the notion of the expanded crowd.

One area Haraway references explicitly that Benjamin does not is race, even as Benjamin's status within the radically marginalized Jewish community informs his work at its deepest levels. It is at this point that we see the flaneurial consciousness take on some of its most significant characteristics, however, because it is precisely the discourse of marginality for the which the flaneur accounts. We can see the formation and working through of this type of discourse in work such as Stephano Harney and Fred Moten's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013) where a fully integrated cultural critique goes hand in hand with an ontology of resistance and definitional fluidity. Any number of points in their book bear out a type of flaneurial project. Consider the following statement, from "Blackness and Governance":

The anoriginary drive and the insistences it calls into being and moves through, that criminality that brings the law online, the runaway anarchic ground of unpayable debt and untold wealth, the fugal, internal world theater that shows up for a minute serially—poor but extravagant as opposed to frugal—is blackness. (47)

This is an extraordinary statement that I won't offer a full exegesis of here, but it is important to note how blackness is positioned vis a vis a flaneurial consciousness as we have been investigating and constructing it. The "anoriginary drive" is in Harney and Moten's book a modality of black cultural activity that includes citational practice, and the quote situates this practice of externality and "outside" as very much simultaneously internal, a drive that seems to have equal parts agency and a collective or crowd aspect. Much like Benjamin's flaneur as well, this tenuous back and forth is couched in phenomenological terms, as much grounded in historical specificity (that is, citational) as it is a component of "being." And we see the

flaneur as “outlaw” reflected here in the “criminality” of the drive, which also as with the flaneur doubles as the deeply conservative impulse of the commodity, bringing “the law online.” It is a criminal, runaway, fugitive, and anarchic force that nevertheless is the “ground of . . . untold wealth.” And debt here works in nearly identical fashion as the flaneur’s relation to the crowd as broadly conceived through citation, the only way into the contemporary being a relation to a ruined or absent past that is nevertheless always already present and future. Of course the specificity of debt here is the debt of slavery, but that mass slaughter of what we know as the human is also contained in the paradoxical notion of the flaneur as simultaneously pure human and pure capital. Finally, the singular performativity of the flaneur is through and through this “world theater,” its momentary appearance very much in line with the Benjaminian “flash” or “dialectics at a standstill.” There is every case to be made for the flaneur as blackness itself, as the manifestation of the very complexity of the human as “other” in the depths of the machine.

One final linkage here, particularly as we more overtly broach the ontological dimensions of flanerie, is to Martin Heidegger’s essay “The Question Concerning Technology.” There Heidegger discusses technology or *techne* as very much an abstract process, one of “revealing” but also that of “questioning” technology itself. It is most appropriate to discuss the *Arcades* here as itself a technology that brings forth this revealing. *Techne* means:

to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it. Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a revealing. (5)

What we have in *the Arcades* is a being “at home” in the technology of the citation, in the actual anticipated reading process as we have discussed it above. The passages and citations, crowds of sociotechnical beings, work as access points in just this way. Benjamin, and by extension his readers, becomes “expert” in each passage, thereby opening up a being at home in history, which is

thereby “revealed.” *Techne* “reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us.” “Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens.” Citation and citational reading function as technology, through the technology of language, in precisely this way. They are this opening up to historical truth.

All well and good. But one of the decisive turns in Heidegger’s essay is from this more handicraft based mode of technological revealing to the treatment of what is “new” in “modern technology,” which Heidegger terms “challenging” of what is understood as natural resources through the incorporation of large-scale machinery. He provides a concrete illustration in the following paragraph:

The hydroelectric plant is set into the current of the Rhine. It sets the Rhine to supplying its hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning. This turning sets those machines in motion whose thrust sets going the electric current for which the long-distance power station and its network of cables are set up to dispatch electricity. In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electrical energy, even the Rhine itself appears as something at our command. The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather the river is dammed up into the power plant. What the river is now, namely, a water power supplier, derives from out the essence of the power station. In order that we may even remotely consider the monstrousness that reigns here, let us ponder for a moment the contrast that speaks out of the two titles, “The Rhine” as dammed up into the *power works*, and “The Rhine” as uttered out of the *art work*, in Hölderlin’s hymn by that name. But, it will be replied, the Rhine is still a river in the landscape, is it not? Perhaps. But how? In no other way than as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry. (7, italic in original)

As much as the final sociological critique seems to take its cue from Adorno, one senses an extraordinary anger here. That said,

the flaneur will be in that tour group, vacationing and doing business. But the crucial move in this passage is of course the approach of technology to the natural world such that nature then become derivative of technology, such that the very being of nature is displaced into the machine, in this case into electricity that functions on the scale of public works, large projects that echo M21,1 above.¹³ This displacement is at the core of *the Arcades* and frames the haunted landscape within which the flaneur circulates. Heidegger calls out this displacement as “monstrous.” The Rhine is no longer a river, the being “at home” of earlier iterations of *techne*, the artwork itself, is no longer an option other than as an extension of capital. This situation reaches into the depths of *the Arcades* insofar as the arcades double here as the power works, though *the Arcades* takes account of the entire scene here, including the river, power works, electric network, vacation industry, tourists, and finally the zeroing in on language itself in the phantasmagoric shift of meaning in “The Rhine.” We have only to return to M2,4 to see Benjamin constructing an analogous tableau, though here implicating the railroad rather than a hydroelectric plant in the technological displacement, a kind of mechanism at the very “heart” of the flaneur:

We know that, in the course of flanerie, far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment. When the authentically intoxicated phase of this condition announces itself, the blood is pounding in the veins of the happy flaneur, his heart ticks like a clock, and inwardly as well as outwardly things go on as we would imagine them to do in one of those “mechanical pictures” which in the nineteenth century (and of course earlier, too) enjoyed great popularity, and which depicts in the foreground a shepherd playing on a pipe, by his side two children swaying in time to the music, further back a pair of hunters in pursuit of a lion, and very much in the background a train crossing over a trestle bridge. Chapuis and Gélis, *Le Monde des automates* (Paris, 1928), vol. 1, p. 330. [M2,4]

13. We might interpret this in terms of the genesis of the hyperobject as discussed by Timothy Morton.

Compared to Heidegger's more or less straightforward presentation in discursive prose of a relatively contained shift from handicraft to modern technology, the wide-ranging implications of this passage are staggering. Its density rivals a Nietzschean aphorism, or indeed the opening Mechanical Turk tableau of Benjamin's "Theses on the Concept of History." For now I only point to the relationship between a bucolic vision of the natural environment (where the old Rhine might appear) and the way in which the deep background is characterized by the introduction of the railroad. Of course the whole scene is a "mechanical picture" so the unfolding complexity might start from there.

Have we then broken in, to the text, and broken out, again? What have I been able to say, or point to? When and where has the crowd, or the flaneur, displaced what I have to say, the way I am speaking? My only object is to point to *the Arcades*, and a figure therein, one that in many respects points to itself, does nothing but that. By way of conclusion perhaps the most appropriate move is to return, like any conclusion, to the opening question, asking again, what is the flaneur? In that way we re-enter, perhaps this time with a different brand of cognition, the ontological terrain of Heidegger's "questioning concerning technology." But there is always something else, a kind of way we get there. Not a before and after, since any "before" is always changed by what we pass through on the way in. Any before is revealed as part of the passage itself, in this extensive network of passages, a *Passengen-Werk* (the German title of *the Arcades*). We conclude a look at the flaneur perhaps best exactly by leaving ourselves in the dream of reading, by not forcing ourselves to "wake up." We certainly don't conclude with an informative, discursive summary of our major points—the flaneur as extension of mass culture, as built environment, as transhistoric interval, as capital dressed up as a tramp—since that might call our whole project into question. No, we want to ask *again* after the unanswerable, the untrackable, the disappearing, that very thing that perhaps compels whatever comes to the surface at all about the flaneur. We comprehend our

status, then, as somehow wrapped in darkness, intellection's fog, "convalescent," as in Poe's "Man of the Crowd." Time passes in our pursuit, to be sure, and as much as clarity can be reduced to small nodes of existential authenticity, still a phantasmatic slip-page dominates. As Poe's narrator writes:

There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told. Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking them piteously in the eyes—die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not suffer themselves to be revealed. Now and then, alas, the conscience of man takes up a burthen so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only into the grave. (506)

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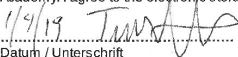
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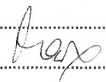
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February 6, 2019

Experience of sitting here in this archive. Face to face with the PDFs of the *AP*. Why don't they just put this stuff online! Again, utterly outmoded idea of the archive, as stale as can be, and the only reason I was here, even knowing that they wouldn't show me the mss (not that big of a deal anyway), was to test the theories I wanted to test. Which I did I suppose.

That the epigraphs are out to the right continuously strikes me as so odd, I suppose. Why? So that they could be added as an afterthought, in an ms that is entirely epigraphs as it is. So they must have had a particularly special status.

And you can read into the *AP* anything you like, possibly one of the points Ursula Marx is making. That's for sure. But then too this is not a time when someone is doing that: they visit the archive for a sense of what in fact is going on in the work. They are taking a last step toward doing that, toward caring, so that to take an attitude of, oh well, people are just nuts, is well . . .

I'm making this up day by day. The lesson of the *AP*, the actual reading of the *AP*, I can't quite recognize, think I'm trying to be some sort of scholar: M20,2, the confusion of ships, the play of a light of inexhaustible richness, "a river of the blind eternally in pursuit of immediate material object." I just can't believe there is any way to sit all day, every day, in this archival environment and grasp this pursuit.

Somewhat set up here to believe the *AP*. It's not in the end significant if B was waning on interest, supposedly, or if some abstract book on Baudelaire was in the works. It is what it is, how it has been handed down, or made it down to us. And here and now looking at the disjunction between the clean mss of the *AP* vs. the mostly sloppy but somewhat overwhelming symbols that take over the mss. We have to believe in the *AP* as it is, in citation. We can't keep thinking, oh he would have moved on. It was a behind the scenes, in process collection of material that was deeply intense. Crafted, as very much indicated in "The Storyteller," via Valéry. I think it must be that pursuing that line of

thought, all the way through *Origin*, is what might possibly lead “out the other side.” As I can now, how many horses did B hear on the street? Should I go visit his old house, since I have nothing better to do?

And I think obviously as well (and doesn't it feel good to write here?), the manuscripts make clear the effort put forth in making the little black boxes of the cross references. That effort lines up in four ways with the symbols: the referentiality of meaning, they are both “transfers”; the dark color; the size of the shape; the positioning. Fact is, no one knew at all what B was going to end up doing. There is not one single person who has the slightest idea, let alone the ability to prove anything. And then, even if they did prove something... The *AP* is radically incomplete, and B himself was radically self-cancelling.

And then there's this other guy, in the glassed room to my left. He seems to sit over there all day, sometimes getting up to stand near the window, or near his book shelf. It is both him and Ursula in their glassed rooms, at their desks, clearly intended to provide a type of surveillance, but also an awkward expertise, their status as gatekeeper of some sort. I guess it taps into my resentment at the whole archival setup as a barrier around the *AP*, a barricade.

Today is a quiet day here. Ha ha. Anyway, the sun came out and the window near this desk is open, fresh cold air coming in, the sound of light traffic, a siren, a horse-drawn carriage (or horses) went by a little while ago. I had a cappuccino at the café I like across the street, where they don't mind at all speaking English and they take my credit card (5 euro minimum!). I like the wooden desks here, the book shelves, even the walls with large panes of glass, blocking sound and allowing sight. There's more to be said as the day winds down. I had to get over this nervousness to get into a groove here. But man it is a sweet groove. Sitting here paging through the original ms just seeing what comes up, making notes all along, checking out translations, coming up with theories on many different levels. Study! Let it live...

As I've written before, too, even not reading the *AP* is reading it. Or being just about to read it, setting aside the dreary angst at so much information and knowing, as in the Valéry quote, the vast riches in front of one, that any point is sufficient to access a textual and historical feast unlike any other created. And, yes, that's without reading it! Since it is at that point that one is aware of the way the *AP* points directly beyond itself, with a power generated by the power of its self-referentiality. By reading it closely one gets to the point of true appreciation, which as I've said is re-translation but is very much that non-engagement, which I guess I'm insisting on with NP, my "dissertation," which insists on not being finished. A conclusion would kill it.

I think that when he was pulling quotes he was pure and simple only looking for those that attached to the overall project. And what took place was that it quickly became clear that it wasn't that hard to find things, that all text seemed to fit in one way or another, that the world was full of these symbols. On top of that, it became obvious that he could then write in "his own voice" and still be in the framework of the arcades, even more in the framework at that point. Is this a whole new biography? He was even more in the framework.

Not only is there the pretty good possibility of outright mistakes in the German edition (and of course the Americans had the manuscripts in front of them as well), but the handwriting seems entirely incomprehensible, beyond all legibility, in many places. I don't know, we get wrong readings, slightly wrong readings, readings that are overenthusiastic and off the mark, stupid mistakes, ignorant mistakes, avoidable oversights, ideologically motivated and nearly intentional inaccuracies. This probably happens with everything in the world. One continues with what one has a passion for, hoping that in the end, cumulatively, the balance tips toward substance.

Always that pressure or inclination exists in the *AP* to read out from any given passage, to read one's way out of the *AP*, through one of these doorways, to escape. So then that's there when one thinks of reading the *AP*, that going right past it. So this gets extrapolated

to the “experience” of reading itself. Which is the ragpicker. Which is a way of being in the world. And this is too a way of experiencing history, or history in the making, or the present. Which comes to us so easily when the *AP* is activated. To read is to be inside of history as a force in the present, which may, according to Benjamin, happen in a flash or shock. But does the shock continue? Or get absorbed? Become boring? Can a shock happen to a collective? And then can the collective get inured to shock? I think so. I think we are.

B2a,2 is an instance of the bibliographic information being separated from the passage at the end, and indented. In this case, the passage is speaking of the crinoline, so the irony is very much pronounced. This indentation does not make it into the German, and hence the English. These hugely telling oddities do not survive. . . . I mean, this indentation may have been used earlier too, and he may have been experimenting with it, to hit just the right note of material resonance, of illustration, of implication. In some sense B was fine tuning an instrument in the *AP*.

Anyway, having been at this for a while, maybe I’m fine-tuning too. Making one statement after another about the *AP* that is truly only comprehensible from a place of a symbolic reading, which is in fact pretty much done with worrying over the informational crowd. They’ll either figure it out or they won’t. Meanwhile we have this whole world of stuff sitting here.

A9,1: “transfer” symbol to red x in square, “sensual system,” symbol inserted into passage, in the middle, not at the end, right next to the word “painters”: the first time the symbol is used, dark red splotch on first page of convolute A, it is at the passage where Balzac “chants the stanzas of color”. And here too the mark is very pronounced, which made me want to investigate. Paid off. . .

February 7, 2019

After a nice cappuccino at a place that takes my credit card. Getting here early today. Expecting a number of other folks who need to use the computer. Back at it with PDFs of English and German, this document, Google translate, and the mss. This morning

went through the rough draft document for the diss, seeing how it is rough, too much lacking in signposts to help readers over the hump of how much is in there, how to put it all in context.

The way one goes through the mss—not knowing German and French, looking at the scrawl—is to note what is out of the ordinary, then check to see how it was translated to the German and English. What often happens is that once one starts a closer look the delayering commences, which is exactly B's though process I would say. Once that delayering starts the dance of being en face of the mss is begun. And I'm still very much testing this out. For instance, in B1,4, the addition of “—between and Lust and Corpse—” is striking, carefully given a precise location. And obviously here with the cross references this opens a thread, or better, a transfer point, between fashion / revolution / love, or better, a dialectical hub, crossing point. And you can look at precisely the way you can spend all day here facing the PDF, or go on with the mss.

And the guiding idea is looking for the material intervention in the look of the page by the symbols. So that if in fact in each passage is a dialectical image, or you could say a hub, then the symbol-marking either abandons that idea or amplifies it, signals a shift. And it has to be that they were part of a some kind of separate pass, maybe simply a point at which the Baudelaire project was a major concern. But again if the pages themselves were under serious consideration as a key element of the meaning of the words, then the symbols seem to indicate a slightly different valuation. Could it be that the written out passages were a way for Benjamin himself to mediate on the ideas being worked out?

What's basically on view is the “treatment” of the mss by Benjamin both at the first pass stage of writing in the citation and then again during some sort of correction pass. Then again at a pass to enter the symbols.

Fact is that the symbols are good as “transfers” but if you look at the entire idea of the titles of the convolutes you have the same thing. It's simply a continuation of something like, ok, here's a citation that filters into the idea of “fashion” and has cross

references and fits into this dialectical hub or transfer point. What the symbols might do is push the hub idea away from the linguistic or encyclopedic and into an iconic or visual statement, more quickly and easily grasped. But still it is nearly identical to the arrangement that was already well established, even at the very inception of the *AP*, you could say, or even as a modality that really has no ground or bottom in the “network.” All here is network. *All* here is transfer. All here is the appearance of one thing through another. I mean, even to say a “book on Baudelaire” is somewhat ridiculous given that it’s obvious from that convolute how expansive the idea of “Baudelaire” actually is: and you can see that from the long essay as well, as it detours through other topics.

So that for Benjamin nothing you say is going to be without the “transfer” points. This seems to be the case in “Task”, *One-Way Street*, and so on. And clearly in the *Arcades* the status of any given piece of prose is at stake or in play, newspaper, scholarship, poetry, and so on.

The citations were all communicating through the various loose sheets of paper. So the framework will have been in mind, the scaffolding or armature of the informational categorization, which he would have been working among, page after page in a network that was already put in place by history itself. So that the pages floated in and among the thousands of pages of books he was reading and drawing from, in and among the alphabetical organization of the library collection.

That the epigraphs inhabit that alternate space of the page is all the more extraordinary given that in a number of cases Benjamin goes out of his way, as with B4a, to squeeze in text overrun up the side, even writing over other text in a fight for space. Why do that? Here it may also be that this is the second page of B4 and would have needed to leap to a whole new page, B5, with a continuation.

There is certainly also an accounting to be made, if any accountings are being made, of the fact that a number of symbols are placed in the midst of the passages, not at the end. For

instance B6 has a light red cross 12 lines up from the bottom of the page, with the passage ending in fact on B6a. Indeed you can see the commitment Benjamin must have had to these longer citations, this one filling nearly a page and a half, with some 20 ellipses throughout. The citation was effectively sculpted into the *Arcades*. Its purpose must be extremely specific I would say. It looks very much like he was concerned with the idea of the inverse proportion of the duration of fashion to the swiftness of its introduction, the cross inserted right at that line.

One idea here is to put the dissertation in the *Arcades* format of folded 11x17 or something, typed into half the page, on loose sheets, packed in. Which brings up the idea of the basic conception of NP in the first place, how much it is a place of the between and needs a very loose structure. I'm constantly attempting to make the case for why that is true. Of course web pages are those loose pages. Possible to reroute the blog into smaller chunks, along with everything else, rewriting a whole bunch of the other material. Could we get 426 pages? So that's 852 sides, say 3,200 entries. That many?

Question: why does he end B9a with more than half the page empty, but start the new with a citation that could have easily fit there? Also, there is no page number at the top of B9a, so there must be some idea of a completed movement, or a movement through B9 that was so pronounced that it went right through that way. Need to read those citations.

There's also the way the end of one convolute works its way into the beginning of the next, which seems to happen pretty often. In this case there will have been a very specific conclusion to a convolute, meaning no additional pages were meant to be added. This guy next door has been trimming and pruning this plant in his office for about half an hour now. Makes me wonder what he's doing when he looks like he's concentrating on something. The simple truth is he wanted to start a page with a passage. He didn't want to break across pages, esp. break from one page to the next (which I don't think I've seen one example of). This is a very particular thematic containment, also a material containment.

Looking intently at these mss for hours, suspecting I'm doing some sort of dance of the unthought about this project, this work, which I have so little comprehension of. Ha ha!

So the pages are indeed arranged as a Kaiserpanorama or Stereoscope. The ideal cover of the project.

These panels are in fact the columns of the ms. The pages of a book. This is one way the citations themselves maintain the status of images. Each one is an image in the panorama in this regard. Notice the thoroughly bourgeois characters of this scene, complete with gendarmes overseeing, nearly like a prison visitation. Possibly compare this to the panopticon. Also notice the numbering of the different stations, just like the numbering of the convolutes. Would each of these people be looking at the same thing? How exactly does this work? Well, like the peep show booth in *Paris, Texas*.

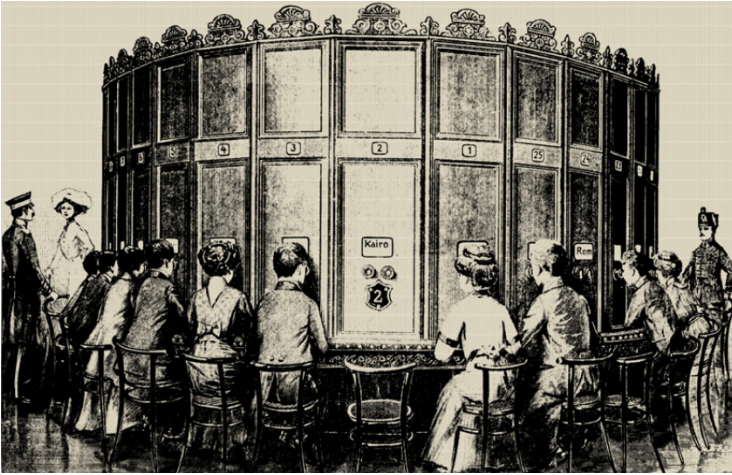
How does this image carry over to NP? But this all speaks to the material experience B had thought about in actually reading the *AP*. Anyway, all of them have a place where you look and then an empty panel above.

And this is just this media archaeology thing, but a core historical insight. He spent many years working in this modality and probably book after book could be written that takes apart different implications. That must have been what kept the interest going, that there is a truth to this avenue into the understanding of language. That's what the book on Benjamin really needs to be about, how exactly that is the case, how we can then assess the digital based on the idea that the movement of technology and language are crystalized in this form, that we're never not in this viewing position, how later developments, 1984, Foucault, the Matrix, etc., took up this insight or situation.

You'd also want to have a piece or pieces on this very specific materialization of the manuscript and text and how that carries over to punctuation in many cases, micro/macro etc.

Also see article online that connects to *Berlin Childhood*.

The significance of the paragraph. Nothing really exceeds one paragraph. So there is this distinct rhythm of containment across "images." Maybe you can imagine the young Benjamin staring



at each one in the kaiserpanorama, unpacking it for the full five minutes as his imagination went on and on, just as each passage is meant to create that exact same sensation as staring at something for a long time and making something up. And all this was the early commodification of the image, the self, the *Arcades* showing how all this takes place certainly not through text only, so that the folks who argue against everything being language can't really make the same point here. His structure is completely text based and completely image and material at once, watching exactly where these two converge.

There's this form of kinda knowing it to be the case. Then there's the issue of expressing it... Getting it on the table. I'm understandably a few steps down the road, so it's important to go slow, which means it's hard if not impossible to get at the real excitement.

February 8, 2019

Final day. Went to B's neighborhood from 1930 to 1933 and his emigration. These are years not working on AP. Then it starts again when he settles in Paris. It's really (obviously) a Paris

project. But even perhaps more tied to this longing for Berlin specifically.

Now last day visiting mss, for very short time I think. Have in some sense played it out, but now feeling that seeing the mss is the only way into eg. the actual sense of the handwriting, how large/small, what physical effort it must have taken to produce it, then to how much there is, and so on.

Clear from first page of J that he was numbering the images (I won't even call them passages any longer: but if you think of the "passage" of the kaiserpanorama it is like a birth canal etc., so that crossing of image and passage. How can I have the diss convey this sense?)

And what's crucial about the *AP* is that it's not even about some informational thing but precisely about getting distracted, floating off into study, a dream but not a dream since it's simply what life is and does. I need to remember that at all places in the writing.

If indeed he is making images out of all the passages then it's really awful to actually change around punctuation, which the German mostly doesn't do. But then too thinking of translation makes it all the more impossible. Like Dickinson, even harder, no way at all to translate. So that what happens in the German, which I'm only on the outskirts of, is that it opens up this whole other reading that is completely crucial to the whole project, one that is necessarily barely discernable in the English (though it is there).

Please note: J18a,9 in the mss contains a very obvious colon that was removed for the German and then didn't appear in the English either. Oh well: it actually reads:

Seilliere bemerkt, die apokryphen, Baudelaire zugeschobenen: Gedichte seien sämtlicnekrophil. (p 151)

Seilliere noticed, the apocryphal, Baudelaire added: poems are all necrophilic. (p 151)

So that based on this punctuation you have to go into this reflective space, following the feeling of the text and punctuation, its often odd syntax, into the overall meaning. And you kind of can't do that sitting in this archive I suppose. Or just very quietly. But that's I think very much what J18a,9 is about.

The fact is that on a subtle reading there are decisions being made with almost every passage on how to honor the formatting and syntax of the original mss. The German edition does have slight shifts here and there in many places that are potentially rife with meaning, and then the English on top of that is nearly unbearable, if one is doing this subtle reading. There is no doubt that what is needed is a printing of the mss, with for English speakers must have the German, to have a sense of what Benjamin wrote, and then an English translation that stays much closer to the original, without attempting to smooth things out. Maybe just try with a convolute or two. And why not on the original sized paper. In the same column, completely fetishized, but this also points to an art project.

Ok back from lunch at that café I just like a lot... Now the last moments with the mss for this trip. I wish I could take some images with me, but that's ok. I have this strong sense that I can't really say what this is all about at the moment. I have some ideas but it's not clear how meaningful they'll be later, as I go through the diss, then after that, a civilian. I can somehow imagine writing pieces and sending them. Pieces that are what they really should be: nonacademic explorations that simply let loose and then can become this true recovery project for the *AP*. Really? Does it need to be recovered?

And you have always to remember with the *AP* that your misinterpretations simply don't matter. I'm sure Ursula has a sense of that here, but I'm not sure. I say this because of the fact that the *AP* has as its subject matter that all language sees through all other language, so no matter what language you choose it will also be part of the networks of meaning that, say, something that was more accurate or correct was part of. "It's all good."

Note that ellipses are always very clear, 3 steady dots pretty close together and float up from the baseline to about the middle of the horizontal type space.

Note that m has no transfer symbols. Nor does "i" (but "i" is very short). Some other sections also missing bookmarks but still have symbols.

“And those, who cannot ... pay for a shelter?”:
NP’s Poverty of Place

A2a,4 from the *Arcades*:

“And those who cannot pay for . . . a shelter? They sleep wherever they find a place, in passages, arcades, in corners where the police and the owners leave them undisturbed.” Friedrich Engels, *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1848), p. 46 (“Die grossen Stadte”).

»Und diejenigen, die kein . . . Nachtlager bezahlen können? Nun, die schlafen, wo sie Platz finden, in Passagen, Arkaden, in irgend einem Winkel, wo die Polizei oder die Eigenthümer sie ungestört schlafen lassen.« Friedrich Engels: *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England* Zweite Ausgabe Leipzig 1848 p 46 (Die großen Städte)

“And those who can not pay ... night camp? [And those, the no [such] bivouac pay off can?] Well, they sleep where they find a place, in passages, arcades, in some corner where the police or the proprietors let them sleep undisturbed.” Friedrich Engels: *The Situation of the Working Class in England* Second Edition Leipzig 1848 p 46 (The big cities)¹

PART 1

I

Which approach? There should be some form of approach. A struggle taking place. There is the approach of *explication de texte*. It might be the best way to warm up, to give things a try, a step that can always be made. That step parallels the first thought of a new press, the element of the earliest conversation (between who

1. A2a,4, from Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); *Das Passagen-Werk*, Gesammelte Schriften Band VI, edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Suhrkamp, 1982); Google Translate (with minimal corrections of my own), March, 2019.

and who?) about a new press as the tide of NP appears (beyond anyone's agency?) as an initial list of projects. To then take things for what they seem to be worth. To accept and assume all pre-existing forms of value.

That earliest conversation. We keep trying to take in those first qualities, which have to do with a not-yet-having-decided, with a having rejected all definitional outlines, except the one that means a multitude of some kind will eventually form. Of course. And these earliest movements and circumstances (almost purely of the body) tend toward what we can designate as a location of resistance only NP might arrange, with each purely substantive press, the more substantive it is the more it serves as backdrop for what then results in NP, no press, no place, new press, starting over. It's possible to say that explication de texte is taken up out of fear of the unknown, an unknown that if contended with obviates all that implied hand-holding.

Here the "Nun" or "Well" of Engles in the German quote above, left out of the published translation, is appropriate to assess. It indicates an obviousness to the question, a common sense aspect to asking what it might be that the penniless actually do when they can't find shelter. It isn't quite an "of course," but is more parochial, levelling the playing field between author/observer, reader, and the figure of the homeless, linking us all through common sense and shared humanity, what anyone would do in this situation. There is no great mystery, even as the implication is that a mystery is assumed, even as turning-a-blind-eye to the plight of the shelterless assumes a bourgeois constancy. All these things, whatever it is that happens to those we experience as homeless, happen in the darkest of dark places, but places that actually take form according to human instinct, according to the laws of gravity, as destitute bodies settle into the pockets of least resistance, let's call them areas of low pressure, which themselves can't help but to perhaps exist. There is a logic that applies here, in this situation of those who might not even rise to the designation of "working class" (that is, what is conceived of as the lumpenproletariat).

But these are people beyond regulation, which is a status NP is designed to adhere to.

II

It's significant here to first gather the surrounding context of the quote from Engles, since it indicates what Benjamin was presumably reading before he made this selection for the *Arcades*. The very brief *Arcades* citation in fact carries the weight of what is an extraordinary tableaux created or documented by Engles:

. . . they who have some kind of shelter are fortunate, fortunate in comparison with the utterly homeless. In London fifty thousand human beings get up every morning, not knowing where they are to lay their heads at night. The luckiest of this multitude, those who succeed in keeping a penny or two until evening, enter a lodging-house, such as abound in every great city, where they find a bed. But what a bed! These houses are filled with beds from cellar to garret, four, five, six beds in a room; as many as can be crowded in. Into every bed four, five, or six human beings are piled, as many as can be packed in, sick and well, young and old, drunk and sober, men and women, just as they come, indiscriminately. Then come strife, blows, wounds, or, if these bedfellows agree, so much the worse; thefts are arranged and things done which our language, grown more humane than our deeds, refuses to record. And those who cannot pay for such a refuge? They sleep where they find a place, in passages, arcades, in corners where the police and the owners leave them undisturbed. (translated by Florence Kelly Wischnewetzky)

The scene is one of misery so profound, bodies piled one on top of another in a primal search for shelter, that as Engels notes language itself is exhausted in accounting for it. It is a human condition outside of the capacity of human accounting, a state that will not be spoken of or recorded, that will in fact be refused by language. At this point, precisely, this extra-linguistic and hence unimaginable abjectness is compounded in the consideration of those figures, those people, who somehow have even *less* than those condemned to these rancid beds. These are the truly peniless, the radically homeless or shelterless, whose condition can only be assumed to be horrific, completely beyond the consciousness of even the dregs of civilization. This is the figure outlined by

Engels and the one taken up in the *Arcades* by Benjamin, a figure in many ways a template for the oft-recurring, central figure of the vagabond in the *Arcades*.

Here the English translation loses the pathos introduced by the emphasis on “those” or “diejenigen,” along with its following comma, which creates a pause in the mind to consider a human being beyond all proper consideration, the extra-moral living dead. But in fact that is the moment Benjamin retrieves from Engels, a key moment that is cited. I propose that Benjamin is appropriating just that—you could say, mostly the comma, which is a punctuational and hence material spatiotemporal departure of writer and therefore reader into an extra-linguistic yet of course purely linguistic zone that is contemplation and only contemplation of what is expressly stated here as being beyond contemplation. It is thought itself but also the delay in thinking, a compassion at the root of the human but given birth to by the material and hence mechanistic operation of ink on the page. “And those,”: we as readers *have to stop*, consider “them,” an impossibility. Here we find the actual intent of the citation, of the passage, the sign or syntax of which has in fact been removed from the Harvard translation, and indeed the translation of the Engels I have quoted.²

Following this interpretation, it’s possible to fine-tune a more step by step reading of the passage. For immediately following this comma—again, Engels’s comma very much the “object of citation”—is in the German syntax the equivalent of saying “the no”, that is, “die [the] kien [not].” Here again the punctuation brings forward a pause that seems relevant, since readers are again placed in suspension—a particularly Benjaminian correspondence of readerly consciousness and punctuational intent—just at the moment when a negative entity is introduced. Yet here the difference is that the first, comma-induced entity, while being so abject as to not be mentionable, still maintains the barely sensible outline of a “those,” or is somehow discernable as a positive personal entity, whereas the suspension in the midst of “the no” as pure

2. In some sense NP is here locating itself outside of the English translation of the *Arcades*.

antecedent is strictly (and inexplicably, unmentionably) an even more negative entity to hold in suspension. Benjamin picks up the rhetorical move of Engels—moving from those who can pay their penny to those who can't—and compounds what already seems to be a state of negativity not to be exceeded. In some sense, he also *cites* that compounding. Engels's text moves from bed to no bed, Benjamin moves from comma to ellipses, both writers using prose text to access a readerly consciousness referencing a deep condition of inhumanity (or, that is, the human pure and simple, stripped of all resources).

III

But the reading extends further in that the comma's equivalence to Engels's minimal and destitute condition of "bed" by extension enables us to consider the ellipses as the equivalent of "no bed," even as it forms the image of a horizontal, if fragmented, bed-like plane on the page:

...

The phenomena of "no bed", itself equated with having literally no money, an externality of capitalism, a refuse, castoff, is here suggested by this fairly diaphanous appearance of a bed itself, one might say a bed that in its bare outlines equates in fact to the *Arcades*, a massive ellipses in book form, a dialectics or indirect reference of visibility, a piecemeal incarnation of history where there can in fact be no history, a ruin of a bed. The reader is placed, housed if you will, by this Benjaminian interruption of Engels's text, inside a consideration of what it is to be utterly outside, "on the street." And it's important to keep in mind that Benjamin's authorial intervention is thus doubly constituted—a signature move of the *Arcades*—not only by selecting passages to cite, but by picking and choosing exactly how to elide, to actively disappear, certain moments in those citations, Benjamin's own authorship appearing as the disappearance of an author whose appearance, which constitutes Benjamin's own disappearance, is

the only way in which he can appear. Benjamin appears as author precisely in the suspended negativity or homelessness, bedlessness, of the ellipse, as much as this authorship is also the blank space or interval between passages, the empty locus of actual spatiotemporal and transhistorical interruption.

Moreover, what the ellipses elides perhaps couldn't be less significant, that is, it could have been easily left in. It is a single word in the Engles, "sochen", German for "such," the qualifier for "shelter", or "Nachlager." "Such shelter." Certainly if we are attempting to get at the meaning of this passage (and it seems that we are), we need logically to approach some kind of rationale for removing the word "such." Indeed, this rationale of the selection of what text to include in the *Arcades*, this discussion of what possibly makes sense for Benjamin's rationale, may be one of the primary, if not the foremost, directions Benjamin "studies" could take. I say this mostly since this type of assessment is what does finally move "off" the page and get to the mechanics of the construction of the *Arcades*, which is nearly impossible to attain to even now, almost a century after the work was compiled. Only when we are able to report on the sources of the *Arcades* and how exactly they were conscripted and deputized in service of whatever the larger project of the *Arcades* is, can we get to the appropriate distance from its foundational insight, can we then exceed its radicality and make good on its revolutionary promise.³

Quite straightforwardly, "such" does refer back to an extra-textual (outside of the *Arcades*) entity, or the subject that precedes, in the Engles, the citation here. "Such shelter" refers to the horrific, crammed-full beds the truly homeless could not afford. Without the "such," that potentially confusing pointing back to the Engles is taken away. We are left with "shelter" on its own, hence "And those, who could not afford shelter?" Thus it is shelter in the absolute sense, a generic idea, not keyed to the contrast that exists

3. Ursula Marx at the Benjamin archives reports that a book will soon appear (in German) that takes up just this assessment of Benjamin's sources in the *Arcades*. Of course NP as a whole is another approach, a thread, to the revolutionary quality of the *Arcades*.

in the Engles, the reference to the piled up bodies of the working class (or at least not a reference unless of course we know the Engles, which many will). The ellipses indicates a strong intention here to remove that link, that hint that one should perhaps pursue the original text to complete the meaning of the citation.

I'm saying this as well even as a second option exists (these two in addition to Benjamin's desire simply to introduce, to author, an ellipses at this exact point). That option is that an immediacy of appearance is being introduced or constructed for "shelter." That is, the notion that one cannot afford shelter whatsoever. By removing the "such" Benjamin is able to zero out the entirety of the idea of shelter, that is, to make its mention a consideration of shelter in the absolute sense. What is human being without any shelter at all? Can it be defined then, as human?⁴ To consider this passage, our readerly experience, is to revolve back and forth between the human and non-human insofar as "human" is incapable of being sheltered, or escapes shelter. It is also to consider how each of these two extreme states of being human appear in and through each other, in the same way the "no bed" experience is produced by bed-like ellipses. With the word "shelter" we in some sense recover from the void introduced by the ellipses (finally not a void, but the primary locus of Benjamin's authorship) but of course only in the sense that the word "shelter" here is a positive indication of exactly what is missing. On multiple levels in this passage, in the span of a few words and punctuation marks, there is a dialectical inversion or contradiction, the

4. Not unrelated here, and possibly functioning as an ur-text of sorts, is Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (first published in 1930):

Political economy, therefore, does not recognize the unoccupied worker, the workman, insofar as he happens to be outside this labor-relationship. The cheat-thief, swindler, beggar, and unemployed man; the starving, wretched and criminal working-man—these are *figures* who do not exist for *political economy* but only for other eyes, those of the doctor, the judge, the grave-digger and bum-bailiff, etc.; such figures are specters outside the domain of political economy.

ellipses a bed that indicates a radical bedlessness, the word “shelter” standing in for shelter’s complete absence, the (dis)appearance of Benjamin as author through the elision of Engels.

IV

We can state all this, theorize it, put together more or less likely close readings that seem to emerge. This event of reading happens, perhaps dependent on what is being read. But simultaneously with Engels’s writing is the development, status, and state of United States chattel slavery, whose effects thoroughly impacted and penetrated the nineteenth-century global economy and whose material and affective extension into the global collective psyche characterizes thinking of the human condition at its very core.⁵ For example, we can reference here the prose description of slavery composed by Engels’s near exact contemporary Frederick Douglass (Engels 1818–1895, Douglass 1820–1895), in, for example, the three iterations of his personal narrative.

I would like to filter the conversation thus far about the *Arcades* and NP, a conversation that obviously has to do with, among other things, poverty—or what is perhaps the prohibition constitutive of language itself of the human as outside of its status as an artifact of capital, language’s material suggestion of a trans-historical, transpersonal, always more than simply intertextual ontology—filter the conversation through Douglass’s treatment of the conditions of sleep. In the context of Benjamin’s treatment of Engels and the radical absence of a place to sleep, I want to

5. Virtually every single major writer or thinker in the Black Studies tradition, perhaps starting with W. E. B. Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880*, and moving through writers such as Frank Wilderson, Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, Christina Sharpe, Fred Moten, Ashon Crawley, and Alexander G. Weheliye, this statement about the underlying reality of race-based barbarism becomes effectively a truism, in need of little to no elaboration. See below on the character of barbarism in relation to poverty.

consider the first two appearances of sleep in Douglass's *Narrative*. By doing this we in some sense refuse even the arcades, by refusing to leave Douglass behind, which then too transposes the arcades and the *Arcades* into a specifically American context⁶—making it not inappropriate to then transpose particularly American iterations of barbarism and inhumanity back into the European context, and this exactly during the most hideous onslaughts of Nazi fascism, perhaps making the transhistorical implications of the *Arcades* even more apt.

Before literally referencing a portion of Douglass's text, I'll say as well that in addition to NP occupying a booth at the Modern Language Association conference in Chicago from January 6–8, 2019—an out-of-the-way booth, sparsely furnished, nearly empty, marginal to the larger and more trafficked university press booths—there are also the facts that (a) an email with “new university press” in the subject line was sent to over 2,000 participants at the conference, 20% or about 400 of these emails being opened, and (b) I personally spoke to close to 100 conference attendees about the NP project, most all of these people in fact accepting the NP business card, with two people having specifically followed up. I want to make the case for the institutional nature of both sides of this activity and response, the portion that indicates engagement—me being at the conference, people opening an email (some twice, since a followup email was sent), and people stopping at the booth—and the portion that indicates a lack of engagement, engagement's sleep, or people (c. 1,600!) not opening the email to begin with, people not stopping at the booth, people not following up after having good conversations about NP at the booth. Do institutions sleep? Does sleep institutionalize? Is it the case that a person who is either in or looking for a place in an institution could be said to be unable to “pay for” a certain bed? Which bed is that? And are we given access to that institutional (non)location in a particularly relevant way by the

6. Even as Benjamin incorporates consideration of indigenous peoples in the Americas in passages such as D5,1 (see above section “North American Dandy”).

Arcades, by citation or appropriation, by the empathy implied by language's insistence on being read?

I want to read or quote Douglass here for his very specific rumination on the bedlessness of the slave. The first edition of the *Narrative* contains this passage:

There were no beds given the slaves, unless one coarse blanket be considered such, and none but the men and women had these. This, however, is not considered a very great privation. They find less difficulty from the want of beds, than from the want of time to sleep; for when their day's work in the field is done, the most of them having their washing, mending, and cooking to do, and having few or none of the ordinary facilities for doing either of these, very many of their sleeping hours are consumed in preparing for the field the coming day; and when this is done, old and young, male and female, married and single, drop down side by side, on one common bed,—the cold, damp floor,—each covering himself or herself with their miserable blankets; and here they sleep till they are summoned to the field by the driver's horn. (Everyman edition, 21–22)

The English language here makes an appearance where perhaps it never meant to be. The circumspection we bring to aligning Douglass's text with Engels and Benjamin could perhaps not be more demanding. I want to say that I make no claim to awareness of what Douglass and the text he employs actually refer to, or in fact Engels's text, or that of Benjamin, given that he was living in placeless exile when most of the *Arcades* was constructed. (But of course I am claiming an awareness, of something common and shared, which perhaps is the working life of NP.) Douglass seems to create an image or experience whose incomprehensibility makes its way into consciousness the same way that shelterlessness does as an extension of the comma and ellipses in A4a,2. I suppose I am standing far away from the referent, even in suggesting it for close and detailed reading. Still, these efforts seem to find something in the effort of Douglass's writing, the effort of his publishers, the close reader anywhere and everywhere. This is what it is to "see through," via our collective reading and legibility, to an inhuman absence that casts us into what now must be the harsh light

of the human itself. We can't help but read the text, can't help but have it be our "place", our *platz*.

V

Bringing the Engels/Benjamin and Douglass into conversation in this way we perhaps can't help but imagine, or can't help but imagine that we are intended to imagine, how disquieting and uncomfortable reading is, or study is. Which is to say that in both texts, and I'm assuming that we have that longer section of the Engles in mind, layered into the idea of maximum discomfort there is still the idea of sleep itself, a release and letting go, a "finally finding," automated, that the body is physically impelled to accept. There is probably a question here as to whether Benjamin could be seen to be distantly citing Douglass, since Engles and Marx's positioning of the humanity of the working class will have filtered through to the American abolitionists whom Douglass had read and with whom he apparently found figurative and literal refuge. This is not to say that Douglass's own comprehension, recognition, or reading of bedlessness or the absence of a bed is subject to historicization. In any case, there is a way that taking Douglass's words at face value, for what they seem to say to us, brings out what seems to be a "slave-based" ontology of both resistance and reinforcement or accommodation that Benjamin via Engles works to inform, expand on, and strengthen. As much as we're able to contemplate that specific bedlessness or placelessness, an informing begins to happen within the aesthetic of NP, that is, within the mission statement of the global university press as it is brought forward by NP (no place). The sleep of the slave destroys the university in this way, is the only hope of making the university placeless.

The abjectness evinced by Douglass echoes Engles's description of the members of the working class who *did* have a penny or two for a communal bed. In the quoted passage and elsewhere in the *Narrative* Douglass indicates a level of perversity not only in the treatment of slaves—here the absence of treatment or provision of

resources—but in the results of that treatment, the forced comingling of exposed bodies on the uncovered ground. As in the Engles and Benjamin we as readers are invited in, empathetically given to pass over into, to make passage to, this particular phenomenon, which also happens to be in itself the extreme opposite of the privileged ontology finally at stake in any given readerly subject position. There is a “beyond language” to both the Engles and the Douglass, and, for both, that incomprehensibility is what matters when bedlessness and the obliteration of the human by work, which has always been the way we understand slavery, is the subject.

I want to note as well the particular dreamlessness that seems to be implied in the Douglass, where the exhausted slave, no energy to make even those most basic distinctions of age or gender, is given to “drop down.” What Douglass’s prose here invokes, asks its reader to imagine and hold in mind, is the specter of being so completely exhausted—every day—that without any consideration of where they are or who they are with, the slaves “drop.” That is, as a group, everyone in the slave household passes out, entering into sleep so desperately needed that it can only be dreamless, the body recovering, if briefly, from the torments of its status as pure commodity. Similar to the Benjamin, Douglass’s prose here also avails itself of materially illustrating its topic, with “one common bed,—the cold, damp floor—”, the em dashes and brief clause between them forming a horizontal plateau reminiscent of the Benjaminian ellipses and being a moment where the prose in fact poetically visualizes the slave quarters.

In the second edition of the *Narrative*, Douglass expands this passage and re-engages bedlessness through a consideration of slave children, those who don’t have even the “coarse blankets” provided to the adults. Douglass’s revision of the passage is as follows:

As to beds to sleep on, they were known to none of the field hands; nothing but a coarse blanket—not so good as those used in the north to cover horses—was given them, and this only to the men and women. The children stuck themselves in holes and corners, about

the quarters; often the corner of the huge chimneys, with their feet in the ashes to keep them warm. The want of beds, however, was not considered a very great privation. Time to sleep was of far greater importance, for, when the day's work is done, most of the slaves have their washing, mending or cooking to do; and, having few or none of the ordinary facilities for doing such things, very many of their sleeping hours are consumed in necessary preparation for the duties of the coming day.

The sleeping apartments—if they may be called such—have little regard to comfort or decency. Old and young, male and female, married and single, drop down upon the common clay floor, each covering up with his or her blanket,—the only protection they have from cold or exposure. The night, however, is shortened at both ends. The slaves work often as long as they can see, and are late in cooking and mending for the coming day; and, at the first grey streak of morning, they are summoned to the field by the driver's horn.

Douglass's mention of children answers the question "And those who cannot afford a shelter?" With Engles, we can say "Well, they sleep where they find a place." In this case, they are in "holes and corners" rather than "passages, arcades," but just as what seems to be at stake for Douglass is a type of ontological descriptor of key aspects of slavery, a bedlessness, so for Engles and even more so Benjamin referentiality seems to circle around an absence of structure that finally feeds into definite yet emergent absences contained within governmentality, the police, and capital (the merchants of the arcades). And in A4a,2 both the expansive experiment in textuality that is the *Arcades* and its minute passage-to-passage readerly consciousness are quite openly implied as parallel subject matter, "placing" or overlaying the reader within the character of the abject vagabond, and—if we accept the parallel with Douglass—the slave.

At this very specific, if not specialized, level or place, there is a way that study, scholarship, reading insists on being consistently, repeatedly, again and again identified with the most vulnerable, what has come to circulate, at the minimum rhetorically, as the

experience of the slave, perhaps attaining to its most radical articulation in Douglass's narrative.

VI

What happens to critique if slavery—even that cited by Engles and, even more cogently, by Marx⁷—becomes a given, a that-without-which critique cannot move, move forward? It is at that tenuous place, bedless, deprived of all, at least nominally outside of capital, that NP appears. In this sense the university press is associated with pain, disaster, and chaos. Like the *Arcades*, it is structurally impelled to keep to its abject uselessness and unrecognizability as seen from the vantage of bourgeois values. For that reason, it can't in fact do any of the things it sets out to do, publish, organize, even study. Drinking in this unlivability, it lives on, sleeping deep within the cycle of daily events the university sees fit to entertain. That is a sense in which NP in fact finds a place, even as necessarily like the ellipses that place is a ruin.

And in many ways this place of writing is that place. That is, this writing and self-assignment of the working out of the aesthetic or method of NP is finally its place, as much as any other, or as much as the writing has available options of ongoing conversation, conference attendance, marketing and publicity, and finally, almost excruciatingly or criminally, the construction of an actual press. NP is no more or less than the being human in precisely this inhuman reality I've been sketching of being human, right there in front of us(e). And what of those, actual presses? Certainly we'll make an answer but always aware, and this is part of each and every one of the answers, that no answer is given, just the opposite of answer, that is, question or opening. Because we stay here, all still, in the movement from institution to institution, university to university, press to press. We're stuck. And of course I keep drawing on the tautological and self-contradictory nature of language and presentation, an ongoing citation of Harney and

7. Particularly in volume 1 of *Capital*.

Moten, but answering their call too, which got to where it is via Douglass, Engles, and Benjamin opening it up.

VII

But we're also positioned at a breaking point in terms of where Benjamin diverges from Engles and Douglass. Quite clearly Engles and Douglass are not placing value directly *in* that radically displaced status of the homeless or the slave. Benjamin, on the other hand, clearly does do that, insofar as he persistently, throughout the *Arcades*, invokes a similitude or superposition between reader and, in this case, those who are finding a "place" in the "passages" or arcades. One of the most significant aspects of A4a,2 is the starkly overt character of its calling out the equivalence, as I've mentioned, between reader and subject. This equivalence must be dealt with—with perhaps every passage, with the idea that *this* is what the *Arcades* is *about*, if one is to read it. For instance, the question emerges as to how exactly it is the case that those who are in effect beyond language in their abject misery, penniless, without shelter and by extension anything that might designate them as human at all, in what sense is this status equated with the reader and all they may represent, first and foremost perhaps the author? The dialectic of poverty and wealth, homelessness and shelter, barbarism and civility, seems to be at stake.

The passage turns us, as I have been indicating, toward the perhaps quite complex Benjaminian notion of poverty. At this point we'd have to turn away from the Engles and Douglass, at least suspend what looks like their far more straightforward notions of poverty. And what I would like to not lose sight of is the idea, and here is where NP finds virtually all of its relevance, that the very carving out of history, interpretation, or analysis is not only implicated by what is said by my language and prose, by its direction in itself and as a modality of exploration, but is progressively dismantled by these exact characteristics I have just mentioned. The closer we get to the text, then, it must be that

the more tenuous our hold becomes. So that as that tenuousness emerges from thinking, analysis, and study, so there and then NP comes to be recognized. There's no prize here, no take-away, only NP inasmuch as it is the promise of continuing, its fugitivity and folding back into and fulfilling governmentality.

Poverty's complexity for Benjamin can be gleaned from a few key moments in his 1933 essay "Experience and Poverty," but there is one we can't help but assume crystalizes the essay as a whole perhaps more than any other—beyond other key moments such as the shock experienced by the WWI veteran, the positive sense of barbarism, and the extraordinary image of Micky Mouse. The first paragraph opens with a kind of parable that holds in nuce many of the key points contained in the rest of the essay as well as a framework for approaching what I have been referencing so far in terms of poverty:

Our childhood anthologies used to contain the fable of the old man who, on his deathbed, fooled his sons into believing there was treasure buried in the vineyard. They would only have to dig. They dug, but found no treasure. When autumn came, however, the vineyard bore fruit like no other in the whole land. They then perceived that their father had passed on a valuable piece of experience: the blessing lies in hard work and not in gold.

What's significant here is the play of absences, which fit quite snugly into the mold of absences, places of rest really, from A4a,2 and the Douglass. These are nonplaces and voids that achieve ontological ascendance. They constitute modalities of poverty that, perceived differently or at a later point, are the quintessence of wealth. Expressed in this paragraph of "Experience and Poverty" is a mourning for traditional types of wisdom or experience, and this parable is put squarely before us as an example of that experience. But the moment we start to assess the story in detail, it's clear that it is shot through with difficulties or even aporias. We have to believe that an old man—a cipher for traditional authority—would in fact use his dying breath in a lie to his own sons, representing a profound poverty of relation. And the cagey

story he tells is one of wealth, a mythical buried treasure, that is very much nonexistent. And a central image of the tale is the empty holes dug by the sons, which for months before the harvest must have stood for perfect abandonment by the old man. At last, and very much inexplicably, these holes, these emptinesses, produce a fruit that needs some interpretation, an effort at rerouting. Finally it's not the fruit itself that is the wealth or that's sold for wealth, but the work that was done to dig those holes of empty promises. Did the old man really mean that treasure was found in the work of digging holes for no apparent reason? Work that gathers around a lack of value, a uselessness, at least when it is actually done?

There are many forms of poverty on display in the parable, even as each goes hand in hand with an idea of wealth. For instance, the parable is prominently placed in this essay, the first paragraph, a sign of the value of significance, and what is on offer, according to the essay, is a shining example of experience:

Moreover, everyone knew precisely what experience was: older people had always passed it on to younger ones. It was handed down in short form to sons and grandsons, with the authority of age, in proverbs; with an often long-winded eloquence, as tales; sometimes as stories from foreign lands, at the fireside.

This all effectively describes the old man's tale and how it was related to the sons. It is not poverty, but wealth. It is a wealth of relations, of storytelling, of wisdom and lives on, of well being, of buried treasures that really do get found, dreams that come true. Alongside those moments of emptiness and poverty just mentioned, we have all of this, the upside.

Benjamin's essay goes on to note how parables such as this one have been displaced. This interplay of wealth and poverty has taken on a different form, shifted its coordinates. The impetus for this transformation is technology and specifically the machinery of war, which has had such devastating effects that parables and the like no longer resonate the way they used to. Benjamin is concerned to exhibit the way technology exceeds human capacity

but only to reroute, to reintroduce but subtly, those primitive tendencies technology set out to combat or appease in the first place. Humanity itself is in shell shock, comatose, unable to register any enthusiasm for digging such holes. Humanity is, as a protective measure, bored, with that particular affective state defining a whole new modality of poverty. The key question of “Experience and Poverty” is what this new form of poverty is, and I would say whether it is new at all. It’s true that NP is grounded in this other sense of poverty, one that engages and carries with it the indefinable but desperate absence of life-giving sustenance such as food and shelter, but that also valorizes the manner in which the extrusion of the human by capital doubles back as the very definition or concept of reaffirmation and resistance. NP needs to want to be excluded.

VIII

Setting out to understand this new form of poverty, it’s possible to come to or arrive at a filtration of absences that informs the “reading” of A4a,2 at the same time as they structurally inform the behavior of NP, or any university press. As this new poverty comes to the fore, and we enlist A4a,2 in our attempts to assess it, there is no more appropriate way of acknowledging these absences than founding a new university press (and that specific project, coextensive with NP, constitutes a new, mobilized reading of Benjamin overall). Thus, moving beyond “Experience and Poverty”’s first paragraph, it’s possible to note how experience itself takes on value within a generation.⁸ What this indicates is the way experience, new or old, rich or impoverished, functions within a system of valuation, clearly referring us to Marx, the valuation and self-valuation of value. “No, this much is clear” writes Benjamin. Yet he had already operationalized or made the subject of the essay the very notion of clarity in the first paragraph: “everyone knew precisely what experience was.” This colloquial “no” is

8. Cf. the section on K1a,3 above, which discusses technology’s operation in and through the phenomena of the “generation.”

performative, both empty and full, just like the holes dug by the sons. The negative followed by the positive of what is “clear” reenacts the sons’ vain attempts to discern the old man’s meaning in their hunt for riches. The reader is left asking, then, well, indeed, has experience fallen in value? Or is this something we are given to perceive just like the sons in their determination that work was the entire point of the old man’s nonsensical and demonic ruse? And then too with this kind of reading of Benjamin’s essay (and his essays overall) why wouldn’t he simply come out and say all of this? Why be so indirect? (I think it’s fine to save that question for another day, another approach.)

The idea here is that we—the reader—humanity—need to process or perceive this fall in valuation of that particular experience that seems to want to be handed down, or whose inheritance has been structured into who we are, that is our only access to what manifests as self-knowledge. At stake is a tautological re-application—a “renaissance” as the essay calls it—of experience as we know it, the use of one version of experience, the old man’s, to grasp another and bring it into the monstrosity of technology and global conflict, World War I, leading to an abject failure of the known to account for the unknown. But these are our terms, and what transpires is a poverty that is a direct extension of the inadequacy of language itself, or a reflection of all of its false promises of “treasure” and well being.

As Benjamin writes, this reflection also finds an outlet in displays of wealth, particularly in an overwrought “oppressive wealth of ideas” or, I would say, of a sheer volume of information and sale items that constitute the passages (the substance of the *Arcades*) and the historical arcades themselves, forerunners of the garish displays of the modern department store. This compensation for the stark inability of what had been traditionally understood as experience to line up with contemporary reality then becomes the matrix within which “they find a place, in passages, arcades, in corners where the police and the owners leave them undisturbed” (A4a,2). The displays of wealth are precisely what is bought, sold, and policed, but it is the poverty lurking just behind the advance

of capital in these terms that piecemeal sets itself up as an abiding locus of the human, which has no qualms about contending to be outside of use value, which may only realize itself in that space. We step up, writes Benjamin, and “declare our bankruptcy.” “Let’s admit it.” And this is not simply personal, but fully generic. Humanity, the human, itself owns up to being bankrupt. What we can and perhaps must then say is that, sans the human, we are left with everything we have defined as not human, outside the human, that is, the barbaric.

Poverty comes to be equated with the barbaric in this sense. Poverty must be seen as that which falls outside of the human inasmuch as the human is equated with use value or wealth. That which is absent of wealth, penniless, poverty stricken, comes to circulate and be treated exactly as the unmentionable threat of barbarism. But that absence, also deemed a “*tabula rasa*,” can in no way be completely resistant to characterization in pre-existing terms, which terms Benjamin designates as “a little”:

Barbarism? Yes, indeed. We say this in order to introduce a new, positive concept of barbarism. For what does poverty of experience do for the barbarian? It forces him to start from scratch; to make a new start; to make a little go a long way; to begin with a little and build up further, looking neither left nor right. Among the great creative spirits, there have always been the inexorable ones who begin by clearing a *tabula rasa*.

Of note here is how this passage performs its own content, destabilizing its logic of objectivity. Benjamin admits (again, “let’s admit it”) that he invokes that “poverty of human experience in general,” that “kind of barbarism,” precisely to clear the way, or create a *tabula rasa* for, a “new, positive concept” of barbarism. He “starts from scratch” exactly in the mode of a new barbarian. Indeed his “a little” is exactly the concept of barbarism itself, which tautologically leads to the idea that barbarism perpetuates itself, is in some sense on auto-pilot, here and there enlisting the entire idea of the human for its own purposes. No doubt Benjamin positions himself as writer here as a “great creative spirit” but

only in the context of this glaring irony, wherein poverty itself must be, perhaps quite tragically, an extension of an inexorable increase of wealth. Clearly “poverty of experience” does *something* for the barbarian. It has value and is used.

IX

“Tabula rasa” is Latin and carries with it the entire realm of traditional logic, that is, old forms of experience. It’s probably entirely inappropriate to read “Experience and Poverty” without unpacking that term’s many ironies in this context. Indeed, unpacking these ironies introduces thematic threads that filter throughout the essay, but here I’d like to keep an eye on how these ideas of clearing, tabula rasa, and in particular the “new” intersect and inform the operation of NP. What I’m referring to quite specifically is the demand that one read this term in the context of the circulation of ideas in “Experience and Poverty,” the way for instance barbarism extends both toward and away from the term. That is, there is barbaric impetus toward complete obliteration and clearing while equally at the same time and in the same move there is a barbaric or “inexorable” reliance on systematization. “Tabula rasa” must be said to be a unit in this analysis. It works in a certain way: and that working is precisely what we are unpacking.⁹

9. Of note in this context is a recent and perhaps barbaric “clearing” by Denver art critic Ray Mark Rinaldi in his *Denver Post* article “Who we are, artistically speaking” (Jan. 24, 2019, Life & Culture section, C1). Rinaldi reviews the omnibus Arvada Center show “Art of the State,” which contains work by 133 Colorado artists and which Rinaldi describes as a monumental, exhaustive, survey (arcade perhaps) that is the most definitive statement of the totality of art in Colorado. It is a “snapshot of the now in Colorado.” But then Rinaldi hints at a dismissal of the entire effort, all that art, all that “now”:

It’s [the show as a whole] not cutting edge, exactly. Generally speaking, the work is not in-your-face political, and it’s non-obscene and family friendly. . . . In that sense, it’s easy to like

So here I am, with a suitcase, as it were, laid out before me, its contents arranged all about in neat piles, being sorted, matched, rearranged, counted, reconsidered. If “tabula rasa” is a clearing, then the unpacking of “tabula rasa” within the essay whose topic is essentially an alignment of poverty, experience, and clearing, that unpacking is a clearing of the clearing, by a subject that must be assumed to have already been “cleared,” or to have taken on an

and inoffensive—though that might just be who we are here in Colorado.

The effect here is Rinaldi clearing a tabula rasa, starting anew. His statement constitutes a profound dismissal of not only the entirety of artistic practice in Colorado but also of “who we are here in Colorado.” The article offers no alternative reference for “better” art, where we should look for the good stuff or to be redeemed, and readers are therefore left, in a sense, “amid a landscape in which nothing was the same except the clouds and, at its center, in a force field of descriptive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body,” to reference Benjamin’s essay (732).

All well and good, perhaps, but we are obliged to take the next step and note how this article appears in, is part of the apparatus of, the quite mainstream *Denver Post*. One might argue that since substantive art criticism probably won’t appear in such a publication, the only possible response to art in these pages could be argued to be one of sheer poverty. Rinaldi’s dismissal, then, of the entirety of Colorado art will finally be “less remarkable than it appears” (731), since even as his dismissal is defined by the critique of the lack of being “cutting edge,” that dismissal itself seemingly attempts to be attention-grabbing and cutting edge—thereby failing in that attempt by virtue of its journalistic provenance almost before it starts (this “clearing” comment is also buried in the no man’s land of the middle of the piece), and thus representing yet another empty shell that indeed echoes and exemplifies the family-friendly and non-offensive art that forms the subject of the article. The various angles by which barbarism appears in contemporary culture are here covered line item by line item. The invocation of the “cutting edge” perhaps can’t be anything but the demise or poverty of the “now” as we experience it.

ability to be objective in this way. In this manner NP clears and extends toward a location where a particular press takes shape, that press doing its own clearing, but then NP clears that clearing by clearing out and leaving. In this sense NP moves toward and within a poverty of experience, a barbarism. And this is a poverty introduced by language, the “tabula rasa” phenomena. If experience is constantly in renaissance, the old man certainly not dying but only being displaced in order to return, that face of the beggar of the Middle Ages still present in “sharpness and precision,” then that barbarism that “inexorably” departs from the given willfully and with intention enters the cycle, a move that even as it shadows the very concept of barbarism itself also functions as a limit experience, homelessness and poverty and placelessness, a being most perfectly outside the system, a move that is then valorized, made useful, brought in. This whole package of movements is one of the things Benjamin is referring to, exhibiting, and performing, the way what we think of as the beyond not only comes into but is revealed as all along the quintessence of value inside the system. The value of NP is the way it unpacks that valorization in a knowledge economy. It can only do that as a component of an ellipsis, or as a readerly, internalized ruin of data.

X

NP emerges into reality via its website and then via its appearance at the Modern Language Association conference in Chicago in January 2019, a component of which was the compilation of a mailing list of over 2,000 potentially interested parties who were sent 2 emails from NP (c. 300 individuals opened both emails and did not unsubscribe). Less quantifiable elements—conversations—also transpired. We drew interest. There were interested parties. There were people who were willing to attend to the argument. A banner was hung out in the arcade of the exhibition hall. In large letters in Adobe Garamond and Helvetica Light it read “NP: New Press,” the NP of “no place” or “no publisher” given the status of acronym for “New Press,”

which it both is and isn't, just because we're aware that to say we have a "new" press is exactly to draw on the poverty of no place. But the conference gave NP a place, or anyway allowed it to purchase one, drawing on personal funds but with a vision of recompense or credit in the not too distant future. Various visions taking place, all at once. Unpacking those visions in a move toward NP.

XI

I want to conclude this consideration of "Experience and Poverty," this notation of the workings of poverty into and beyond what is more straightforwardly a miserable penury and placelessness, by asking how Micky Mouse operates within this critique. The way the surreality and wish-fulfillment of that cartoon emerge in the essay progresses according to a discernable logic. That is, the poverty of experience (a) creates a longing to escape experience. The masses have "'devoured' everything, both 'culture and people,' and they have had such a surfeit that it has exhausted them." This tiredness (b)

is followed by sleep, and then [(c)] it is not uncommon for a dream to make up for the sadness and discouragement of the day—a dream that [(d)] shows us in its realized form the simple but magnificent existence for which the energy is lacking in reality. The existence of Micky Mouse is such a dream for contemporary man. (734–735)

And so Mickey Mouse makes his way into Benjamin's consideration of poverty, indeed comes to exemplify that poverty through perfect indirection and inversion, itself perhaps a reflection of the inversion indicative of the early twentieth century blackface minstrelsy out of which Micky Mouse emerges. All of the impossible things one might wish for in reality and can only be silent about are indeed possible in the technologically enhanced dream-world of this cartoon. In fact the contours and existence of that dream world are defined in the first place by the contours and existence of that technologically induced poverty of experience.

When Benjamin speaks of poverty—which is also that barbaric clearing referenced earlier—it is persistently via various ideas of wealth, just as earlier in “Experience and Poverty” he invokes the “oppressive wealth of ideas,” the carnival of Ensor’s paintings, the “constructors” such as Descartes, Einstein, the Cubists, or Klee, and finally the “interesting creatures” of Scheerbart, all in fact harking back to the old man’s story, which produced the questionably valuable vineyard that “bore fruit like no other in the whole land.” Mickey Mouse adds to these ironic riches an application to early childhood alongside a technological impact on mass psychology via film, one that echoes the overwhelming traces of the personal in the bourgeois interior. If we circle all the way back to citational passages in the *Arcades* such A4a,2, we can account for the complexity of the valorization of the poverty-stricken in this manner, as a profound dialectical way-station of sorts, positing, as I’ve mentioned in terms of its punctuational spatiotemporal performance, an internalization and literal development by the reader of its subject matter.

XII

Bringing this complex logic to bear on Douglass’s text might also make sense in that, as he indicates throughout the narrative, he locates his entire concept of freedom from chattel slavery in the language of the oppressor. Hence the bedlessness and poverty he experienced first hand as a child have their profundity incarnated via communication in book form. That abject poverty, perhaps the most extreme form of poverty, slavery itself, comes to be incarnated and politically activated, documented at all, by way of a linguistic construct that carried with it a whole range of implications, not just the oppressive confinement of its limited meanings (it is “more humane than our deeds”), but also the galvanization of abolitionists, and a newfound relevance among the powerful as Douglass’s fame grew. Neither Engles nor Douglass show any signs of valorizing the specific poverties of which they speak, but, perhaps even with Engles, if we pull back to consider the

larger context of their respective works, then their subjects move toward the complexity Benjamin clearly introduces, authors, into the Engles (even though Engles had already, in the text preceding what Benjamin cites, introduced the idea of a beyond of language).

This is all to say that, for NP, poverty of placelessness will be tenuous in these same respects. It will necessarily be a beyond of language that comes to be characterized more by its opposite than by anything positive that might be said about it. The individual presses it strives to create will be absolutely necessary and in fact life-giving forays into use value and the appearance of knowledge in the university—fantasies perhaps, unlikely inversions of their own impossibility—but the return to uselessness is the *sine qua non* of NP's internal structure.

Indeed each passage of the *Arcades* is a way to test and further elaborate this quality of NP, and to that end I would like to enter here into a consideration of the ragpicker character, another figure of abject poverty whose position vis a vis larger societal forces serves as a locator for NP as it negotiates approaches to technopistemological institutions.

PART 2

XIII

J68,4:

The ragpicker is the most provocative figure of human misery. "Ragtag" <*Lumpenproletarier*> in a double sense: clothed in rags and occupied with rags. "Here we have a man whose job it is to pick up the day's rubbish in the capital. He collects and catalogues everything that the great city has cast off, everything it has lost, and discarded, and broken. He goes through the archives of debauchery, and the jumbled array of refuse. He makes a selection, an intelligent choice; like a miser hoarding treasure, he collects the garbage that will become objects of utility or pleasure when refurbished by Industrial magic" ("Du Vrn et du haschisch" *Oeuvres*, vol. 1 , pp. 249-250). As may be gathered from this prose description of 1851,

Baudelaire recognizes himself in the figure of the ragman. The poem presents a further affinity with the poet, immediately noted as such: "a ragpicker stumbles past, wagging his head / and bumping into walls with a poet's grace, / pouring out his heartfelt schemes to one / and all, including spies of the police."

Der chiffonnier ist die provokatorischste Figur menschlichen Elends. Lumpenproletarier im doppelten Sinn, in Lumpen gekleidet und mit Lumpen befaßt. »Voici un homme charge de ramasser les debris d'une journee de la capitale. Tout ce que la grande cite a rejete, tout ce qu'elle aperdu, tout ce qu'elle a dedaigne, tout ce qu'elle abrise, il le catalogue, il le collectionne. Il compulse les archives de la debauchee, le capharnaüm des rebuts. Il fait un triage, un choix intelligent; il ramasse, comme un avare un tresor, les ordures qui, remachees par la divinite de l'Industrie, deviendront des objets d'utilite ou de jouissance.« (Du vin et du haschisch CEuvres I 249/5°) Baudelaire erkennt sich, wie aus dieser Prosaschilderung von 1851 des Lumpensammlers zu ersehen ist, in ihm wieder. Das Gedicht führt eine weitere unmittelbar als solche benannte Verwandtschaft mit dem Dichter auf: »On voit un chiffonnier qui vient, hochant la tete, I Buttant, et se cognant aux murs comme un pOfte, lEt, sans prendre souci des mouchards, ses sujets, I Epanche tout son coeur en glorieux projets.«

The chiffonnier is the most provocative figure of human misery. Lumpenproletarian in the double sense, dressed in rags and dealing with rags. "Here is a man responsible for picking up debris from a day in the capital. All that the great city has rejected, all that it perceives, all that it has despised, all that it shelters, catalogs it, collects it. He compiles the archives of debauchery, the shambles of rubbish. He makes a sorting, a smart choice; he picks up, like a miser, a treasure, the garbage which, brought back by the deity of Industry, will become objects of utility or enjoyment. "(Wine and hashish CEuvres I 249/5 °) Baudelaire recognizes, as can be seen from this ruse of 1851 of the rag-picker, in him again. The poem cites a further affinity with the poet, immediately named as such: »We see a ragman coming, nodding his head, I Buttant, and banging on the walls like a father, lte, without taking care of the sneaks, his subjects, I pour out all his heart in glorious projects."

Again the figure of human misery, which sends us back to A4a,2 but now with sources in Baudelaire. In any case, before critiquing the “double sense” of the language here, and troubling the English translation for various (unavoidable) gaps, the informational summary of the literal meaning of the passage might run as follows: the passage points out how the ragpicker functions on multiple planes at once. The ragpicker not only collects the bits and pieces of society’s refuse, but shares that exact project with the poet. The passage points out how the poetic project shares an equivalence with what the ragpicker is doing. The poetic project, the poet, is impoverished and survives in the same way as the ragpicker.¹⁰

But NP right now is going to do something different. It needs to admit that it emerges from the symbolic matrix that it is trying recapture, get itself back into. “Let’s admit it.” There’s a poverty of reading in this sense. Poverty here comes to define the *entire poetic project* of the *Arcades*. Poverty here enters that double dealing referenced earlier, which can only be said to pertain to the language of the Engles or the Douglass from a far remove. For here we see poverty taking a position, which perhaps it has had all along, within a certain construction of the human, within humanism, wherein a construction of use value gets inverted into a mark of authorship that can’t help but work its way back to an embrace of the status quo, in fact policing the status quo, subverting the subverters. We need to watch how the *Arcades* employs itself in such a way, since it is that nuance, which only the *Arcades* itself evinces, not any “explanation” or scholarship hovering around its edges, its margins, that always already was and is NP. We’re not even doing anything abstract

10. We’re trying to get to poverty, which gets expressed in survival. And effectively the entirety of the institutional is arrayed against doing that. There’s all kinds of experience that’s blocking it. I just want to communicate me to you, and that’s what the poverty is, where we let go, and it always seems that in the midst of capital there’s that possibility of one-to-one, which is what we go on and live. NP is that saying “we get it, it won’t live long” so it attains to the ephemeral very quickly.

in reading the *Arcades*. We're all about making whole new institutions that are already destroyed, whose rubble and dust are already in our hands and covering us.

XIV

And I can go *from here* to look at this passage. For instance, I'll point out that the ragpicker—and we're always remembering that this *is* poverty, this *is* the lumpenproletariat—is a “figure.” That is to say, the ragpicker is certainly not an absolute, but more along the lines of a literary example. Benjamin is at pains to highlight this particular character of the ragpicker, the ragpicker's linguistic and symbolic character, even while, as I've stated, the major import of J68,4 is that Baudelaire in fact identifies with this, his own, literary creation. Thus we witness in many respects a superimposition of the human and the literary.

I want to return later to how we might be intended to understand the “provocative” nature of the ragpicker figure—really as an “agent provocateur” or imposter—but for now it's possible to ask, is the point that “human misery” itself is a figure? Is misery, placelessness, a game language is asking us to play when we presume to speak of what is most troubling, presume to point beyond language just as Engels, Douglass, and Benjamin are doing in their respective milieu? Are we not caught up in language down to our very core, so that to excavate a figure such as the ragpicker, complete misery that exceeds use value or capitalist systematization, that is, the lumpenproletariat who theoretically possess not a shred of awareness of their own plight, is by definition to provoke a series of reactions that effectively merge the informational and symbolic, the personal and the institutional, human and machine, poet and text, so that we are “dressed in rags and dealing with rags” (“adorned with rags and working with rags”)? Poverty must be falsely summarized and hence mischaracterized and misdirected by the language used to characterize it, by its very name. In fact, insofar as a text sets out to address poverty, or a barbaric absence of the human, “human misery,” it provokes and invokes

a beyond of language that then reinscribes a ragpicking tendency inherent in the urge toward linguistic characterization overall. Language itself is peripheral to its own system.

In building up this argument, I want to turn back for a moment to a more literal reading of the passage, J68,4, to be sure we have in mind a clear conception of the ragpicker. It is a figure seen to inhabit complete worldly uselessness, which is why I believe it is so interesting to Baudelaire, Benjamin, and others. Even so, it cannot be that straightforward, since the ragpicker's "job," jobs being where social purpose and use value are in fact found, is in moving among and making selections from what is deemed to have no value, the useless. Again, "occupied with rags." Specifically, and we want to keep an eye on how this activity defines radical poverty itself, the ragpicker "picks up the day's rubbish in the capital"—the distinct overlap is heard here between capital city and monetary capital, such that we are constantly working with an idea of what may in fact be an outside to the capitalist system (just as with references in A4a,2 to those who "cannot pay") and then *how* that *figure* of the "beyond" capital might operate. And we do get some clues:

He collects and catalogs everything that the great city has cast off, everything it has lost, and discarded, and broken. He goes through the archives of debauchery and the jumbled array of refuse. He makes a selection, an intelligent choice; he picks up, like a miser, a treasure, the garbage which, regurgitated by the deity of Industry, will become objects of utility or enjoyment.¹¹

It is as if the ragpicker is introducing a whole alternate or inverted universe of use value and enjoyment, though again note that even outside of use value the ragpicker is perhaps the consummate figure of the reinscription of use value. Is that then how "uselessness"

11. The Eiland/McLaughlin translation, for this last clause, reads, "like a miser hoarding his treasure, he collects the garbage that will become objects of utility or pleasure when refurbished by Industrial magic." I find this to be unfortunately very confusing and to introduce an entirely contradictory thematic to the passage.

works? In any case, it should be said that a central intention of this passage is the lining up, placing in parallel, or superimposition of the ragpicker's *modus operandi* and that of the *Arcades* itself. There is nothing the ragpicker is doing that is not equally as well a methodological statement for the *Arcades*, so the identification does not take place simply between Baudelaire and the ragpicker, but between Benjamin and Baudelaire, between Benjamin and the ragpicker.¹² Indeed, this is a point in reading the *Arcades* where, as with A4a,2, we have a far more direct reference to the *Arcades* itself than in many other passages, providing a clearer window into the methodology of the project overall. And what is this "point"? What is this "reading"?

We approach a certain citational theory and perhaps return to the dynamic of attempting to assess the ellipses, a linguistic

12. For background reference, it seems pertinent to include here at least a translation of "Le Vin des chiffonniers":

The Rag-Picker's Wine

Often, in the red light of a street-lamp
Of which the wind whips the flame and worries the glass,
In the heart of some old suburb, muddy labyrinth,
Where humanity crawls in a seething ferment,

One sees a rag-picker go by, shaking his head,
Stumbling, bumping against the walls like a poet,
And, with no thought of the stool-pigeons, his subjects,
He pours out his whole heart in grandiose projects.

He takes oaths, dictates sublime laws,
Lays low the wicked and succors victims;
Beneath the firmament spread like a canopy
He gets drunk with the splendor of his own virtues.

Yes, these people harassed by domestic worries,
Ground down by their work, distorted by age,
Worn-out, and bending beneath a load of debris,
The commingled vomit of enormous Paris,

marker made to appear as if its entire intention was to subvert its very appearance as linguistic marker. I had also made the connection between my own status here in writing this reflection and the push and pull of disappearance in the advance toward characterizing NP as something that persistently engaged and withdrew according to certain criteria that were still to be worked out. I'm not sure if I'm on the verge of disappearance (it's crucial that I openly consider the possibility that I might be), but for now I want to continue these statements since the ragpicker is in fact that figure who has disappeared, in exactly the same way as the shelterless step beyond recognizability, beyond language,

Come back, smelling of the wine-cask,
 Followed by companions whitened by their battles,
 And whose moustaches bang down like old flags;
 Banners, flowers, and triumphal arches

Rise up before them, a solemn magic!
 And in the deafening, brilliant orgy
 Of clarions and drums, of sunlight and of shouts,
 They bring glory to the crowd drunk with love!

It is thus that throughout frivolous Humanity
 Wine, the dazzling Pactolus, carries flakes of gold;
 By the throats of men he sings his exploits
 And reigns by his gifts like a veritable king.

To drown the bitterness and lull the indolence
 Of all these accurst old men who die in silence,
 God, touched with remorse, had created sleep;
 Man added Wine, divine child of the Sun!

— William Aggeler, *The Flowers of Evil* (Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954)

penniless, in possession perhaps of not even a rag, but still find pockets or empty spaces of rest that nevertheless are aspects of the workings of, or contained within, governmentality and capital. We might say that the holes dug by the sons in their search for nonexistent treasure are where the ragpickers lay down at night to rest.

Let's complicate matters further. Not insignificantly, the passage seems to wait for us to do so. We are mapping the contours of a void, a *mis en abyme*, and what the passage affords us is exactly the way we as readers become implicated in this same process, the way our own affinity with the ragpicker becomes evident. The English translators seem well aware of this aspect of the passage and the "as may be gathered" places in parallel the gathering action of the ragpicker and the reading process itself, which in the *Arcades* in particular is the sorting through, the "making a selection," the collecting and cataloging of the disparate and seemingly useless particles of the history of a bygone and disappeared age, a ruin. Somehow in reading the *Arcades* we are intended to realize that no one is meant to actually give a damn about the arcades themselves. There is no treasure buried in this vineyard, which is the "substance" of the eternal performance of the *Arcades* overall, a substance or performance that is permanently receding the more we attempt to come in contact with it, the more we attempt to understand it. I address this topic elsewhere,¹³ but once more we can cite the construct of the Angel of History, also deeply related to the figure of the flaneur, "an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. . . His face is turned toward the past" (*Selected*, volume 4, 392). The superimposition is between ragpicker, Baudelaire, Benjamin, and reader, translating a common project from 1851 to Benjamin's time, to whatever present time Benjamin's idea of his reader might inhabit, perhaps the time of language itself. In this sense, the figure of human misery is transhistorical, moving as well from prose to poetry, from less direct reference to more "immediate."

13. See page 442.

XV

Finally I want to look briefly at the role of the “police” before moving on to a consideration of social policy as it emerges as an aspect of the contradictory phenomenology of poverty, which is neither more nor less than NP’s appearance. The police, alongside shopkeepers, figure in A4a,2 as a kind of filtration device for poverty, they let the impoverished find a place within the capitalist framework of the arcades. That is, within a veritable shrine to utility, use value, one that is in many respects equated with the stock market itself, there are still reservoirs or pockets of the “useless,” the homeless, where those without a penny might come to rest or find a bed (as incomprehensible as the prospect of such a bed might be). It is not clear whether the impoverished—and we can read here the ragpicker as well—escape the notice of the police and obtain to a type of fugitivity, or whether their resting places are being preserved and safeguarded by the police.

Similarly, in J68,4, the ragpicker-poet seems to be engaged in some sort of collaboration with the police, “And, without being careful of the informers, his subjects, [he] pours out all his heart in glorious projects” (my translation). Here the “informers” are the police (translated as such by Eiland/McLaughlin). But again we are back at the question of how much awareness is in play here, whether the ragpicker might be drunkenly wanting to alert the police to his subversive (useless) intentions—the police are, after all, his “subjects”—or whether any given poetic expression or experience of poverty is by definition subject to surveillance. The indiscernibility of the interchange constitutes much of the import of both passages, A4a,2 and J68,4, of much of Benjamin’s concept of poverty overall, and in many ways the institutional balance entered into by NP as soon as it starts to become established in a given location. NP approaches out of and arrives from a type of interruptive locale that echoes the uselessness being discussed here, negotiating the appearance of the useless, the anti-institutional, within the pre-existing passages, arcades, corners (to

cite A2a,4) characteristic of the hyper-institutionalized university in the first place.

XVI

I want to put in play here Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's concepts of planning and policy, assessing how they intersect the dialectical framework that seems to emerge from the *Arcades*, particularly with poverty. Harney and Moten, in their essay "Planning and Policy" in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, very much posit planning as the anti-institutional pocket of resistance I have been compiling in this essay via Engles, Benjamin, Douglass, and finally Baudelaire. They suggest that it is reflective of a certain kind of "hope" that is invoked by Cornel West in 1984. Since that time, however, that hope and planning in general have been attenuated and coopted by policy itself. Given that planning (and hope) were always about legitimate forms of social reproduction, they write:

Capital [by which we understand policy] has glimpsed the value of social reproduction and wants control of the means, and no longer just by converting them into productivities within formal industrializations of care, food, education, sex, etc. but by gaining access to and directly controlling the informal experiment with the social reproduction of life itself.

Hence the contemporary modality of social reproduction evinces a near identically complex dialectic of control and what is not yet within or under that control as I have been discussing. I want to again quote the Harney and Moten essay at length because it figures hope and planning as just the same as the falling away of poverty, the "figure of human misery," and the ragpicker:

The hope that Cornel West wrote about in 1984 was not destined to become what we call "policy." The ones who practiced it, within and against the grain of every imposed contingency, always had a plan. In and out of the depths of Reaganism, against the backdrop and by

way of a resuscitatory irruption into politics that Jesse Jackson could be said to have both symbolized and quelled, something West indexes as black radicalism, which “hopes against hope . . . in order to survive in the deplorable present,” asserts a metapolitical surrealism that sees and sees through the evidence of mass incapacity, cutting the despair it breeds. Exuberantly metacritical hope has always exceeded every immediate circumstance in its incalculably varied everyday enactments of the fugitive art of social life. This art is practiced on and over the edges of politics, beneath its ground, in animative and improvisatory decomposition of its inert body. It emerges as an emblemic stand, a kinetic set of positions, but also takes the form of embodied notation, study, score. Its encoded noise is hidden in plain sight from the ones who refuse to see and hear—even while placing under constant surveillance—the thing whose repressive imitation they call for and are.

This final sentence shares many of the concerns of J68,2, particularly the final poem from Baudelaire, with the boisterous, “in plain sight” behavior of the ragpicker, somehow handing over to the police—to policy, to “the ones who refuse to see and hear”—all of the plans for their resistance, the entire catalog of the regurgitations of capital. The ragpicker—the planner—blurts out “this is how it works” and government wastes no time in taking up the call. But make no mistake, West’s “to survive in the deplorable present” is the substance of the Benjaminian ellipse as it appears and as I have been describing it in A4a,2. Poverty is precisely fugitive, ending up either in a boarding house or in unknown corners in the arcades, in any case beyond language, as it were in the interruption between passages in the *Arcades*, and/or between the points of an ellipses. This is the how and why of our getting to detach and depart from the literary text and to enter the same text all over again, which is an entirely alternate world too, of the social, the contemporary, the fraught constructs imagined first then concretized back into imagination of the now of the built environment. There is here a very specific justification of NP being in the world, never for a moment thinking of returning to the *Arcades*, which it had such a hand in building, the homeland of its very dreams.

All well and good. But once we enter and contemplate the world before us, NP takes on a very different character, easily objectionable, easily demanding that study reroute it and show it how to pull away. Is Benjamin there with us? Was Baudelaire all along showing how modernity can't help itself? What was Baudelaire doing or performing? We can continue to address this complexity, continue to pursue it, unpack not just the text but what the text is constantly not even willing to give, a pursuit that must be NP and where the object too is NP, we can take the openness that might be evident in this essay thus far and use it as a launching pad for keeping going. That is, we can re-descend into the world, which for present purposes is the *Arcades*, from the position of readers of the *Arcades*, finally acknowledging that we are the *Arcades* reading the *Arcades*, making that our resistance and revolution in that the commodity can't possibly retaliate or reset itself as many times as we ourselves might be able to. No? Let this be a (non)conclusion of the entire project of NP.

XVII

This type of commentary then can happen right here between J68,4 and the immediately following J68a,1, which reads:

Much can be said on behalf of the supposition that "Le Vin des chiffonniers" was written around the time of Baudelaire's espousal of "beautiful utility" (The question cannot be settled with any certainty, because the poem first appeared in the book edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*.—"Le Vin de l'assassin" was published for the first time in 1848—in *L'Echo des marchand de vins!*) The ragpicker poem strenuously disavows the reactionary pronouncements of its author. The criticism on Baudelaire has overlooked this poem.

Es spricht vieles dafür, daß le vin d(es) chiffonnier(s) geschrieben wurde als Baudelaire sich zum beau utile bekannte. (Genaueres läßt sich darüber nicht ausmachen, da es zuerst in der Buchausgabe der *fleurs du mal* erschienen ist. - Le vin de l'assassin wurde 1848 zuerst publiziert - im *Echo des marchands de vins!*) Das chiffonnier: Gedicht desavouiert kraftvoll die reaktionären

Bekenntnisse Baudelaires. Die Literatur über den Dichter ist an ihm vorübergegangen.

There is much to suggest that *le vin d (es) chiffonnier(s)* was written when Baudelaire professed “beau utile.” (More details cannot be made out, since it was first published in the edition of the *fleurs du Le-vin de l’assassin* was first published in 1848 - in the echo of the *marchands de vins!*) The *chiffonnier* poem powerfully disavows the reactionary confessions of Baudelaire. The literature about [by] the poet has passed him by.

On offer in this passage is a not uncommon Benjaminian phantasmagoria of referentiality, reflecting an uncertainty of, simultaneously, subject matter and situatedness in time. Emerging from a reading of J68,2, the immediate effect is perhaps one of consternation given that the ragpicker has just been described as operating very much outside the realm of utility, a beautiful non-utility (though Baudelaire’s prose describes this state perhaps far more than the poem does). But I think as our close reading revealed, the effect of reading J68,2 must in fact be one of confirmation, since that standpoint of perfect uselessness is also perfectly compromised, announced carelessly to the “informants.” Thus to learn of Baudelaire’s confession of how beautiful utility is (anticipating Warhol) falls exactly in line with the earlier passage.

But it only does so tentatively, and it is in tracing the components, sources, or causes of that inability to affirm what Baudelaire believed that we find not only the nature of the phantasmagoria just mentioned but a standpoint vis a vis the nature of institutional utility in general, one that applies to what Harney and Moten suggest as “social reproduction,” one that inflects NP in its ongoing negotiation of its “approach,” its worldliness, its nonprofit profit motive that permanently forms the only press worth forming and that flees any and all presses it creates, uncovers, or represents as viable.

The passage starts with “There is much to it” (my translation), kicking off a dubious forensic operation that attempts to discern through publication history whether Baudelaire was in fact

a reactionary, embracing the status quo, which “beautiful utility” would seem to suggest. According to the passage, there was a point at which Baudelaire was partial—he “espoused” it, really “confessed to” it, which lines up better with his confession later in the passage—to the beauty of utility, and this would have been around 1848, when “Le Vin de l’assassin” was published, a poem supposedly embracing use value. The question here is whether, even though it appeared in *Les Fleurs du mal* in 1857, “Le Vin de chiffonnier” was in fact written earlier. Again the passage says “there is much to this idea” of the overlap of the two distinct, contradictory, viewpoints and works. There is much to the idea that Baudelaire was either double, able to express contradictory viewpoints at once, or that Baudelaire was in fact reflecting the dual nature of utility itself, a phantasmagoria inherent in use value.

In fact, however, one thing to focus on, or to continue to bring new attention to, in this passage is the parenthetical. As with any parenthetical, it comes in as a supplemental aside, a notation of sorts, in this case an aside that contains or conveys the “evidence” for the uncertainty about whether Baudelaire could have at one and the same time written poems that contained contradictory viewpoints. The authorial or scholarly persona of this aside is one of chronological, informational proof that says that the “question cannot be settled,” and this is “because” the ragpicker poem “first appears” in 1857, the other poem in 1848. The scholarly flourish is concluded with an exclamation mark, as if anyone would admit, based on this publication evidence that we must go by, that the question cannot be settled! In fact, the parenthetical is not so secondary after all, but performs exactly the utility that is at issue in the passage overall. It is a critic, an author, Benjamin, often equated with Baudelaire himself in the *Arcades*, enacting the criticism that is the subject of the last sentence of the passage, enacting the creation of a “literature” of Baudelaire. Literary history is being enacted within these parentheses.

How does this work? If we look closely at the rather odd final sentence of the passage, some of these thematics emerge more clearly. The English translation has “The criticism on Baudelaire

has overlooked this poem.” But meaning is either altered or lost here. The German—“Die Literatur über den Dicheter ist an ihm vorübergegangen.”—translates more directly as “The literature [criticism/scholarship] about [or, crucially, by] the poet has passed him by.” Note here how the Harvard translation substitutes “Baudelaire” for “the poet”, as if to helpfully clear up some ambiguity. But in fact that ambiguity is exactly the point, which I will come back to momentarily. For now, notice how it’s in fact not clear whether the “literature” is either “about” the poet, or in fact “by” the poet, suggesting that the poet, let’s say it’s Baudelaire, has in fact authored the criticism, or commentary, about himself. I would say we’re at least invited here to consider how that might be the case. But in the context of the *Arcades* it’s in fact quite clear. The author or writer in the *Arcades* is always displaced directly into his dialectical opposite, as with all other worldly things really, so that poet and critic are as interchangeable as chiffonier and “beau utile.” The ambiguity of that final sentence could be said to open the way to exactly this reading of the passage, if we hadn’t been there already. “Literature” here does double time as criticism and poetic output, the “über” or about/by re-registers the idea, the overlap of poet and critic, while at the same time expanding it into an implication of a temporal flux of influence and (de) identification of poet and critic: if indeed utility is the same as non-utility, if the poets have all along been authoring the criticism, then in fact insofar as utility is the equivalent of the poet it must be that utility can author its opposite, non-utility, criticism, jumping ahead of “himself” as much as it might even “blow by” itself at the same time.

It’s important to note here that what is in fact invoked as “evidence,” in the next to last sentence, is Baudelaire’s poem itself, which “powerfully disavow[s]” use value. Baudelaire’s own poems work in concert with the “useful” criticism contained in the parentheses. Moreover, here the poem about the beauty of uselessness, the ragpicker poem, is seen to be taking a very strong and clear argumentative position. The content of the sentence, the import of its meaning, is shot through with dichotomy, a tension

of opposites. The deep insufficiency of all literary history is also on display, in the sense that literary history cannot help but have the poetic as its object of study.

Baudelaire the useless ragpicker poet authors himself—his own nonutility—through the utility of the criticism he writes about himself, even as, insofar as it is criticism, it must ignore the useless essence of its own object. Again, a phantasmagoria is what hits us with this passage, arriving with all the convolution I am sunk into at this very moment of writing what I'm now writing to whoever is reading. We feel how we as readers are on the selfsame forensic mission as the author of the passage, trying with all the evidence we can marshall to clear up or resolve contradictions, potential simultaneities, knowing there is “much to be said” for one interpretation or another, but also unable to avoid the instinctive leaning toward a straightforward informational, useful, summary or conclusion.

XVIII

We can again draw parallels between our reading process and the content of the passage by noting how the logic of literary history, the chronological construction of who an author is or what he might be doing, proceeds by very distinct stages within the parentheses. A statement is made and it is then followed by a dash. What that dash or interruption indicates is whatever might be going on between the moments of construction of an argument. The dashes are clearly not the argument itself but a physical indicator of time and a thought process that happens between the spatiotemporal stages of an argument. They function as intervals of thought, in this case very much an indicator of the non-useful within the eminently useful logical argument that constitutes literary history, scholarship, and so on.

Indeed these dashes here offset, highlight, and underscore that status of the parenthetical material itself, a moment of “utility” couched between surrounding instances of commentary, in this case perhaps Benjamin himself, or his ghosts, Baudelaire, poetry,

the non-useful. The chiasmic of course extends from here to the status of this entire passage as an interruption in the universe of interruptive moments that makes up the *Arcades*. As readers, in reading the passage what we experience as this hiatus is in fact the useful, informational argument, the coming back down to earth. As I've said, as part of that informational argument we do in fact have the interruptive moments of the dashes that throw us back, perhaps, to that originary state, the great unknown, the ragpickers nonutility, an outside the system. Thus here again the useful has, buried within its very definition, the non-useful. We might also note here that the horizontal black dash has the status of the inversion of the horizontal white space between each of the passages themselves. Indeed just like the passages, all made of ink, it creates in miniature a top and bottom of all white space. From a distance, the manuscript pages of the *Arcades* may well appear as a stack of dashes:



Both white and black behave as reservoirs of certain types of concentration or readerly consciousness.

As I've written elsewhere, such is the status of punctuation in the *Arcades*. Its graphic relevance to the argument at hand, its invocation as an embodiment of the substance of meaning, is a hallmark of the *Arcades*, if not of Benjamin's work overall. It may well mark, so to speak, one of the most profound insights of the *Arcades*, one that often seems to go unnoticed. In the editions we have, in many instances it has been "cleaned up." My sense is that an edition of the *Arcades* must be an undertaking like no other, exactly in the sense of assessing these (seemingly) miniscule details. What we have is an infusion into the linguistic "material" itself of an array of opposing meanings. These oppositions may be termed "dialectics at a standstill," or called by a number of other names, but they echo the opposition of citation and authorial commentary out of which the *Arcades* emerges.

XIX

I'd like to turn back to the Harney and Moten to draw on a few key passages to track this Benjaminian linguistic dialectic and, if it doesn't hold up, deduce what its effects might be on Harney and Moten's theory of planning and policy, and in particular social reproduction. In "Planning and Policy," Harney and Moten also evince the key modality of NP, the formation of the multitude, so that such an assessment then becomes a central working out of the blueprint and rationale of NP.

Overall, the essay adheres to a distinctly positive idea of planning as a locus of resistant community formation, the multitude, and an authentic hope. For instance:

Here management encounters forms of what we will call planning that resist its every effort to impose a compulsion of scarcity through seizing the means of social reproduction. . . This ongoing experiment with the informal, carried out by and on the means of social reproduction, as the to come of the forms of life, is what we mean by planning; planning in the undercommons is not fishing or dancing or teaching or loving, but the ceaseless experiment with the futural presence of the forms of life that make such activities possible.

Whereas earlier in the essay there is more description of a "deplorable present" that we associate with poverty and an absence of the human, this material detours through a "ceaseless" or "ongoing" "experiment" that indexes a generativity that NP keeps close to its own mission. Again, planning works by "gaining access to and directly controlling the informal experiment with the social reproduction of life itself."

What the essay is also concerned to delineate is the way "policy"—characterized as distinctly negative—has of late taken on many of the formations of planning in order to re-route planning toward its own, capitalist ends. The essay is remarkable for the cogency of its insights regarding the history of hope and planning, and the subtlety and insidiousness of policy's advance. Policy's negative aspect comes across as:

Policy says that those who plan have something wrong with them, something deeply—ontologically—wrong with them. This is the first thrust of policy as dispersed, deputized command. What's wrong with them? They won't change. They won't embrace change. They've lost hope. So say the policy deputies. . . . As resistance from above, policy is a new class phenomena because the act of making policy for others, of pronouncing others as incorrect, is at the same time an audition for a post-fordist economy that deputies believe rewards those who embrace change . . . Policy distinguishes itself from planning by distinguishing those who dwell in policy and fix things from those who dwell in planning and must be fixed.

Again, the dichotomy remains quite stark, even as the essay maps out a clear process by which policy turns its gaze toward planners and attempts to “fix” them into an acceptance of the contingent multitude that fits more succinctly into the post-fordist economy. Policy steps in to define resistance for, or away, from the planners, to take the glue that holds their communities together and apply it policy's ends.

What this essay seems not to address is an ongoing dialectic of planning and policy, that is, a *culpability of planning*, at its very heart, in the advances of policy, indistinguishable from a rebirth, renaissance, or reignition of new forms of planning out of the very heart of policy. As I have been indicating, Benjamin is quite deeply instructive here as a guide toward not simply how dialectical opposing forces emerge out of each other over time, or the way linguistic constructs are implicated in and become the primary progenitors of such “turnovers,” but also the way resistance emerges as the ongoing acknowledgment of impossibility of emerging from dialectic's impenetrability, which NP will at least hypothesize keeping in place.

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