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Allegories of Walking in the Modern Age

by

Andries Alkema

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through English Language, Literature and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor**

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin presents the allegory as monadic in shape. Borrowing from Gottfried Leibniz, Benjamin sees the allegory as having similarities with the monad in that both are singular yet whole: the entire is condensed within the particular. In Benjamin's schema, the truth can only be gained piecemeal; the whole can only be grasped through the minutiae. Accordingly, that which previously remained out of reach – the whole – becomes graspable through the fragment. Employing Benjamin's understanding of the monadic properties of the allegory, this paper follows three allegorical figures of walking: Benjamin's flâneur, Louis Aragon's surrealist stroller, and Guy Debord's situationist drifter or dériver. By studying these three city-walkers an entire world is brought into view: France of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This paper seeks to explain how revolutionary fervour dissipated in a country rife with revolutionary history. By inductively examining the three incarnations of the Paris stroller, the undulations of critical consciousness are rendered transparent, from the barricade-fighting of 1848, the dissipation after 1871, and the re-emergence in the month of May, 1968. The flâneur explains the disappearance of revolutionary desire with the rise of the consumer, while the surrealist stroller demonstrates the strength of phantasmagoric desire. By exposing capital's inequalities, however, the situationist drifter paves the way for the return of revolutionary desire.

Table of Contents

Abstract		iii
Chapter		
One	Introduction	1
Two	<i>Walter Benjamin and the flâneur of Paris</i>	10
Three	Louis Aragon and the surrealists of Paris	44
Four	Guy Debord and the drift through Paris	61
Bibliography		109
Vita Auctoris		113

Chapter One: Introduction

He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing, he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole.

- Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" 1841

The predominance of barricade fighting in the narrow streets of 1848 Paris directly led to the 'boulevardizing' of the city. Already in 1830 there were over six thousand barricades counted in Paris, clogging the city's arteries and establishing an equal footing between various revolutionary groups and state power. Wishing to secure power, Napoleon III appointed Baron Haussmann to head a large-scale renovation of Paris. This task included the modernisation of sewage systems, public utilities, and transportation facilities. Above all, Haussmann was charged with the responsibility of demolishing old neighbourhoods in order to make way for wide boulevards, which would enable dispatched troops to move around the city with ease. In this way Napoleon III eliminated barricade street-fighting and quashed revolutionary fervour, while ushering his capital into the twentieth century at the same time.

Two continental wars later, Paris had undergone massive changes. Certainly Haussmann had put a modern face on the city, but the devastation of war and economic downturn had left its mark. Immediately after the second world war, France's government saw its most urgent need for redevelopment among the provinces, in those towns destroyed by bombs and other weapons of war. In the first full decade after the war, however, the state turned to its capital: demolitions and excavations transformed the city. Sections like the old Ville de Paris - at least a third of it - disappeared, as did many of the city's dilapidated areas and ghettos. When De Gaulle returned to power, moreover, his

government passed policies to restructure Paris as a metropolitan centre at the whole of Europe's disposal. With pickaxes, shovels, dynamite, and bulldozers, the Paris of the Renaissance was remodeled into a functionalist, modern capital. Remnants of the old city remained, of course, but between Haussmann and the postwar boom, the glories of a past Paris could only be visited in books.

In his *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin raises methodological doubts concerning this very issue: can one truly confront the past? His subject - Baroque drama of the seventeenth century - is seemingly worlds apart from the city of Paris, but similarities emerge nonetheless. Paris under Haussmann and De Gaulle lies somewhere out of reach, as do those esoteric, German plays of Benjamin's study. Our access to the truth of such worlds is difficult to glimpse, let alone grasp. He likens truth to a mosaic: "The relationship between the minute precision of the work and the proportions of the sculptural or intellectual whole demonstrates that truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject matter" (*Origin* 29). "Immersion" is the watchword here, although, paradoxically, it is immersion at a critical distance. Like Vidocq, the Parisian policeman in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," our vision is impaired if we get too close. For "only by approaching the subject from some distance, and, initially foregoing any view of the whole, can the mind be led [...] to the position of strength from which it is possible to take in the whole panorama" (*Origin* 56). From a distance, then, a single shard will reveal the entire mosaic. Truth can only be gained piecemeal; the whole can only be grasped through the minutiae. Accordingly, these tiny fragments unlock a vast reality which previously remained outside of reach. According to Benjamin's conception, truth has a definite structure: it is composed of ideas, and each individual idea has a structure as well, which is monadological. He argues for an

interconnectedness of ideas, and thus borrows from Leibniz. If truth, like a mosaic, can only be taken in through the details, these fragments must express the whole. Leibniz argued that the world was composed of one immaterial substance - monads - which have no causal relations to each other, but in an indistinct way contain all other monads (636). Important to note here is that the monad, as idea, is our only means to secure that which seemingly defies intellection. Since the monad expresses the totality, our grasp of the whole is assured. In the representation of the single idea, the doors blocking our view to the totality - whether that is baroque drama or a bygone Paris - are unlocked and opened wide, since such representation is an abbreviated or condensed approximation of the entirety. One question remains: what fragment behaves as a monad? Benjamin suggests that this fragment is the allegory.

Benjamin's faith in the allegory as the monadic particular that opens the vastness of a past age into full view is not at all arbitrary. It guarantees its monadic status by virtue of its coming into existence. Benjamin claims that we are drawn to the symbol, in part because one can locate symbols with ease: wherever there is a manifestation of an idea, he states, the critic dubs it a symbol. This trust in the symbol, however, quickly turns into a quagmire of subjective opinion. The allegory, on the other hand, emerges from within the work, resplendent in objective garb. Since allegories are extended metaphors, there is no mistaking the author's intentions; they are explicit. The symbol, however, exists on the outside of a text, or more precisely, in the realm of the reader. Thus the symbol is that which is imposed on the text. Conversely, the allegory, since it is born from within and swells out of the body of work, confirms itself as objective truth.¹

Most important, the allegory acts as a condensed version of the totality from which it springs. All the constituent parts must come together in the allegory, must

contribute to it, in order for the allegory to function properly. The baroque world - mournful and despondent, largely due to the impact of the Thirty Years War - comes into full view with the allegory of the German *Trauerspiel* plays. So too does that Paris which can never be fully revisited: the Paris of the nineteenth century. Benjamin finds his way into that world by way of the allegory, which he isolates in the Baudelairian stroller, the *flâneur*. Much of this study finds its cornerstone in Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and follows his template in the allegorisation of walking. From Benjamin's insightful work on Baudelaire's Paris, through to the movement which inspired his study - the surrealists - and onto the postwar avant-garde, I wish to follow the *flâneur* as he walks through space and time, changing from a bourgeois stroller into a roamer in search of the marvelous, then finally transforming into the situationist drifter. Imposing an allegory of walking onto surrealist and situationist works may seem dangerously similar to those critics who place symbolic meaning onto texts, but there is a defense: I am weaving with a pre-existing thread (Benjamin's *Arcades*). Moreover, walking behaves like an allegory for both the surrealists and the situationists, condensing a vast and out of reach reality into a manageable shard, a fragment which, for example, brings a bygone Paris into sight.

John Bunyan had long before established an allegory of walking in his *Pilgrim's Progress*. Why follow his lead? The allegory of the city stroller is an extended metaphor, casting light onto modern urban experience. The walking allegory is reminiscent of those grade school experiments with mercury. The teacher pulls out a baby-food container of mercury, warns the children not to touch it, and pours the contents out onto the floor. The mercury breaks apart into little balls but eventually re-forms into the amoeba-like shape it was before. Allegory is not unlike the mercury. Because the allegory emerges within the text, it is separate but simultaneously part of the whole, just as the smaller pieces of

mercury are emancipated - only briefly - from the greater shape. The allegory contains the whole in its particular features, similar to the smaller pieces of mercury, which are quantitatively different but qualitatively similar to the larger mass. The city stroller is only part of a greater picture, that of traffic, crowds, boulevards, arcades, goods in storefronts, low-income neighbourhoods, and functionalist architecture. The figure of the walker is part of that world, but when he breaks free from his context, he pulls all the scenery along with him. That is, the Parisian stroller drags the entire totality with him, accumulating more and more of that reality the longer the metaphor is extended. The allegory of walking is to the urban what the urban is to the modern. What is modernity? One finds an answer to that question by examining the urban experience. Likewise, the urban is grasped through the figure of the walker; the city stroller encapsulates both. Consequently, by examining the three incarnations of the Parisian walker - the flâneur, surrealist stroller, and situationist drifter - entire worlds reveal themselves.²

This thesis is not concerned with locomotion, with moving legs and feet in a forward motion. The allegorisation of walking is a bridge to something greater: charting the emergence of consciousness in a city which possesses a rich history of revolution. I wish to begin with the barricades of 1848 and track Parisian revolutionary consciousness as it subsides during the heyday of the arcades, only to flare-up during the occupations movement of 1968. One hundred and twenty years of oscillating consciousness will be my focus, as well as how the city's very materiality hinders or heightens such awakenings. That city is no more (in point of fact many of the arcades that Benjamin, Aragon, and others wrote about were demolished). The literature of Baudelaire, Benjamin, the surrealists, and the situationists conjures up that vanished city through the lens of the walker.

In Benjamin's analysis of nineteenth-century Paris, social life mirrors Marx's reflections on commodity fetishism: the development of "material relations between people and social relations between things" (*Capital* 166). Human relationships were mediated through the goods they produced, and existed only in skeletal form outside of political economy. Certainly relational structures persisted - the family, bonds of friendship, etc. - but people for the most part lived as strangers to one another. Benjamin makes this observation by way of the poetry of Baudelaire and the short fiction of Poe. The condition of modern life in Paris, Benjamin asserts, could be described as a sense of solitude among the multitude. Nowhere was this more clearly seen than in the depiction of the urban masses. The crowd roamed the streets of Paris, yet despite their numbers, remained an estranged entity. Many in the crowd were, as Albert Thibaudet puts it, "travelers on the same journey" (*Arcades* 252), which is to say, workers engaged in commodity production. Notwithstanding their shared condition, there was scarcely solidarity among the masses. Disrupting the endless flow of pedestrians stood the flâneur. His walk was characterised by style (nonchalant), and speed (tortoise-paced). His nonchalance is an isolating feature, and a protest against the tempo of modern, urban life. Until about 1870, the streets of Paris were overrun by carriages. The flâneur, not wishing to be jostled by the traffic, would seek refuge in the arcades (glass-roofed corridors extending through entire blocks, lined with *magasins* on either side). Here stores would put a wide assortment of goods on display to dazzle and tempt would-be consumers. The flâneur's walk - from the crowds on the street into the arcades - would diagnose the isolation of the urban masses by literally tracing the symptom (alienation) back to the illness (commodity production). He draws a causal connection between production and alienation through his walk, thereby uniting what previously remained separate.

The surrealist strolls, exemplified by Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant*, would sink the flâneur's rising consciousness back into the recesses of the arcades. The flâneur, as interpreted by Benjamin, paved the way for a nascent urban consciousness by drawing attention to the commodities in the marketplace. The surrealist project acknowledged the poverty of alienated life under capitalism and thus withdrew to the unconscious, which offered them freedom. As André Breton would claim many years later, the early surrealists would wander deliriously through the streets of Paris. Aragon's aforementioned work takes place in one of the demolished arcades, the *Passage de l'Opéra*. But withdrawal to the surreal, the irrational, and the marvelous proved to be no more than an escapist strategy. Aragon recounts a strange encounter outside a storefront window, which is bathed in a phosphorescent light. The canes dangling in the window take on a life of their own and float like seaweed, finally clearing away to make way for a mermaid or siren. The scene Aragon describes is not at all a critique of capitalism; he is not writing about commodity fetishism here. Instead he is merely invoking the magical, which resides near to the everyday. Aragon wished to transform different localities, by way of a romantic, spell-binding inventiveness, into something intoxicating and *unreal*. The strolls through arcades and other parts of Paris did not provide for an emergence of consciousness. Metaphorically, the surrealists wandered deeper into the unconscious.

Whatever seed was planted by the flâneur did not germinate with Aragon, Breton, and the other surrealists. In point of fact, revolutionary potential withered under their care. With the birth of the Situationist International in 1957, however, a coherent critique of alienated, modern life emerged. The situationists were indeed heirs to surrealism and dadaism, but unlike their predecessors, they were an avant-garde focused not on art, but on the transformation of life. Their leading figure, Guy Debord, had recognised that

urbanism (city-planning and its accompanying ideology) preserves class power by dispersing the mass of workers throughout the city. Historically, industrial workers were necessarily brought together in urban centers; Haussmann negated their threat by renovating Paris. Technological advances like the automobile and the subway provided for a further defusing of revolutionary power, by casting the worker out into the suburbs. The modern city, in this case Paris, was thus socially structured. Or as some of the situationists once said: “[O]ne doesn’t live somewhere in the city; one lives somewhere in the hierarchy” (Knabb 66). Postwar Paris was home to tremendously wealthy neighbourhoods on one hand and, on the other, large ghettos like the ones immigrant Algerians called home in the early 1960s.

In describing Paris, Debord quoted Marx: “Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves” (Knabb 51). Here Debord’s appropriation, it seems, is narrowly confined to the materiality of the city. Paris is a literal reflection of the stratified socio-economic reality of post-industrial France in its segregation of classes and its strict division of work and residence zones. Debord’s fear was that architecture and urban planning would reinforce class division. We internalise our environment, he argues, and consequently class divisions would be naturalised by the city’s inhabitants. The situationist drift (*dérive*) was intended to allow the walker to experience the literal spaces of class struggle and, from there, map out revolutionary desire. As Parisian ghettos slowly changed into more subtle blemishes – low-income housing – economic disparities would become less transparent. Drifting through such areas like the Algerian immigrant projects, before they transformed into something a little more palatable (to French society on the whole), was an imperative for the situationists. Wandering through the city was not aimless, like the surrealist strolls, but was intended to

awaken consciousness of a society that progressed technologically, but had remained stagnant in other areas. Benjamin's flâneur traced revolutionary consciousness to the source of its disappearance: the arcades and the transformation of the worker into a consumer. The surrealist walker strolled through the streets of Paris, but in search of the marvelous, lulled that consciousness back to sleep. The situationist drifter had modest plans: to stir up awareness of class difference and struggle through the very streets, buildings, and neighbourhoods of Paris. For the situationists, in short, walking was waking, waking to the inequalities that existed in a society which chopped off the aristocracy's head long ago, but did not make good on the promise of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The undulations of critical consciousness - which began with Benjamin and subsided with the surrealists - finally broke the surface in the month of May, 1968. The allegory of walking unveils not just a city, but, more important, reveals this consciousness and renders it perceptible. As Benjamin strove to understand his present by tracing its prehistory to the arcades of the nineteenth century, so we must comprehend the occupations movement of 1968 by following its antecedents, beyond the surrealists to that sauntering figure of the flâneur. The walking allegory is the thread which binds this narrative together, holding it fast so as to allow a glimpse, a snapshot, of a consciousness which, to many, has since evaporated. The allegory, however, preserves this fleeting past and guards it from being forgotten. Like a photograph, it seals the transitory in the eternal - an assurance that the past is still within reach.

Chapter Two: Walter Benjamin and the flâneur of Paris

'Let us do as the ancients did,' suggested Salvator. 'Let us throw up a feather and follow wherever the wind may blow it.'

- Alexandre Dumas, *The Mohicans of Paris* 1854

The world of the German baroque is not as dissimilar to nineteenth-century Paris as one would think. In fact, the two are bound together by way of the universal equivalence of objects: allegorical emblems in the former, and commodities in the latter. Tracing the Baroque allegory back through time, Benjamin observes that medieval society is the site from which the allegory emerges, since "it was absolutely decisive for the development of [Christianity] that not only its transitoriness, but also guilt" should find a home (*Origin* 224). Guilt, which lies heavy on the human soul, is assigned to the object world; projecting guilt outward cleanses believers and relieves them of the burden of sin. For guilt is an abstraction, and, as such, finds no material resting-place other than the Christian heart. Transposing sin outside us, by equating the Fall of Adam and Eve with a fallen world, gives the immaterial (guilt) a material form (the outside world). Consequently, the baroque allegorist has a wealth of objects to choose from, for if the world is drenched in sin and shame, all objects can behave as allegorical emblems. Benjamin writes: "If it is the creaturely world of things, the dead, or at best the half-living, that is the object of the allegorical intention, then man does not enter its field of vision" (*Origin* 227). The allegorist mediates sin and guilt through objects, and any one will do since they are all "dead, or at best [...] half-living." In short, these allegorical emblems are arbitrarily chosen, for there exists an equivalence between objects when everything is tainted with sin. Commodities produced under capitalism are no different

from allegorical objects in this respect. Commodities are necessarily equivalent for exchange purposes, through the abstract human labour bound up within them. This coupling of allegorical object and commodity is Benjamin's own connection. In the *Arcades* he writes: "The singular debasement of things through their signification, something characteristic of seventeenth century allegory, corresponds to the singular debasement of things through their price as commodities" (22).

The price tag – something common now but novel in the nineteenth century¹ - is highly significant, symbolising the complete usurpation of use-value by exchange-value. For only under certain historic conditions do goods or objects of utility transform into commodities or objects of exchange. The emergence of the commodity occurs when objects are bestowed with value apart from their utility, and, as a result, grow into metaphysical objects. Thus the object – a bed for example – begins to “transcend sensuousness” when its value is found not in its usefulness but in its exchangeability with other products (*Capital* 163). The equation ‘five beds = one house’ only makes sense because of the equal amount of labour spent in the production of both the beds and the house. Under a system of exchange like bartering, there is an intuitive understanding that such objects are, in a way, equal. But it is only under capitalism that “the labour expended in the production of a useful article [is] an ‘objective’ property of that article” (*Capital* 153-54). The commodity, in Marx’s estimation, is a strange phenomenon, for its metaphysical properties become ‘objective’ properties which overshadow the object’s sensuousness; the metaphysical is more material than the material. Whether the bed is wood and a mattress is subsidiary, for the bed – under capitalism – is really x number of labour hours and it can be traded, through the medium of money, for any other commodity on the market. The price tag marks a decisive step in the development of the

universal equivalence of commodities since it explicitly announces the central role of money in the exchange process.² Use-value, as was stated above, remains secondary under commodity capitalism, but in the arcades of Paris, even the utility of goods is called in question.

The first arcade appeared in 1821 – conceived by a group of speculators to connect the vestibule of the Paris opera house with the neighbouring stores.³ Most of the arcades, however, grew out of the textile boom in the 1830s and early 1840s, when merchants had to keep large stocks of goods on their premises, thus needing more interior space. A decade before, advances in iron production led to the birth of the railway; the railroad tracks – prefabricated iron components – paved the way for the manufacturing of iron girders, which the glass panels of arcade roofs rested on. These iron structures united buildings from either side of the street, creating an interior, sheltered environment in the very roadways of the city. The rest of the details followed later: elegant marble flooring, gas lanterns for shopping at night,⁴ winter heating, and summer ventilation. Within these passageways stood the *magasin* and its large storefront window provided those strolling through the arcades with a view to its goods. The display window, a development attributed to the Parisian shopkeepers, was “wholly adapted to arousing desires” (*Arcades* 42). The items on display were of the dazzling, arousing type, but scarcely utilitarian. They were, in short, the refuse of the nineteenth century: its junk. To stick with Marx’s exchange/utility dichotomy, these goods were removed apart from the objects of utility produced in earlier times.

In storefront displays stood debris in glittering disguise. Arcade windows were lined, for example, with “palm tree and feather duster, hairdryer and Venus de Milo, prostheses and letter-writing manuals. The odalisque lies in wait next to the inkwell, and

priestesses raise high the vessels into which we drop cigarette butts as incense offerings” (*Arcades* 540). Benjamin offers readers a snapshot of what was sold in the arcades, insisting that the merchandise was not just superfluous, but entirely frivolous. These goods represented the dregs of a system of production which mass-produced any conceivable thing. The ornamental ashtray is not just gaudy and overdone; it has no real connection with the other items like the duster, the hairdryer or the palm tree, which is Benjamin’s point. These commodities are disparate items, living proof of their universal equivalence.

The arcades, however, are not the first places to house such dissimilar objects. The world exhibitions of the first half of the nineteenth century were precursors to the arcades. At such shows or fairs, commodities of all kinds made their first appearance before they found their way into the marketplace. These exhibitions, Benjamin writes, “glorify the exchange value of the commodity. They create a framework in which its use value recedes into the background” (*Arcades* 7). Here the commodity, through its transcendence over utility, finds itself “enthroned” (*Arcades* 903). The implication of the sovereignty of the commodity - first glimpsed in the world exhibitions but more clearly seen in the Parisian arcades – is significant, and should not be overlooked. ‘Enthronement’ necessarily entails a throne and subsequent kingdom, and a kingdom, of course, implies a rule over subjects. When the commodity changes from an object of utility to an object of exchange, it achieves a position of dominance over its producers, for the solitary object conjoins with all other objects – through exchange-value – to form something monstrous. In the poem “The Seven Old Men,” Baudelaire describes the inhabitants of Paris as ants who, when taken together, form the figure of Colossus (*The Flowers of Evil* 83-87); the same can be said about the commodity. Taken in isolation, the solitary object exerts no

real power. When the commodity unites with all others, however, it lords over its producers. The reign of the commodity is woeful in and of itself, but is punctuated by the fact that the objects are not even useful: they are the odds and ends that line shop windows. That is not to say that all *magasins* resembled pawnshops or sold trifling goods. As commodity capitalism matured in the late nineteenth century, however, its triumph manifested itself through excess like slippers, pocket watches, egg holders, and cutlery cases (*Lyric Poet* 46). As such goods dazzled and glistened through panes of glass, attracting the longing glances of passers-by, their sovereignty was assured.

Georg Simmel viewed the city as a "space of over-stimulation" (*Everyday Life* 43),⁵ but the same could be said of the arcades. Therein the consumer was surrounded, or rather bombarded, with goods of all kinds. The display window, providing a space from which pedestrians could be drawn into the shops, resembled a *phantasmagoria*.⁶ Phantasmagorias are displays of optical illusions, where figures appear, fade away, increase and decrease in size, and pass into each other. In the *Arcades Project* Benjamin refers to such passageways as "fairy palaces" (834), precisely because of their ethereal nature. Certainly the arcades, the shops, and the goods themselves are concrete and tangible, but that materiality is essentially illusory once the first layer of reality is stripped away. Underneath all that lies the immaterial, for the phantasmagoria is the deception that emanates from the commodity itself. Exchange-value is an abstraction, which the invocation of optical illusions points toward. As Rolf Tiedemann suggests, the phantasmagoria "is already the commodity itself, [but it is also] the whole capitalist production process" (*Arcades* 938). The phantasmagoria is thus both the singular and the entirety, since the totality necessarily stems from the metaphysical properties of the single commodity (its capacity for exchange which unites it with all other goods). The

deception, moreover, is twofold: the exchange-value masks the use-value, and the commodity masks its own production. The term phantasmagoria works on these two levels, but has more impact as understood in the latter context, for the word plays on the magical qualities of the commodity in the marketplace. The magic trick is the sudden appearance - like a magician's wand conjuring some rabbit out of a hat - of goods free from any trace of production. The arcades of Paris were the perfect expression of this optical illusion.

The gas lanterns cast a certain light on the goods in display windows. That glow - the *lueur glauque* of Aragon's *Paris Peasant* - made objects appear "strange and vivid at the same time" (*Arcades* 933). Tiedemann's word choice is very deliberate here: 'strange' because the goods bear no evidence of production, and 'vivid' because the commodities carry a very real allure; the latter is a consequence of the former. Adorno defines phantasmagoria as "a consumer item in which there is no longer anything that is supposed to remind us how it came into being. It becomes a magical object, insofar as the labor stored up in it comes to seem supernatural and sacred at the very moment when it can no longer be recognized as labor" (*Arcades* 669). The commodity, in short, obscures its production. The merchant is no producer, and as a result, the evidence of the good's production is masked, if not forgotten. The *lueur glauque* is the commodity's disguise. In fact, it is its new garb - a sheen which lends the good its dream-like appearance. Instead of testifying to its creation (and all that it entails: alienated labour, assembly-line production, etc.), the good dazzles and glitters in its new home. That glow through arcade windows was nothing more than a lustre, a compensation for the "inadequacies in the social organization of production" (*Arcades* 938). Any magic trick, once explained, loses its charm. For the phantasmagoric arcades, that trick was scarcely unveiled.

Though many who strolled through the passageways were held spellbound, some were not so overwhelmed. Baudelaire was one who saw through the façade of the arcades. In the poem “Eyes of the Poor,”⁷ there is a detailed description of the arcades. He writes: “The café sparkled. The gaslight itself lavished all the intensity of a première, and illuminated with all its might the blinding white walls, [and] the dazzling expanse of mirrors.” He ends his illustration with the statement: “All history and all mythology placed at the service of gluttony.” The narrator in the poem is moved by a destitute father and his two sons who gawk at the wealth from across the street. They do not begrudge those dining on the outside terrace, but instead stand dazzled by the opulence of the arcade café. The narrator’s shame at such disparity leads him to conclude that the phantasmagoria is nothing more than the manifestation of gluttony. What is perhaps most interesting, however, is that the poor stand in wonderment. The father’s eyes seem to express: “How beautiful it is! How beautiful! You’d say that all the gold of the poor had gathered on those walls.” There is not the slightest cynicism in those thoughts, which is not entirely surprising given that the phantasmagoria – from the days of the world exhibitions straight through to the shopping mall in present times – has been so heartily embraced.

The phantasmagoria is the ultimate consolation. When an object of utility transforms into an object of exchange, disparate objects of all shapes and kinds are placed in social relations with each other. As commodities are drawn together, they overturn the social dimension of labour. In *The German Ideology* the origin of labour is presented as an inherently social exercise (42; 48-50). The family unit, but also larger cooperative groups, came together to meet certain collective needs. Under commodity production, however, the objects of labour share a social relationship, but not the producers. The

social relation between objects is a relation “which exists apart from and outside the producers” (*Capital* 165). Capitalism contorts reality so severely that what we accept as given is really a world turned upside down; it creates “material relations between persons and social relations between things” (*Capital* 166). Men and women are by nature, according to Marx, social creatures. When the objects we produce usurp our social being, something essential (to our being) is lost. The phantasmagoria, however, acts as a compensation for this loss. If labour is an exercise in alienation,⁸ then commodities ease that suffering. Goods cannot fully cure the pain, just like modern science really cannot cure cancer. This stunted therapeutic understanding is perhaps what led Benjamin to claim that in the arcades “all the juices slow to a standstill, the commodity proliferates along the house fronts and enters into new and fantastic combinations, like the tissue in tumors” (*Arcades* 828). Baudelaire saw through the *lueur glauque* of the phantasmagoria and cried ‘gluttony.’ Benjamin observed more than greed; he saw a cancerous disease. The arcades only told one side of the story, that of the social relations between things. The other side – the stunted social relations between persons – was clearly evidenced by the alienation of the crowd.

In commodity production the worker comes into social contact solely through his/her products. As Marx states: “The specific social characteristics of [the producers’] private labours appear only within this exchange” (*Capital* 165). The material social process, according to the writers of *The German Ideology*, demonstrates a healthy interchange which has since been obliterated (42). Under capitalism, the only relationship the worker enjoys with others is one mediated through goods – ‘material relations between persons.’ The effect on the human psyche, Marx argues, is substantial. In the *Manuscripts* he writes: “[I]n the relationship of alienated labour every man regards other

men according to the standards and relationships in which he finds himself placed as a worker" (129). The worker is a kind of island, and if Marx is correct, views others as separate islands. Edward Timms suggests that the modern city "was perceived as the locus of alienation" (*Unreal City* 11). One could be more specific, however, and add that the crowd was the true site of alienation. For the crowd was where people were "strangers to one another [despite being] travelers on the same journey" (*Arcades* 252). The quotation, taken from Albert Thibaudet's *Interieurs*, is perhaps not a critique, but certainly reflects the isolation born out of nineteenth-century economic conditions.⁹ However it was not Paris but London, as featured in Engels' *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, which exemplified the self-estrangement of the crowds; coupled with the writings of Poe, Benjamin came to see the manifestation of alienated labour through the lens of the crowd.

In 1844, when Engels wrote *Conditions of the Working Class*, London was a city of vast numbers: two and a half million people lived within its borders. Considering that many of its inhabitants were involved in heavy manufacturing and other forms of industrialisation, the author wonders why the streets were so cold with indifference. He writes:

The hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other - aren't they all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy? And aren't they obliged, in the end, to seek happiness in the same way, by the same means? And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one - that each keep to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposing streams of the crowd - while no man thinks to honor another with so much as a glance. (*Arcades* 427-8)¹⁰

Engels is not simply discouraged by the crowd, but disgusted. Benjamin writes: "He responds with a moral reaction, and an aesthetic one as well; the speed with which people

rush past one another unsettles him" (*Illuminations* 167). The people in the crowd are homogeneous in the sense that they are all 'travelers on the same journey' - all commodities selling their labour - yet the only common ground they share is the unspoken agreement to keep out of each other's way. Why, Engels sincerely asks, can they not even look each other in the eye?

Juxtaposing the geographical solitude of the rural with the emotional solitude of the urban, Rebecca Solnit praises the alienation of the city: "In the city, one is alone because the world is made up of strangers, and to be a stranger surrounded by strangers [...] is among the starkest of luxuries" (186). She goes on to suggest that such alienation is a "liberatory state" and, in a way, she is correct, for there is something desirable about anonymity. A distinction must be drawn, however, between strangers as unknown persons and the experience of indifference associated with strangers. To dissolve into the mass is not predicated on the self-estrangement of people who should have some sense of solidarity with each other, which is Engels' point. "From our fellow man," wrote Benjamin, "we should expect no succour" (*One-Way* 58). This emotional distance defies all thinking, considering that the private individual's singular concerns were, in fact, universal concerns. The crowd should be anything but unfriendly, but such indifference exists because material relations are so completely reified. Benjamin argues that this reification literally follows Marx's observation to the point of absurdity. He writes: "If it was earlier a matter of course in conversation to take interest in one's partner, this is now replaced by inquiry into the price of his shoes or his umbrella" (*One-Way* 57). The social aspect of labour is lost under capitalism, which aids in explaining the phenomenon of the crowd; when there is warmth enough for conversation, however, that glimmer of hope quickly fades, since even discourse is mediated by the material: commodities and their

prices. Conversation, however, was a rare occurrence; many silently walked on without so much as a glance.¹¹ Reifying the relations created by commodity production, the individual turned inward and fixated on private concerns and struggles. In actuality, however, these concerns and struggles were common if not universal. The crowd was the expression of these severely damaged social bonds:¹² a mass of people turned into a sea of private individuals. Paradoxically, one felt alone and isolated in the midst of a throng.

Victor Hugo was one of the first writers to glimpse and articulate this alienation. He realised that "if man is [a] solitary animal, the solitary man is a man of the crowds" (*Arcades* 269). Consequently, Baudelaire could insist that solitude and multitude are "equal and interchangeable terms."¹³ Poe similarly saw this paradox operating within the crowd. In "The Man of the Crowd" he writes that the masses "were restless in their movements, had flushed faces, and talked and gesticulated to themselves as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around them" (256). In Poe's view, 'solitude' and 'multitude' might be, in a sense, synonymous terms, but a distinction must be drawn: the latter heightens the effect of the former. Baudelaire cannot pick up on such a nuanced observation since, as a Parisian, he had naturalised the crowd. When he reads Poe's story he concentrates on the narrator, not the crowd. His focus is on the narrator's curiosity, which, he writes, "has become a fatal, irresistible passion" (*Arcades* 442). In his reading the crowd is hardly a consideration,¹⁴ but we are warned by others not to be so cavalier. Solnit reminds us that "the crowd itself seemed to be something new in human experience" (199). Raymond Williams also suggests that we might forget "what a novel experience [the crowded street] must in any case have been" (*Unreal City* 16). The genesis of the crowd is not a foremost concern; instead what concerns us is the crowd as symptom of commodity production. The alienation present in the production process

found its way into the phenomenon of the crowd. The isolation one felt, even among large numbers, was none other than the usurpation of social relations by commodities. The emergence of the estranged mass, at a time when the West was "dominated by its phantasmagorias," was no mere coincidence (*Arcades* 26), for the two - crowds and goods - were obverse images of each other.

Right in the middle of the solitary multitude stood the flâneur. He moves like a phantom in the crowd, which Benjamin calls the "phantasmagoria of the flâneur" (*Lyric Poet* 50).¹⁵ Teetering on this precipice, the flâneur never fully submerges into the mass, however close it may appear; he stands on the threshold between immersion and isolation. Benjamin describes this precarious positioning: "Dialectic of flânerie: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all [...] and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man" (*Arcades* 420). Simmel argues that some of "the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces" (409). The city-dweller counters such forces by striving for distinction, for "extreme subjectivism is the response to the extreme objectification of culture" (Frisby 131). Something analogous to Simmel's observation occurs when the flâneur steps out his door. He is not swallowed up by the mass because of his carefully cultivated image, which he achieves through pace and style. His pace is that of a turtle; this claim is no exaggeration: "In 1839, a rage for tortoises overcame Paris" (*Arcades* 106). A flâneur would put a tortoise on a leash and let the creature set the tempo. His stroll, consequently, transforms to a saunter, differentiating him from the bustle of passers-by. The flâneur's style is also a distinguishing feature. His nonchalant swagger sets him apart from others and acts as a protest against the quick

rhythm of the metropolis.¹⁶ The flâneur clings to his individuality, which is only one battle; he also had to fight for room on the crowded streets.

In his reading of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," Benjamin notes: "If the crowd is jammed up, it is not because it is impeded by vehicular traffic – there is no mention of it anywhere – but because it is being blocked by other crowds. In a mass of this nature the art of strolling could not flourish" (*Lyric Poet* 53). One could say the same about the streets of Paris. In his study of the relationship between the urban and mental states, Simmel concludes: "The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli" (409-10). The Paris thoroughfares were not as congested with people as Poe's London: instead they were home to carriages in Baudelaire's day, and later to automobiles and streetcars. Until the widening of boulevards under Haussmann, carriages dominated the streets and terrorised pedestrians.¹⁷ For a Parisian, the bombardment of outer stimuli was thus a very real concern. Navigating through traffic, writes Benjamin, "involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections, nervous impulses flow through him in rapid succession, like the energy from a battery" (*Illuminations* 175). Edmond Jaloux describes the urban scene as a "torrent where [one is] rolled, buffeted, cast up, and swept to one side and the other" (*Arcades* 436). The hazards of walking were manifold, and thus the streets were no place for one who wished to saunter. Paris was in no way saddled with overcrowding, but it was not just the 'shocks and collisions' of traffic which prevented the ideal conditions for flânerie from emerging. The streets were peopled enough to make the flâneur view pedestrians as rivals; they were meek and allowed themselves be jostled, but the flâneur was not so tolerant (*Illuminations* 172). He certainly fought for his space

as he walked, but the frustrations mounted. Not desiring to dodge carriages and maneuver around people any longer, the flâneur scurried – like one seeking shelter from the elements – into the arcades.

The arcades were certainly more spacious than the street, providing the flâneur with enough elbow room to stroll at a leisurely pace. Free from the frenzied bustle, these passageways were also, seemingly, a safer environment. Within, however, other dangers emerged. The bombardment of traffic and people was no comparison to the phantasmagoric bombardment in the arcades.¹⁸ Solnit claims that once the flâneur entered the arcades, he was intoxicated with the proliferation of goods (200). If the flâneur was indeed smitten with the dazzling commodities, he never let on that he was. On crowded streets he differentiated himself through pace and style; in the arcades he asserted his individuality by succeeding where others had failed: resisting the *lueur glauque* of the phantasmagoria.

The flâneur was part of that privileged class which did not have to sell its labour. As a result, he was a man of idle hours and highly vulnerable to the threats of boredom. Writing in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Siegfried Kracauer expounds on two types of boredom. In the modern city, he writes, one is subject to a deluge of posters, advertisements and “the thousand electric bulbs” of storefront signs and displays. As boredom sets in, the big city-dweller “saunters through the streets [...]. One’s body takes root in the asphalt, and, together with the enlightening revelations of the illuminations, one’s spirit – which is no longer one’s own – roams ceaselessly out of the night and into the night” (*The Reader* 302-3). The spirit, which leaves the body in search of fulfillment among the tantalising goods and endless allurements, is metaphoric of the pedestrian’s desire. The spirit is ‘no longer one’s own’ because it surrenders fully to this phantom

power. In Kracauer's view, the spirit does not reenter the body because the ravenous desire to consume does not cease. If it does "by chance return at some point, it soon takes its leave" again, for the body cannot reclaim its spirit in the face of such hunger (*The Reader* 303). The dazzling arcade breeds this insatiable desire. In some cases, however, one could – if he or she had the fortitude to do so - resist its powerful lustre. This ability constitutes Kracauer's second conception of boredom.

There are some who refuse to be "chased away" by phantasmagoric desire (*The Reader* 304). Kracauer's word choice is deliberate: 'chased away' denotes the spirit which takes flight at the sight of electric lights and goods in storefront windows. For those who resist these incessant desires, body and spirit remain one or whole. This unity, accordingly, provides "a kind of guarantee that one is, so to speak, still in control of one's existence" (*The Reader* 304). The state of being in command is a resistance to commodity culture, or rather, boredom with it. Disenchantment with its enticements is a boredom which becomes the "only proper occupation" (*The Reader* 304). The flâneur's idleness takes the form of this second variety. Benjamin calls boredom "the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience" (*Illuminations* 91). He suggests that boredom establishes the necessary condition(s) for the emergence of certain kinds of experience, just like the warmth of a mother's body is required for the baby to hatch from its egg. The experience in question is that of resistance, which is born out of the flâneur's boredom not with the arcades themselves (for they allowed him to stroll in a way that the streets could not allow for), but with what they represent. Heidegger writes about the dangers of being captivated, bewitched, dazzled and beguiled (56). One could counter such forces by adopting an attitude of "releasement toward things" (Heidegger 53), which is a strategy Benjamin's flâneur employs.

Solnit claims that the flâneur was intoxicated by the multiplication of goods in the marketplace, but his inebriation took a different form altogether. In *The Arcades Project* Benjamin writes:

An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum: ever weaker grow the temptations of bistros, of shops, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next streetcorner [...] Then comes hunger. He wants, however, nothing to do with the myriad possibilities offered to sate his appetite, but like an animal he prowls through unknown districts [...] until, utterly exhausted, he stumbles into his room, which receives him coldly and wears a strange air. (880)

As the length of the flâneur's walk increases, the temptation to submit to the phantasmagoria decreases, at least initially. His sense of dominance is a momentary illusion, however, and begins to crumble and erode as he surrounds himself with 'myriad possibilities.' The hunger of consumption is powerful and the flâneur's resistance takes its toll, for he grows weary and his walk degenerates into a stumble. The strength of the commodity manifests itself in this: if it cannot be consumed, it consumes the one who dares to turn away from it. The flâneur's boredom does not guarantee anything; he is still susceptible to the allure of the arcades. His boredom, however, provides him with reserves of energy, sufficient enough to withstand the spell which the phantasmagoria casts. His attitude of releasement provides him with the Herculean strength necessary to master his desires. The weak, as Kracauer writes, disintegrate into the immaterial while they stroll through the arcades. The flâneur resists - his boredom a "threshold to great deeds" (*Arcades* 105). There is certainly a stigma attached to idleness,¹⁹ but for the flâneur those idle hours bear very real fruit (*Arcades* 453). The flâneur's active opposition to the arcades is great in the sense that he has overcome a powerful force. More

important, his resistance proves beneficial because of its didactic quality: offering proof that the phantasmagoria is not as insurmountable as it appeared.

His strength was sapped by it, and he wilted under its bright lights, but ultimately the flâneur was not transfixed by the lustre of the arcades. In many ways we have advanced without pause for reflection, never bothering to inquire about this figure who possesses enough resolve to stand firm among these "temples of commodity capital" (*Arcades* 852). Other than his idleness, we know very little of this man. Benjamin called the flâneur's imperceptible presence in the crowd the 'phantasmagoria of the flâneur.' One could suggest that this claim functions more effectively as a marker for the flâneur's questionable historical status than it does as a description, for he was more a phantom in history books than he was on the street. Solnit, desiring to hunt down this apparition, begins with the word itself - 'flâneur' - which has never been adequately defined in her estimation. She looks for etymological answers and discovers that it was either derived from the Irish word for 'libertine,' or was taken from an old Scandinavian word meaning 'to run giddily here and there' (198). In spite of her efforts she remains largely unconvinced, and the shroud of secrecy concerning the origin of the word contributes to the mystery surrounding the figure. Benjamin, Solnit observes, never defined the flâneur, but only made associations between him and crowds, alienation, goods, and walking (199). Its etymology remains uncertain and a definition is conspicuously absent in the works of a thinker so captivated by the image of a solitary stroller. The most significant question concerning the flâneur, however, is not that of origin or description, but comes down to the trivial: pet turtles. Solnit writes: "No one has named an individual who took a tortoise on a walk, and all who refer to this practice use Benjamin as their source" (200).

The myth of leashed tortoises is the first assault on the historical validity of this figure; it is also a most decisive blow and, as a consequence, casts the whole idea of the flâneur in doubt. This discovery would be substantial if it actually mattered. Solnit concludes: "The only problem with the flâneur is that he did not exist, except as a type, an ideal, and a character in literature" (200). The flâneur, as he appears in Benjamin's work, is a fiction and an ideal, but that is scarcely a problem. The flâneur is an allegorical creation in Benjamin's hands. His walk is not random like the flâneur who follows a wind-tossed feather in *The Mohicans of Paris*. Benjamin's flâneur has a definite route in mind: "The path of one who shrinks from arriving at his goal will easily take the form of a labyrinth. [For the flâneur, this goal is the marketplace]" (*Arcades* 338; his brackets). It is not merely fortuitous that the flâneur moves from the crowded streets to the arcades. An allegorical significance resides in that walk, for the flâneur's gaze "as it falls on the city, is the gaze of the alienated man" (*Arcades* 10). To be sure, the flâneur is no alienated man; the alienation refers to what he surveys: a sea of estranged souls. By arriving in the arcades, he draws the alienated mass to the source of its pain.²⁰ Not wishing to get lost in the crowd, the flâneur escapes dissolution and sets foot in the heart of the phantasmagoria, where his resistance functions as an ideal.

The flâneur's stubborn refusal to submit to the alluring goods is intended as an example for others, but is more an afterword than a conclusion. The goal is the marketplace, as Benjamin writes, and not what he does upon reaching his destination. Eagleton goes the other way and stresses not the goal, nor what he accomplishes once there, but the process itself: "The flâneur [...], stepping out with his turtle on a lead, moves majestically against the grain of the urban masses who would decompose him to some alien meaning; in this sense his very style of walking is a politics all in itself" (335).

He suggests that the *style* of walk is of political importance, but the political significance has more to do with the walk's endpoint. The walk unites two, seemingly, separate phenomena: crowds and goods. Eagleton, however, is perfectly correct in his assertion that the flâneur's walk has political worth, for the "flânerie that began as the art of the private individual ends today as necessity for the masses" (*Arcades* 895). We are to follow the flâneur's path and understand the symbiotic relationship between alienation and consumption - that they are implied in each other. The arcades are a "world in miniature" (*Arcades* 3). They resemble a world, moreover, because the flâneur creates a totality out of these passageways by coupling the solitary with the dazzling. The flâneur's walk is the monadic shard which brings this entirety in view. In his study of Paris, Benjamin desired to "discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event" (*Arcades* 461). His allegory of walking achieves this crystalline transparency,²¹ creating not only a condensed world, but bestowing this concept of totality on those who cannot see beyond their own private lives.

Solnit's discovery that the flâneur – as an historical figure – did not exist seems only to solidify his status as an allegory. He encapsulates Marx's observation that under capitalist production goods take on a social form as people grow more estranged from each other. The alienated mass and the Paris passages constitute the empirical proof of Marx's claim and the flâneur absorbs both within himself; he is the congruent image pieced together by two previous incongruities (alienation and consumption). The totality of peopled streets and display windows is condensed into this singular figure and, as a result, the particular gives a view to the whole. The move from the particular to the general is a philosophical or epistemological concern dating back to classical Greece. For Aristotle, knowledge is accumulated through perception, but, since we do not perceive

universals, we employ an inductive mental process to derive the abstract from what is sensible. Induction, then, bridges the divide between the particular and the general. Aristotle's word for inductive thinking is "epagōgē," which is the rational faculty that human beings are endowed with to allow for the jump from the sensible to the universal. In his schema, inductive reasoning functions through the perception of tokens or types. In *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle provides an example: as one glances upon a military formation of men, the universal (not the particular) comes to mind. The eyes may perceive an individual soldier, but the *mental perception* is of the universal, man, and not of Callias or any other specific person (Modrak 167). The use of types guarantees the validity of the move from the singular to the general – as a man Callias can stand in for the general (abstract man). The status of the particular is of vital importance in Aristotle's conception, for if the status is assured then the move between the two points is a justified leap. Benjamin's allegory of the flâneur is not a type or token in an Aristotelian sense, but its status does allow for the move to the whole because it is an abbreviated version of the totality (it expresses the totality like the Leibnizian monad).²² From the singular figure of the flâneur we can gain an understanding of the abstract, which is his function. In turn, the vast and out of reach – capital's total dimensions – becomes graspable.

The flâneur is a generous figure; if we do not comprehend the idea of a total system through his walk, we can understand it through his physiognomic practice. This art of estimating character through facial features casts the flâneur in a new role: an amateur detective. For the flâneur, "the joy of watching is triumphant" (*Lyric Poet* 69). He may appear as a man of leisure, but "behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant" (*Lyric Poet* 41). Establishing a connection between the stroller and the sleuth, Benjamin points his readers in the

direction of the detective story. Within this genre a complete portrait of the flâneur emerges.

The detective story originates with the rise of the metropolis. The sheer size of the modern city, with its infinite alleys, lanes, and courts, gives one the impression of its “impenetrability” (*Unreal City* 17). The urban detective, notes Williams, is the literary response to this labyrinthine confusion.²³ It was not the gargantuan dimensions of the city, however, but its accompanying crowds which truly concealed the individual. The detective’s assignment was a difficult one, for all traces of the suspect were “obliterated” as (s)he was dissolved in the crowd (*Lyric Poet* 43). The hundreds of thousands of people - concentrated in a relatively small area - swallow up the individual like an amoeba absorbs food.²⁴ The flâneur, resembling a detective, wanders the streets looking beyond the veil of the masses for the individual. This daunting task was one the policeman had to perform, since the crowds provided the perfect asylum for the criminal (*Arcades* 193). Benjamin quotes from a 1798 police report: “It is almost impossible to maintain good behaviour in a thickly populated area where an individual is, so to speak, unknown to all others and thus does not have to blush in front of anyone” (*Lyric Poet* 40).²⁵ There were ways, however, to manoeuvre around this disconcerting mass. The creation of types or character sketches narrowed the chaos of the many into neat categories and, by extension, manageable numbers.

In 1840s Paris there was a boom in the sale of pocketbook “physiologies.” These small volumes were intended for use on the city streets where one would encounter a variety of people. “From the itinerant street vendor of the boulevards,” writes Benjamin, “to the dandy in the foyer of the opera-house, there was a not a figure of Paris life that was not sketched by a *physiologue*” (*Lyric Poet* 35). The physiologies, in short,

familiarised the strange, providing Parisians with “soothing little remedies” for big-city life (*Lyric Poet* 40). The individual was empowered by these sketches since (s)he could deconstruct the throng into parts. The crowd was no longer alien, since the physiologies assured readers “that everyone was [...] able to make out the profession, the character, the background, and the life-style of passers-by” (*Lyric Poet* 39). This assurance, moreover, was premised on the art of physiognomy; police agents and detectives alike based their methods on this form of induction.

Through the depiction of types, the chaos of the crowd could be rationalised. Certainly the suspect could still dissolve into the crowd, but detectives benefited from the physiologies as much as pedestrians. These character sketches would confine the search by eliminating all but the criminal types. Once suspects were captured, however, a more pointed form of physiognomy was practiced. The reader of physiologies estimated character through the facial features of strangers with the sole aim of categorising the strange and unknowable; the detective – at this point in the investigation – did not care for categories, but wanted to move beyond character to the (guilty) soul of the suspect. One glimpses this procedure in Dumas’ *Mohicans*. When a young girl is abducted at a Paris boarding school, Salvator and Monsieur Jackal, Chief of the Paris police, visit the school in search of clues and suspects. They both conclude that one of the students, Mademoiselle Suzanne, is in some way implicated in the kidnapping; they reach this conclusion, moreover, by applying physiognomy on the student after taking notice of her cold features as she flits past them. M. Jackal tells his friend: “Her mouth is so thin and firm and hard, her eyes are so cold blooded, her whole expression is so repulsive, fine though her features are, that she *must* be wicked” (Dumas 86).²⁶ This account is intended only as a snapshot of the physiognomic method, which – at the present – could scarcely

qualify as routine police procedure. Already in Benjamin's day such induction was waning; the physiognomic gallery of the early twentieth-century German photographer August Sander attests to this fact, for his work was largely ignored by critics and the public. Sander had a collection of photographs of faces from every member of the social order, starting with the peasant, up to the highest members of the elite, and back down to the clinical idiot. It is a pity, comments Benjamin, that very little of his material is published, and someone should offer a potential publisher this incentive: that the "ability to read facial types [is] a matter of vital importance" (*One-Way* 252). To reinforce the point Benjamin continues: "Sander's work is more than a picture book. It is a training manual" (*One-Way* 252). Benjamin is not salvaging Sander's work from obscurity so much as he is rescuing the physiognomics behind his art. For it is only through physiognomy that the total scope of commodity capitalism is revealed. Sander's photographs can certainly teach one to classify the faces of strangers, but the importance of this collection ultimately rests in its ability to train the eye to see the vista behind the face of things.

Appropriating police induction in an effort to demonstrate the totality of capitalist production, Benjamin builds on the figure of the flâneur. The Paris stroller links the alienation of crowds with the dazzle of the arcades, but the allegory cannot fully capture the vastness of modern political economy. One of the few doctrinal issues agreed upon by most Marxists or post-Marxists is the notion of the base/superstructure divide. Capitalism is a total system and, accordingly, the economic base permeates all aspects of life and culture. Thus the self-estranged throng could be understood as the result of a specific kind of production process, although the crowd as a superstructural reflection is an obvious example. In many ways the mediated relationship between the substructure and the

superstructure remains difficult to comprehend and "hard to deduce causally" (Buck-Morss 177). The method of induction enables one to glimpse this whole. The detective, writes Auster, "moves through [the] morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them" (9); so too does the physiognomist who sorts through the proliferation of goods in the arcades. He understands that those commodities do not dangle there in an abstract state, but are tied together by the base. This view was by no means self-evident, for in the shopping passageways of Paris a mist surrounded the goods in their display windows.

Adorno defines 'phantasmagoria' as the process in which the labour stored up in commodities is erased when they appear in the marketplace. To the unsuspecting eye there is nothing magical about these consumer items: they seem perfectly natural in the arcades. The arcades, however, only tell one side of the story - consumption - and neglect to tell of the commodity's production.²⁷ Capitalism does not insidiously eradicate all traces of human labour. Instead it is simply a by-product of commodity capitalism that the good appears magically free of its labour, since the seller is not involved in production. The *lueur glauque* is a term which, among other things, signifies the hazy shroud which covers the object and, in the process, removes all evidence of its production.²⁸ Adorno wishes to strip the phantasmagoria bare in order to shame its naked state, for once the sheen is wiped away, the labour process is exposed.

The cleansed commodity stands as testimony to its production and, more important, acts as a gateway to the totality. Benjamin argues that the relationship between base and superstructure is one of expression: the base finds its expression in its culture. The term 'expression' is not a haphazard choice, nor is it a synonym for 'reflection.' Instead the word is a deliberate one which points back to Leibniz. In the *Monadology*,

Leibniz writes that monads "go confusedly to infinity, to the whole; but they are limited and differentiated by the degrees of their distinct perceptions" (637). Although each monad has its own view of this "infinity," the individual monad still *expresses* the totality of the universe (including all other monads - God's omniscience, according to Leibniz, hinges on this interconnectedness). In Benjamin's hands the idealism of monads turns into the materialism of commodities, through their universal equivalence. Physiognomy is the art of seeing. Tiedemann explains: "Physiognomics infers the interior from the exterior; it decodes the whole from the detail; it represents the general in the particular" (*Arcades* 940). The physiognomist can look past the façade of the commodity to its interior; he is able to do so by inferring from the exterior of the object. To grasp the totality is both unnecessary and impossible - the singular commodity as monad will bring the entirety of capitalism into view. For any given commodity, writes Buck-Morss, contains the "totality in monadological abbreviation" (176). The commodity is indeed an alluring object, but when one glimpses the total story contained in it, the lustre quickly fades. Once cleansed, the commodity disturbs rather than dazzles.

In Dumas' novel, Salvator throws a paper to the wind and randomly proceeds. Benjamin comments: "No matter what trail the *flâneur* may follow, every one of them will lead to a crime" (*Lyric Poet* 41). In the same way, all commodities lead back to the base. But one must possess the right method to properly follow that trace, since even a practitioner of physiognomy is not guaranteed any success. The narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" is one such figure. To be sure, he tries his hand at physiognomy as he sits in a London coffee-house. Glancing out the window, he reads "the history of long years" in the faces of passers-by (Poe 258). His physiognomic method, however, is flawed. The narrator errs by moving the wrong way:

At first my observations took an abstract and generalising turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance. (Poe 255-56)

He deduces, passing from the general to the particular. The mistake is significant because he cannot locate the particular in the mass of people, and ends up roaming the streets until daybreak. The narrator is "wearied unto death" in his fruitless search for the solitary figure, admitting his failure only at the end. He states: "This old man [...] is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd.* It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds" (Poe 262).

The narrator, in short, cannot see the mosaic through the shard. In point of fact, he cannot even make out the shard. The flâneur, by *ascending from* the particular and not *descending to* the details, can glimpse the whole. Moreover, instead of losing the individual among the mass like Poe's narrator, the flâneur rescues individuality from faces as they flicker past him. Certainly the singular eventually dissolves into the many, but by capturing faces in his gaze, the flâneur grows in understanding. He sees the pain of inward-looking, private persons. He observes their cold features and notices that the eyes of passers-by do not look into his, but are quickly cast downward. To study the faces of individuals as they stroll past him is to understand their plight. By applying induction to the crowd, moreover, the flâneur seeks solidarity among men and women where before there was only division and estrangement; let the one stand in for all and his/her singular problems – the alienation that results from life under capitalist production – become universalised.

The flâneur treats the individual on the street as a monad, and by doing so, can make sense of the shared condition of the crowd. As a physiognomist - one who studies

faces - the flâneur can connect that hardship by seeing the true face of the commodity: its production. There is a wonderful economy of action with the physiognomist flâneur: all he needs to construct a totality is a single person and a single good. However, without the inductive method, this entirety cannot be sketched. Without an understanding of capitalism as a total system, moreover, any attempt to throw off the phantasmagoric yoke falls flat.

Induction allows one to piece the whole from the part, the base from the superstructure. If comprehension of the relationship between monad and totality falters at all, it is solely a result of Leibniz's wording. He argues that each monad is different from any other, but every monad "has relations that express all the others, and consequently [...] each simple substance is a perpetual, living *mirror* of the universe" (Leibniz 636; my italics). By likening the monad to a mirror, Leibniz incidentally stresses reflection, which is a misleading word. The mediation between substructure and superstructure is too complex for such an oversimplification. As Marx points out: "Ideologies of the superstructure reflect conditions falsely and invidiously" (*Arcades* 392). The more exact term is 'expression,' which is a qualitatively different word in Benjamin's estimation. He writes:

The economic conditions under which society exists are expressed in the superstructure - precisely as, with the sleeper, an overfull stomach finds not its reflection but its expression in the content of dreams, which, from a causal point of view, it may be said to 'condition.' (*Arcades* 392)

The digestive metaphor highlights the causal relation between superstructure and base, while simultaneously rendering the idea of reflection an absurdity. More important, Benjamin introduces a dream motif into his explication. He continues: "The collective, from the first, expresses the conditions of its life. These find their expression in the dream

and their interpretation in the awakening" (392). Just as one who wakes from a pleasant dream does not quickly analyse what conditioned its agreeable content, so the mass does not question why, for example, there is division and estrangement where there should be solidarity. These reactions of analysis and inquiry are not instinctive; consider the sleeper again. Upon waking from a dream, one either falls back asleep or rises out of bed. One does not wonder about the correlation between the dreams and what (s)he previously had to eat. Likewise, the collective does not self-reflect. On the other hand, it stumbles in a kind of slumber, never seeing its connection with the economy.

In the nineteenth century, writes Benjamin, a "dream-filled sleep came over Europe" (*Arcades* 391). It was, moreover, a "spacetime" or "dreamtime" in which "the collective consciousness sinks into ever deeper sleep" (*Arcades* 389). Benjamin calls forth the image of one asleep to further explain himself. He writes:

But just as the sleeper [...] sets out on the macrocosmic journey through his own body, and the noises and feelings of his insides, such as blood pressure, intestinal churn, heartbeat, and muscle sensation [...] generate, in the extravagantly heightened inner awareness of the sleeper, illusion or dream imagery which translates and accounts for them, so likewise for the dreaming collective, which, through the arcades, communes with its own insides. (*Arcades* 389)

The sleeper's dreams may be conditioned in this schema - and there is no value-judgement to be placed on such a claim - but there is something inherently wrong when a society 'communes' with its own superstructural phenomena; it remains among the soaring heights and never spirals downward to the reality of the base. When this realm, moreover, is as alluring as the phantasmagoria of the arcades, it seems unlikely that the collective will ever stir from its sleep.

Benjamin's invocation of dreams reveals his close ties with surrealism. Indeed, his study of the arcades blossomed under the movement. What began as a newspaper article

in 1927 grew into the gargantuan, unfinished work which we have today (*Arcades* ix). It was no mere coincidence that Benjamin forged connections with the Paris surrealists, for they were inextricably bound to the arcades. "The father of Surrealism was Dada," writes Benjamin, "[and] its mother was an arcade" (*Arcades* 883). Around 1919 Louis Aragon and André Breton held their meetings in the arcades, in a café in the Passage de l'Opéra; much of Aragon's *Paris Peasant* was devoted to this arcade.²⁹ *The Arcades Project*, however, was only half homage to Aragon, the other half being an antidote to his *Peasant* (*Everyday Life* 62-3). The arcades study certainly displays its surrealist influence, but Benjamin inevitably parts ways with Aragon, Breton, and others at the crossroads of dreams. His greatest disappointment with the surrealists is that they did not advance beyond this junction. He states: "Opposition to Aragon: to work through all this by way of the dialectics of awakening, and not to be lulled, through exhaustion, into 'dream'" (*Arcades* 908). Like a society which never reflects on its own conditioning, the surrealists confine themselves to that same place: the province of dreams. The dream is the final destination for the surrealists; for Benjamin it is nothing more than a starting point. "By turning the optics of the dream toward the waking world," writes Tiedemann, "one could bring to birth the concealed, latent thoughts slumbering in that world's womb" (*Arcades* 933). Benjamin's shift away from dream represents a break with the surrealists but, more important, suggests an attempt to move beyond malaise and engage with actuality. For the surrealists, "both dream and reality would unravel to a dreamed unreal Reality, from which no way led back to contemporary praxis and its demands" (*Arcades* 933). The idea of motion, however, of *turning* from one direction to its opposite, is absolutely crucial, contrasting with the entanglement of differing realities so

characteristic of surrealism. As Marx states: "The reform of consciousness consists *solely* in ... the awakening of the world from its dream about itself" (*Arcades* 456).

To alter consciousness, or rather, to instill a true consciousness, is to perform a specific kind of dream-work: one that conjoins historical materialism with psychoanalysis. Tiedemann writes: "Under capitalist relationships of production, history could be likened to the unconscious actions of the dreaming individual, at least insofar as history is man-made, yet without consciousness or design, as if in a dream" (*Arcades* 933). History does not move forward under the direction of some Hegelian World Spirit, but instead there is an unconscious element to the unraveling of time, which does not negate the fact that it is fundamentally driven by the motor of man. The arcades provide a lucid example of this marriage of Freud and Marx, for these structures were born out of conscious desire to create a shopping environment, and in that sense they testify to a real, human intervention into history. The motivation behind those first developers was not a calculated desire to transform the worker into a consumer, although the arcades result in this metamorphosis, which displays the unconscious aspect to the historical process. In that half-awareness one experiences while dreaming - realising that the inner logic of the dream exposes itself as such - two options are available: submission to this faulty logic by continuing to sleep, or waking from slumber. The crowd was not a deliberate creation, but was the manifestation of the alienation intrinsic to the production process. The collective could accept this distorted logic (which transforms fellow workers into strangers) or it could stir from its sleep and turn to the real, material world, where the phenomenon of estrangement finds an explanation. Benjamin espouses a trajectory which is dialectical: dream consciousness as thesis, waking consciousness as antithesis, and awakening as synthesis (*Arcades* 463). By understanding the causal conditioning of the superstructure,

the spell that the dream casts can be broken. The surrealists, however, prove themselves unable to dissolve this spell because they lack the proper tool: an understanding of the totality of capitalism. Benjamin's miscarried hashish experiments act as a metaphor for the surrealists' failure, for his physiognomy (and by extension, the crucial idea of induction) collapses under the effects of the drug.

Surrealist practice, writes Benjamin, is certainly not circumscribed by "dreams, hours of hashish eating, or opium smoking. It is a cardinal error to believe that, of 'Surrealist experiences,' we know only the religious ecstasies or the ecstasies of drugs" (*Reflections* 179). Later he concedes, suggesting that hashish or opium can provide a sufficient introduction to their project, which is a path Benjamin and his friends follow.³⁰ Surrealist literature does not flagrantly advise narcotic intoxication, but drugs do represent an opening to the marvelous. Although Benjamin does not stress this aim, he delves into hashish experimentation nevertheless. Nowhere in his writings is he clear on motives, but intention is scarcely an issue since it is the amalgam of Benjamin's thought with surrealist methods which is of interest; more specifically, the synthesis of the two punctuates the surrealist inability to grasp the totality.

As Benjamin sits in a hotel room in Marseilles, he eats hashish and waits until the overwhelming effects subside to the degree that he can safely venture outside. As he takes to the streets he turns into a physiognomist, "or at least a contemplator of physiognomies" (*Reflections* 139). The hashish, however, is not as weak as Benjamin initially thinks, and it manifests its potency in his hostility toward others. In another journal Benjamin addresses the negative effects of the trance: instead of cordiality, "the rudiments of an unfriendly attitude toward everyone [...] begin[s] to take shape" (*Selected Writings* 86). Something analogous happens to Benjamin in a harbour bar. He writes: "I positively fixed

my gaze on the faces that I had around me, which were, in part, of remarkable coarseness or ugliness” (*Reflections* 139). Instead of reading faces like the flâneur, Benjamin stands opposed to the those whom he surveys, until finally his hostile physiognomy degenerates into a game: he attempts to recognise people he knows in the faces of the other patrons. The physiognomy breaks down, moreover, because under hashish “connections become difficult to perceive” (*Reflections* 137). The above statement can explain his inability to infer character from facial features, but works more effectively as a summary of surrealist-inspired physiognomics.

Induction is an art - a point Benjamin repeatedly stresses. While under the spell of the hashish, he cannot make ‘connections’ because he is distracted by the brutality he sees in other faces. More important, the physiognomist needs all his wits about him, which the figure of the detective attests to. While under the hashish trance, one is subject to “a continual alternation of dreaming and waking states [which is an] exhausting oscillation between totally different worlds of consciousness” (*Reflections* 137). Held under the grip of the drug, Benjamin cannot perceive with any amount of clarity; torn between two opposing poles of consciousness, he cannot read faces but can only humour himself with a game. Of course Benjamin’s foray into hashish is not to be carefully scrutinised, but must be understood metaphorically: infusing physiognomy with surrealist methods ends in failure.³¹ Benjamin describes the hashish experience as one which cuts the user off “from everyday reality with fine, prismatic edges” (*Reflections* 142). The hashish, after tossing one back and forth between two states, finally casts one into the realm of dreams. In short, it takes one away from the desired site of the everyday, which is the only place where a true vision and full understanding of the world can emerge. Surrealism does not allow for such comprehension as it moves one in the opposite direction.

The surrealists, despite the fact that they loiter too long in the sphere of dreams, cannot be dismissed - a point Benjamin is quick to make. In his essay "Surrealism: The last snapshot of the European intelligentsia," Benjamin is full of praise for them, and more specifically, lauds their gift of the "poetic life" which they bequeath to Europe. This gift, he notes, is not to be associated with merely the artistic or poetic, which is a superficial view of the surrealist movement (*Reflections* 178).³² Instead it must be understood as a "radical concept of freedom," given to a society sorely lacking one (*Reflections* 189). By planting the seed of freedom - all the while disguising it in the garb of art - the surrealists demonstrate that they are the vanguard of revolution, and not, as Trotsky would have it, the after-effect. Beyond these virtues, however, lies the movement's blind spot: the surrealists' fixation on dreams and the unconscious, which bar them from seeing the true face of things. The physiognomist flâneur, conversely, did. By practicing induction he constructs a totality, which he bestows to others by creating an allegory.³³ He has a firsthand knowledge of the powerful lustre of the phantasmagoria, and thus knows what is required to break the spell. Benjamin believes that capitalism "will not die a natural death" (*Arcades* 917): a statement which, at first reading, appears urgent but with some deliberation seems more like wishful thinking. Underneath it drips with melancholy and despair, for Benjamin understands that the unrest of previous generations has since dissipated. A modicum of hope exists; it is the flâneur's allegorical walk from the alienated crowds to the dazzling arcades. By casting a light on the transformation of the proletariat into consumers, Benjamin explains the disappearance of revolutionary fervour and helps to awaken a slumbering consciousness. Due to his untimely death, this task passed into the hands of the surrealists. With the surrealist

emphasis on dreams, however, this revolutionary consciousness seemed in danger of falling back asleep.

Chapter Three: Louis Aragon and the surrealists of Paris

A man's footsteps lead him to all sorts of places.

- Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* 1866

Surrealism was born in 1919 in Paris, when a group of young people gathered together to discuss their despair over a war-torn Europe. André Breton, Louis Aragon, and others distinguished themselves from the avant-garde before them through their wholesale rejection of pessimism and negativism: attitudes that, in their view, had crippled the dadaist movement. In sharp contrast, the surrealists were considerably optimistic. The first two decades of the century were certainly marred by a “few monstrous historical failures,” but humans were “still free to believe in [their] freedom” (*Manifestoes of Surrealism* 187). The reality of twentieth-century life was not restricted to commodity production and continent-wide war, a point the surrealists vehemently argued. There was also the revolution in Russia, and in that event they saw the possibility for a “radical transformation of society” (Lewis x). Assembly lines and trench warfare were two images of the early 1900s, but by no means was the real world restricted to these two pictures. As Franklin Rosemont writes: “Surrealism finds realism deficient in its estimate of reality” (*What is Surrealism?* 24). Their movement, however, was not an attempt to transcend the real, but an effort to deepen it by extending the notion of reality (24). To do so, the imagination must be emancipated from the bondage of rationalism (with its logic of profit valorisation and imperialism). Once freed, the mind could catch glimpses of the dream, the unconscious, and most important of all, the poetic. For the poetic acts as an ideal, which, juxtaposed with the dull monotony of the assembly line, produces a

revelation, a critique, and a desire for change. Thus the surrealists did not retreat *into* imagination, but sought imagination on the road toward praxis.

'Praxis' is a word not often associated with the surrealist movement, but their political involvement suggests that this group was driven by a sense of urgency and a desire for practice. Wollen argues that the surrealists were just one example of the many ways in which art converges with the political, citing the surrealists' 1923 manifestoes against the Moroccan war, and the Manifesto of the 121 (denouncing the Algerian war) which Breton signed just before his death in 1960.¹ The stand they took against French colonial practices, however, scarcely attests to their commitment. Their fight against the capitalist order, on the other hand, is a stronger demonstration of their resolve. They joined the Communist Party (the PCF) until they were banished for not towing the party line, and they befriended Trotsky in his final years.² More subtly, they introduced Henri Lefebvre to Hegel's writings which, over time, rejuvenated French Marxism.³ Leaving aside the manifestoes, the party politics, and the recovery of German philosophy, a significant surrealist contribution came from Aragon's nightmare image of the capitalist apparatus. This bleak picture of a large wheel, spinning out of the grip of a hand, is, as Aragon states, "an essentially modern tragic symbol" (133), but it is no debilitating one.⁴

Marx observed that in the Victorian factory system, human mastery over its own tools was reversed, for workers no longer employed machines to aid in production but instead found themselves usurped and transformed into industrial appendages. Aragon hints at Marx's insight in an effort to reveal what occurs when our creations turn against their creators. Aragon's stance, however, is not entirely defeatist in tone. In point of fact, the wheel which is no longer steered by a hand is a bad dream only if we surrender to it, and in this sense it is an image which inspires one to action. The crucial first step is to

search out the real which exists behind the official version of reality; blind obedience to a system which defines 'life' as 'life-activity' (labour) only perpetuates the damage and, in the process, limits our vision, like the leather binders on a horse.⁵ Life, in short, did not have to conform to this image. If we look for the enchantments that surround us, Aragon implies, we can stretch out our arms and prevent that wheel from rolling overtop us. Many of us, however, cower in the shadows of that looming object, passing our "lives in the midst of magic precipices without even opening [our] eyes" (Aragon 190). As such, Aragon suggests that "Lazarus will never leave his tomb" (199). Lazarus was raised from the dead, but there is no resurrection for those living in modernity, no stirring from that unimaginative realm. People consign themselves to death, which for Aragon is a desireless, rational, ordered world. Through their passivity, moreover, men and women "endorse their own reality" (203). To pierce the façade of the rationalised 'real' is to call it into question; to open our eyes to other possibilities, experience a deeper reality, and awaken desire, one must move from despondency to hope, from the grim image of the giant wheel to the magic of Paris streets.

The surrealist walks in the city are not to be understood as the aimless drunken revelries of youth. Instead, they walked with a definite object in mind: "the golden fleece of everyday magic" (*What is Surrealism?* 25). This fleece, of course, is derived from Greek mythology, and Jason had to journey to the far reaches of the known world (to Colchis) to locate it. The surrealists, conversely, did not have to travel far to find their prize, for it lay hidden in the most familiar of spaces. One had only to "bestow a vacant glance upon [one's own] surroundings" to gain a different perspective, like viewing one's environs for the first time (Aragon 191). By describing this glance as "vacant," Aragon suggests that the magical resides in close proximity, if one's sight aligns with one's

unoccupied state of mind. The point is more subtle than it appears, for if one looks at the familiar with any amount of attention, then one builds on previous experience – like the person who feels insecure about the scars and blemishes which (s)he sees every day in the mirror, but pass unnoticed by others. The end result is that one's glance is inevitably spoiled or tarnished. If the mind is defamiliarised, however, it enables the onlooker to see with new eyes – a recurring theme in Aragon's *Paris Peasant*. This work is exemplary for a number of reasons, but it is the repeated emphasis on vision which makes Aragon's book absolutely essential for understanding the full import of surrealist thought. To mine the secret life of the city, one must have the eyes to see beyond the ordinary and past the 'reality' we impose on ourselves; Aragon recasts vision to prepare his readers for this task.

Certainly the mind shapes how we see in Aragon's schema, but some have misinterpreted it as the creative mind draping a magical veil over reality. Peter Collier describes surrealist literature as fundamentally involving a "metropolitan projection of the imagination" (*Unreal City* 216), which is misleading, for it suggests that the surrealists overlay the real with their own desires. The surrealists wanted nothing of the sort, wishing merely to unearth the buried, which is something we glimpse in Breton's *Nadja*. His book focuses on the chance meetings on Paris streets between himself and the woman who fascinates him so intensely: Nadja. In one passage, Breton and the title character near the Palace Dauphine, and although the area seems desolate (there are only two or three couples wandering around), Nadja sees a crowd, and exclaims: "The dead, the dead" (*Everyday Life* 54). Here the past collides with the present, since the ghosts that surround the palace are the slain from both the Revolution and the Paris Commune. Highmore writes: "Thus, in the everyday environment of Parisian streets lies a history of

insurrection and struggles, struggles that Breton uses as a ghostly presence and a reminder" (*Everyday Life* 54). Breton reminds his readers that the reality of the past is not buried deep underground, but exists near the reality of the present. Curiously, it is not the author who possesses the ability to see this hidden force. Instead it is his textual creation, Nadja, who observes this collision of past and present, and notices the revolutionary potential bubble toward surface. This latent energy does not break through however, but remains concealed until the surrealists bring these immense forces "to the point of explosion" (*Reflections* 182). They employ dialectics to do so, drawing the past into confrontation with the present so as to blast this consciousness into the twentieth century. Revolutionary fervour existed in the city before, peaking in 1789, 1848, and 1871, but has subsided after the days of the Communards. Drawing upon this rich history, Benjamin writes: "Paris is the counterpart in the social order to what Vesuvius is in the geographic order: a menacing, hazardous massif, an ever-active hotbed of revolution" (*Arcades* 83). The volcano image is a perfect analogy for the consciousness which is ready to erupt; the surrealists merely expedite this process. The ghosts in *Nadja* do not haunt. Instead they – like that famous ghost of Denmark⁶ – inspire one to act. These apparitions from the past, moreover, reveal a reality deeper than bombs and factory labour: a world where change can occur if people only will it. The initial step towards change starts with the ability to see beyond the familiar, to spot the ghosts lurking in the shadows; the imaginative mind paves the way for such vision.

There is a danger, however, in readying the mind for imagination: this revolutionary potential can dissipate in the face of an appeal to desire and dream – something we observe in the figure of Aragon. His is a precarious walk between two opposing worlds - reality and dream - but he leans too far in one direction. He writes: "O

reason, reason, abstract phantom of the waking state, I [have...] expelled you from my dreams" (Aragon 22). In an effort to combat western rationalism, Aragon eradicates reason not by fleeing into dreams, but by cleansing even the world of dreams from any residue of reason. He does so to prepare for the liberation of the mind:

How mankind loves to remain transfixed at the very doors of the imagination! The prisoner would dearly love to escape, but he hesitates on the threshold of possibilities, dreading that he may find he has stepped on to a rampart walk leading back to its own casemate. He has been taught the mechanism of the logical sequence of ideas, and the poor fellow has assumed that his ideas are connected. (73)

Once the doors of imagination are opened, one can enter the realm of the *unreal*, that is, if it were not for the shackles of rationalism. What Aragon prescribes is, in essence, a conundrum: in order to glimpse change and its precursor, hope, one must abandon all reason to pass into the unreal. Once saturated with the unreal, however, one finds it difficult to return to the real, which is a place the surrealists do not wish to abandon. Thus this paradox, above all, highlights the frailty of their movement. Walking through the city eventually leads one to the marvelous or poetic, which – if we have the eyes to see – broadens a previously narrow view of reality. Extending the boundaries of the real under the direction of the imagination leads to change, or rather, a desire for change. Sometimes, however, this desire for change simply turns to desire, defusing the revolutionary potential in the process. Aragon's *Paris Peasant* is one such example.

In part this book is an homage to the birthplace of surrealism, for in the Passage de l'Opéra – where much of the narrative takes place – stood the meeting place of its founders: a café called the Certa.⁷ The arcade was slated for destruction,⁸ and thus Aragon's text safeguards this passageway from the threat of erasure. He not only recreates this world through his realistic prose, Aragon also documents the fight to keep it

alive by including newspapers clippings and posters which record the struggle between the shopkeepers and the BD Haussmann Building Society.⁹ His writing style and his chronicling are thus deliberate measures, since an authentic treatment of the Passage de l'Opéra is the only choice available. The arcade, by the time *Paris Peasant* was published, was no more; to prevent its complete disappearance (not materially but from one's memory) the author must necessarily sustain a realist style – rebuilding this passageway in the hopes of preserving it. This style, however, is ill-suited to a surrealist. He begins well, describing the arcade in the most precise detail, especially the Certa (including even its drink selection and list of prices), but falters when he leaves the café: very quickly Aragon loses his footing and inevitably sinks into dream and desire. Collier suggests that when the “narrator enters the arcades they set up reverberations in his mind which will enable him to move into the world of the ‘merveilleux’” (*Unreal City* 220). This phantasmagoric world, Collier continues, “invites the narrator to loosen his grip on external reality and allow his internal fantasies to flower and proliferate” (220). Aragon's realism, buckling under the pressure of these “internal fantasies,” transforms into an altogether different style of writing. The book's content, moreover, mirrors the sudden transformation of its form.

Aragon's *Paris Peasant* begins with the best of intentions. If he describes his nightmare – that large wheel which spins out of human control – it is not to petrify us with fright, but to move us forward. His critique of the arcades pushes his readers in that direction. Despite being rooted in the real world, the critique eventually collapses into the unreal. Aragon insists that in the arcades “everything signifies havoc” (61), writes about the “enchantments” within (36), and views these alluring goods as “distractions” (60). Furthermore, he describes commodities as objects that plunge one into a whirlpool of

diversion, which is a kind of “vertigo” (60). Thus far, the author seems to parallel Benjamin’s work on the dazzling object and the powerful and destructive spell it casts. The rudiments of a critique are certainly present in *Paris Peasant*, but they are exactly that: *rudiments* - undeveloped threads. As Aragon slips away from the realm of the real, however, he negates the possibility of a sustained attack. This inability to maintain a coherent critique is rather surprising, considering that the surrealists’ fascination with collage already represents an accomplished assault on the commodity.

The idea behind the collage – of pounding two disparate objects together to form a bizarre hybrid – is not confined to the surrealists, but stems from the avant-garde before them: the dadaists. Furthermore, many artists outside of Aragon and Breton’s circle were intrigued by this juxtaposing practice. Picasso had his bull’s head, composed of a bicycle seat and handlebars, and Duchamp had his fountain urinal. Meret Oppenheim combined a piece of fur with a cup and saucer, and Man Ray’s “Gift” was an (household) iron with spikes coming out of its surface. The surrealists, however, were particularly fond of Lautreamont’s “Chance meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella, on a dissecting table” – a work they often cited. These artists conjoin two dissimilar objects, but the intention is not, as Highmore has it, to generate “a defamiliarizing of the everyday” (*Everyday Life* 46). Instead, the surrealists laud this art form because the work of Picasso, Oppenheim, and others challenges the reified world (Jay 287). By fusing, for example, a sewing machine with an umbrella, the commodity-form is cast in a new light: in its hybrid state it is rendered absurd. As a result, our reified view of a good, especially its utility, is called into question. Jameson goes further by suggesting that this challenge is closer to a full-blown assault. The collage declares war on the logic of the commodity, and in fact violently splits “open the commodity forms of the objective universe by striking them

against each other with immense force” (*Marxism and Form* 96). The collage artist is no sadist, (s)he merely commits violence on the object to tear the commodity inside out, thus displaying its “inner [metaphysical] contradictions” (97). Aragon does not evoke the image of the collage in his critique of the arcades; he claims that the goods on display are enchanting and distracting but by no means does he expose them in the way that Ray and Lautreamont do. The collage, however, helps to contextualise Aragon’s treatment of the *Passage de l’Opéra*, and demonstrates that surrealist praxis is no myth. Some, like Jean-Paul Sartre, would state otherwise.

Sartre was neither impressed with collage (he claimed that these “ready-made” objects only compound reification), nor was he taken in by the surrealist movement in general (Jay 289). He argued that surrealism failed in its task of liberating desire, emancipating only pure imagination instead. The complaint is as old as the movement itself, and, what is more, is not entirely accurate. The surrealist programme was characterised by a strong emphasis on desire, which, in theory, provides a catalyst for change. Unlocking the prison doors of imagination is not an act of self-indulgence, but must be understood as a step towards change in the real world. However, Sartre is correct in raising concerns about the surrealist fixation on the imagination, for it is intended as an avenue rather than a destination, but oftentimes the imagination stood as the endpoint (one thinks of surrealist painting, especially Dali’s work, in this regard). Aragon’s *Paris Peasant* follows this pattern, clinging for some time to the real, but finally sinking into the imaginative. The author admits as much; earlier he equates phantasmagoric distraction with a kind of dizzy spell, but he only reaches an understanding of the arcades when he submits to his desires. He writes: “Lucidity came to me when I at last succumbed to the vertigo of the modern” (129). Aragon’s admission suggests that he is not able to

understand the nature of appetite (which multiplies in these shopping structures) until he yields to his own. Accordingly, what appears as critique, eventually ends in the arms of desire.

Their admiration for the hybrid image suggests that the surrealists have a solid base from where they can construct a commodity critique; Aragon's account of his wanderings among the shops in the Passage de l'Opéra builds on this foundation. Marx, however, lays the groundwork. In the opening chapter of *Capital*, Marx writes about the fetishism of the commodity, which is precisely what the term 'fetishism' designates: the bestowing of the magical or supernatural on the material. Commodities are objects in which use-value quietly wears away as exchange-value becomes the sole objective value. The collage exploits this metaphysical transcendence by forcefully bringing two unlike commodities together. A sewing machine – Lautreamont certainly knows - has very little in common with an umbrella, and the collage punctuates this arbitrary equivalence by fusing the two into one object. Aragon's description of his stroll through the arcades is not so much an assault on the universal equivalency of things (it is implied), as it is a vivid re-creation of Marx's famous first chapter. Instead of the table which comes to life and stands on its head, as in *Capital*, Aragon transforms a display window into an underwater scene, replete with seaweed and sea-shells.

As the narrator of *Paris Peasant* roams through the desolate passageway, he notices a humming noise which he traces to a nearby cane shop. It is late at night and the lights are off, but a greenish aquatic glow, emanating from the display window, seems to be the source of this low throbbing sound. Aragon isolates this echo – it is the sound of sea-shells – and as he peers into the window he understands why he hears such a sound, for an ocean scene is revealed before him. The canes float harmlessly like seaweed in this

phosphorescent light until they line-up in battle formation. On any other day they hang in pairs, criss-crossing to form an X shape, but as Aragon looks on, these canes point out towards the glass like “a row of pikestaffs” in the hands of soldiers (38). Thus far Aragon’s evocation of commodity fetishism seems perfectly congruent with Marx. He captures their metaphysical properties by imaginatively transforming an ordinary display into an extraordinary underwater spectacle. The transcendence of the ‘sensuousness’ is marked by the metamorphosis of the canes from objects of utility into drifting pieces of scenery. More important, Aragon signifies the powerful strength of the commodity through the image of the pikestaff. For the arcade goods exert a force over the passerby through their dazzling qualities. They enchant, and the pedestrian reinforces his/her subservience to the commodity by submitting to its allure (purchasing it). The cane as weapon, in short, symbolises the supremacy of the phantasmagoria. Here Aragon’s realist prose slackens as he employs his imagination, but the magical – at this point in the text – merely buttresses a real-world critique. The canes, however, are not the only objects floating in this store window. Aragon also notices a human form swimming toward the surface of the glass. As she approaches, Aragon observes that she is neither a mermaid, as he initially thought, nor a siren, and it is here – as this figure swims closer – where the critique suddenly vanishes.

The figure Aragon sees is no creature of the deep; she is a prostitute named Lisel. She moves toward the glass and stretches out her arms in Aragon’s direction, but the seaweed quickly blocks her from view. Soon the green light dims as the sound of the sea fades, and the narrator is left alone in the quiet passageways. Only a fleeting glimpse of Lisel is offered, and one is left wondering why Aragon includes her in his narrative. She, however, is not the only prostitute in *Paris Peasant* and thus the reader must view her as a

kind of forerunner, heralding the arrival of another. At the end of his long stroll in the arcades, Aragon reads an advertisement for a massage parlour, which directs him indoors. Of course the massage is just a cover for something more clandestine, and what follows is a “very casually physical experience in a dirty room” (*Unreal City* 226). Breton’s *Nadja* and Philippe Soupault’s *Last Nights of Paris* both have remarkable similarities to Aragon’s work, Solnit observes. She states: “All three are first-person narratives about a man wandering in Paris, give very specific place names and descriptions of places, and make prostitutes one of their main destinations” (207). These three works parallel each other, but the reason why they do is not attributable to chance: the prostitute is the clue. For the prostitute stands as a surrealist image of desire. She embodies desire because she can gratify it. Obeying its inner logic (the satisfaction that results from consumption), the prostitute also personifies the commodity.¹⁰

Lisel’s appearance in the cane shop is brief, but the point is made nevertheless: she is a commodity just like all the other goods in the arcade. Aragon’s critique of commodity fetishism is nearly effective, although it degenerates into pure desire as soon as Aragon recognises Lisel’s face. As a nondescript mermaid, she is part of the underwater scenery, but as a prostitute she signals the erasure of the critique, which occurs when the narrator visits the ‘masseuse’ (since he perpetuates the very system he opposes by reinforcing her position as a commodity). By making the destination of his walk the massage parlour, Aragon establishes the prostitute as his final word on the subject of the arcades. He nears the threshold of critique but the prostitute as commodity bars him from crossing it. Aragon believes that to see things clearly, one must succumb to the vertigo of the arcades; the prostitute is that point of submission. However, the author is mistaken about lucidity: it only arrives through resistance, which is something we learn

from Benjamin's flâneur (who possesses strength in the face of the phantasmagoria). The flâneur's message is crystal-clear, and it directly contrasts with Aragon's murky one.

Although his message is obscure, one small detail shines through the haze: that desire can certainly deepen our understanding of reality, and act as a catalyst for change, but it can also carve a path away from the real.

This failure to maintain a grip on the real has raised the ire of many an opponent. Some have accused the surrealists of abandoning reality altogether in the pursuit of pleasure.¹¹ Others have claimed that surrealism is – above all – highly individualised, moving “on a different scale from that of the revolution” (Wollen 134). Their project is thus viewed as, at best, a handbook for counter-cultural living, and at worst, a self-indulgent straying from the path of revolution. Still there were others who narrowly saw surrealism as nothing more than an art movement, which rarely left “the aesthetic realm” (*Everyday Life* 130). These assailants, however, reveal their own limitations: they have a fundamental misunderstanding of the surrealist project. The surrealists did not fail because they were merely artists; they did not run aground because they drifted off-course; and they did not stumble because they rejected reality. If they had a shortcoming, it was that the surrealists lacked a proper understanding of totality. The idea of totality, moreover, brings the discussion back to Benjamin – the figure who forms one of the only sustainable critiques of the movement.

As Benjamin demonstrates, revolutionary consciousness will only surface when the symptom is traced to the ailment; casting a light on the commodity is a vital part of this process since it links the disappearance of the proletariat with the emergence of the consumer. Capitalism is not just a system of production, it is also a total system. The flâneur grasps this idea inductively and renders it visible through his allegorical walk. The

physiognomic method, however, provides no guarantees. When the physiognomist is cut off from the everyday - like the hash-eating flâneur - there is no possibility of sketching the general from the particular. The art of induction is lost on him, and his physiognomy quickly deteriorates into a game. To be removed from everyday reality, to be shuttled away from it, is a causal result of the hash trance, as Benjamin suggests, but it is also a tendency among some of the surrealists. There is certainly a strong emphasis on the need for praxis in their movement, and they have a systematic critique of commodity capitalism as well. Desire and distraction, however, infiltrate Aragon's *Paris Peasant*, which subsequently sends him off into the imaginative and away from the demands of the real. 'Distraction' in this case does not have the same connotations it did earlier in this essay. Before this word designated a kind of feast for the eyes, like one bombarded by all kinds of commodified stimuli as (s)he walked through an arcade. Here 'distraction' is to be understood differently: as a distraction of purpose. Aragon embarks on a critique, but as soon as a mermaid invades the scene, the author's trajectory suddenly takes a wrong turn, spiraling downward. As the critique descends into pure imagination, it irrevocably slips away from reality. In the process, Aragon finds himself in a precarious position.

To formulate a critical response, one must have a panoramic view, which the flâneur - by way of induction - possesses. He moves from the particular because he knows that this method represents the best opportunity to glimpse the vista before him. Aragon espouses a different strategy: full immersion, but he is dangerously close to the object of study and, as a result, cannot see clearly; similar to the police inspector from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," his close proximity mars his vision. Aragon claims that lucidity only comes to those who submit to the vertigo of consumption. The claim proves false though; Aragon does not have a view to the entirety because there is no

critical distance between himself and the arcades. In short, he has no “position of strength [...] to take in the whole panorama” (*Origins* 56). When he succumbs to the phantasmagoric desire of the arcades, Aragon is prevented from seeing the whole, but he has no wish to glimpse it either. For the surrealists have no totality to catch sight of, which is perhaps why, metaphorically, hash-driven physiognomy tumbles so severely. The truth is, at times, best concealed in the most obvious of places; such is the case with the flâneur of Marseilles. His induction proves futile because, quite simply, there is no totality to estimate from the particulars.

When under the effects of hashish, writes Benjamin, the user finds connections “difficult to perceive” (*Reflections* 137). The surrealists prove no different from the hash-eater in this respect, since they too do not make out the connections between phenomena. They do not, for instance, link commodity production with the alienation of the crowd. Collier observes that in *Nadja*, “Paris remains a comfortingly familiar village-city [...]. It secretes individuals, not [...] anonymous throngs” (*Unreal City* 218). There is no self-estranged mass in Breton’s book because the surrealists do not have a coherent image of alienation.¹² The flâneur, conversely, does make out these connections, and his stroll from the crowded streets to the arcades testifies to his clarity of vision. He sees sorrow and hardship in the faces of strangers and estimates its cause in the face of goods. Submerged in these passageways, Aragon was too close to see anything other than a blurred image, and that image did not connect with the image of the alienated crowd.

The surrealists wandered rather than strolled. They roamed the streets of Paris conjuring the magical, scouring for the imaginative, and searching for “the poetic possibilities of everyday life” (Solnit 207). To this end, their urban walks were fruitful, but they were essentially aimless, contrasting with the deliberate path of Benjamin’s Paris

stroller. In *Crime and Punishment*, Svidrigailov tells Raskolnikov that their chance meeting was not governed by some providential force, but was entirely fortuitous. "A man's footsteps," he says to Raskolnikov, "lead him to all sorts of places" (539). For the surrealists – who walked all over Paris - this statement is certainly true; their footsteps lead them "to all sorts of places," but they eventually led them away from the real and towards desire (as personified by the prostitute).¹³ Allegorically, however, Aragon never leaves the arcade: he begins and concludes his walk in the Passage de l'Opéra. The surrealist stroller – if he truly wished for change - was compelled to leave this realm of distraction. He never did.

When the Paris opera house was destroyed by fire, the arcade that joined the vestibule with the neighbouring shops was deemed irrelevant, and was subsequently slated for destruction. A widened boulevard, city administrators thought, made more sense than an arcade which began at the smouldering remains of a former landmark. A short time after Aragon wrote *Paris Peasant*, the demolition crews transformed the narrow passageways into a major thoroughfare, but the Passage de l'Opéra remained, albeit textually. Aragon preserves this world, but really it is just half a world; like the passageway after the fire, his critique is castrated.

The monad is an abbreviated version of the totality, and the allegory acts as that monadic fragment which brings the whole into view. Benjamin's allegory of walking creates a miniature world, linking the 'material relations between people' with the 'social relations between things.' The surrealist stroll does not unite goods with the producers of goods, capturing only the fetishism of the commodity; as a result, it does not behave as a monad: an entire world is not condensed within this walk. The surrealist programme – to initiate change but drawing on the unconscious, the unreal, and the marvelous – was

neither a triumph nor a failure, but the surrealists certainly faltered in their inability to produce a view to the vista (capital's total scope).¹⁴ They glimpsed revolutionary energy just as Breton and Nadja had glimpsed the ghosts of insurrection in the Palace Dauphine, yet they could not draw out this energy – not on a mass scale. An eruption of revolutionary fervour would come later, in May 1968, under the watchful eye of another avant-garde movement.

Chapter Four: Guy Debord and the drift through Paris

Sometimes I walked with Peter Reece as he went about his business in the parish. He would go about on foot: he had a theory that people should normally go about on foot, then there might be time for things to sort themselves out.

- Nicholas Mosley, *Hopeful Monsters* 1990

The Situationist International came into existence in 1957, when a group of eight people, meeting in Cosio d'Arroscia on the Ligurian coast, called themselves 'situationists.'¹ They had met a year earlier at the World Congress of Free Artists, where members from three avant-garde groups converged: the Letterist International, the Society for an Imaginist Bauhaus, and the CoBrA group. The SI was short-lived, dissolving in 1972, and was quite small, having a membership that never exceeded twenty people at any given time.² Considering that Guy Debord was the driving force behind the situationists, their story does not begin at a congress in Alba, Italy. Instead, it began five years earlier in the city of Paris.

In the early 1950s, Debord and some friends frequently met in a café in the Latin Quarter. They were known as the 'Letterists' and would often "drink too much and plan systematic rambles that they referred to as *dérives*" (Jappe 45). The rudiments of situationist theory sprang from conversations held at these café tables. This image of artists gathered around a table and expressing their malaise is a familiar one: the avant-garde before, the surrealists, similarly congregated in a Parisian café. The parallelism of origins, however, is superficial, for the situationists strove to distance themselves from prior avant-garde movements. They certainly acknowledged their inheritance to these groups, which Debord announced at the founding meeting of the SI. But unlike their

predecessors, they abandoned all notions of utopia and moved outside the boundaries of art (Sadler 161). In their estimation the avant-garde never formulated a coherent critique of either capitalism or modernity, and its art took them places that the situationists did not wish to visit; Debord wanted to go elsewhere – not museum walls or the pages of magazines, but to the streets.³ He is reported to have said: “That which changes our ways of seeing the streets is more important than what changes our way of seeing painting” (Plant 60). For the cardinal error in previous cultural movements was that the focus inevitably turned upon itself (usually on its art). The situationists found such self-reflection both indulgent and unproductive, and, as a consequence, directed their focus outward.⁴

The SI was seen as the latest in a long line of avant-garde movements, but was often coupled solely with the surrealists. Many viewed situationism as a “latterday incarnation of surrealism” (Knabb 384), but Debord did not think the comparison was entirely accurate. In point of fact, he had venomous words for the surrealists, calling them ostentatious and weird, and describing their methods as monotonous (Plant 59). Other avant-garde groups were inward-looking – which was their weakness – yet such a failing did not compare to the shortcomings which plagued the surrealists. Even as its outset, Debord states, surrealism “ground to a halt practically and theoretically (Knabb 42). Furthermore, that place which the surrealists wanted to access – the unconscious mind – was both miserable and poor (Plant 59). To stray towards the unconscious was to move in a direction which Debord did not sanction. The situationists sought to awaken a dormant consciousness; the surrealists kept it slumbering (at least in Debord’s view). In the process, Breton, Aragon, and the others withdrew “from the responsibilities of living in the world” (Shields 45). Henri Lefebvre, who was briefly associated with the surrealists,

admits that their movement, as a symptom, was important. Yet by fixating on the unconscious they inevitably lived “outside of the real world, without it, [and] against it” (*Critique* 112). When an avant-garde group finds itself in this position, thought Lefebvre, it ceases to retain its value. Spotting the cul-de-sac where surrealism was headed, Lefebvre left for the university. Here he hoped to find the right climate where intention would not be derailed by art, and where an understanding of the real world would be deepened without the aid of the surreal.

Once there, Lefebvre encountered an environment beset with its own set of difficulties. The surrealist programme was in many ways too slack and disorganised, resulting in a loss of focus. French Marxism, on the other hand, was far too stifling and unbearably doctrinaire.⁵ In the first half of the twentieth century, any analysis of Marx’s work rarely left the confines of the economic and the political. This rigid adherence to only two areas of his thought would have been fine a century earlier, for in the 1800s capital was merely building geographical empires (abroad, through imperialism, and at home, through world fairs and shopping structures like the arcades). In the twentieth century all this had changed. A dramatic shift occurred when capitalist relations quietly encroached upon “the very intimacy of people’s everyday lives” (Plant 11). An orthodox Marxist, however, would not suggest that alienation extended beyond the borders of the workplace, viewing ‘the home’ as a refuge for the worker. Understanding the full philosophical import from earlier texts, Lefebvre was one of the first thinkers to observe the total scope of alienation.⁶ *The Critique of Everyday Life*, his book about the extent to which modern existence is colonised by capital, was published in 1947 and was poorly received by academia. Philosophers were outraged because their discipline was dragged from the lofty heights into the mundane and trivial, and Marxists thought culture critique,

especially an analysis of bourgeois culture, was useless and antiquated (*Critique* 6). The situationists, however, received Lefebvre's work with open arms.

Debord met Lefebvre when a friend – Michele Bernstein - urged Debord to audit one of his seminar courses. A relationship blossomed out of that initial meeting, and Debord and the other situationists maintained a dialogue with Lefebvre from 1958-1963, until a disagreement caused an irreparable rift between the two.⁷ Despite the inglorious end to their friendship, Lefebvre had a tremendous influence on the SI. Debord recognised his debt to him, but took the situationists in another direction. Lefebvre explored the depths of alienation, whereas Debord addressed how this alienation was disguised by way of “the mirage of ‘satisfaction’ and ‘freedom’” (*The Reader* 237). If modern existence was impoverished, argued Debord, it was lamentable for one reason alone: that we are incapable of recognising the alienation which makes life so insufferable. The essential question – as for Aragon – was that of sight or perspective. The mosaic that constitutes twentieth-century life could not be glimpsed in its entirety, but the solitary fragment that could bring it into view was conspicuously absent from Lefebvre's work. Debord spoke of this dilemma at a conference, likening everyday life to a “sort of reservation for good natives who keep modern society running without understanding it” (*The Reader* 240). We view life through “specialized fragments that are virtually incommunicable,” he continues, “and so [the everyday ...] is naturally the domain of ignorance” (*The Reader* 240). Given the above, the situationist programme was fairly straightforward: replace the non-monadic shards with monadic ones, which is the equivalent to giving sight to the blind. Such a task required the corresponding method; in Debord's opinion the narrowness of vision could only be corrected with the most crass of gestures. To bring the panorama in view, he called for guerilla-style tactics, which ranged

from the distribution of pamphlets, to insightful/*inciteful* graffiti and bizarre media stunts.⁸ These activities were by no means self-indulgent, but were steps toward the revolution, placing them closer to figures like Luckács and further from the avant-garde movements before them.

The poverty of life in the twentieth century was not self-evident (although unmistakable to thinkers like Debord and Lefebvre), because people were unable to unify a world of seemingly disparate phenomena. We need a paradigm to bring these fragments together, writes Plant, and the situationist understanding of “the spectacle” is a useful way of turning those pieces into a picture of our alienation (9). The spectacle makes the incomprehensible comprehensible by condensing the totality of life into a single idea. This term first appeared in some entries in the SI journal publications, but is treated in full detail in Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*. His definitions are manifold: spectacle as a “social relation among people, mediated by images” (Debord 4), the “materialization of ideology” (212), and the very image of capital (34).⁹ To be sure it is all these things, but the spectacle is, above all, the intensification of commodity capitalism.

In the nineteenth century, the world was dominated by its phantasmagorias (*Arcades* 26); in the following century, however, the world was a little more complicated: “all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*” (Debord 1). The distinction between the two centuries is a notable one. As one walked through the arcades, one was susceptible to the allure of the commodity, but the individual could always leave its sphere of influence, for the commodity was restricted to world fairs, market places, and shopping centres (the arcades were the most concentrated site for this bombardment, with Scylla and Charybdis on either side of the street). In the twentieth century, the commodity branches out. Unfettered, it comes searching out the individual

(and not vice versa). The spectacle is thus a process: it “inform[s] the commodity world” (Knabb 158), which is not to suggest that the spectacle is mere advertising.¹⁰ The word ‘inform’ is best understood as a kind of heralding, for the spectacle announces a new stage in capital. Yet at the same time it disguises this phase, masking the aggression that characterises it. In the arcades the consumer, although prey to the arousal of desires, could maintain a certain amount of autonomy; with the sophistication of capitalism, however, that control is magically stripped away without any cognizance of its absence. For the spectacle is “the omnipresent affirmation of the choice *already made in* production and its corollary consumption” (Debord 6). The degree to which capitalism deceives – the choice is already made for us, yet we cling to the false notion of self-determination - attests to the extent of its advancement. It is a total system. Through the lens of the crowded streets and shopping arcades of Paris, Benjamin saw how material relations developed between people and how social relations developed between things, which is capital’s move towards a totality. In both its victory over the consumer and its vast dimensions, the spectacle marks the arrival of this system.

In many ways the situationist project parallels Benjamin’s work, and the spectacle is an extension of his understanding of the phantasmagoria. The commodity had fetishistic tendencies in the arcades (where use-value is usurped by exchange-value); commodity fetishism has its apogee, however, in the spectacle, where the tangible is replaced by the intangible (Debord 36). For in Benjamin’s schema, the value of exchange overshadows the good’s utility, and so a false veil is draped over reality, yet by the mid-twentieth century – when the image exists over and above the object - that veil replaces reality.¹¹ In *The Arcades Project*, the phantasmagoria is represented as a consolation for the labour process; for Debord, commodities enslave us while promising liberation from

need.¹² Furthermore, Benjamin believes that the phantasmagoria induces sleep; Debord goes one step further and claims that the spectacle is “the guardian of sleep” (21). As the spectacle ensures that we never stir from our sleep, it too puts to rest all thought of revolution. The last real revolution in Paris, and in all of France for that matter, occurred in 1871. The phantasmagoria put that social unrest to bed, and the spectacle kept it sleeping. To return to the days of the Communards, the proletariat would have to emerge.¹³ In order to do so, it must – despite the consumerism which followed after the war - become “the class of consciousness” (Debord 88).¹⁴

The sudden shift in topics in Debord’s book, from the spectacle to the USSR, is a seemingly mystifying one, but makes perfect sense given the undercurrents of consciousness present in both sections of the work. In the West, consciousness could not emerge because the spectacle did its best to erase the proletariat’s existence. As the economy after the war gathered strength, prosperity trickled down to the lower classes, offering compensation for their participation in the production process. In the Soviet Union matters were different; consciousness did not erode as prosperity increased - as it did in places like France - but existed in an imperfect form. As Debord turns his gaze toward the East, he observes what occurs when consciousness is imputed elsewhere. Bolshevism “triumphed *for itself* in Russia,” and subsequently, it quickly became apparent that “the *representation of the working class* radically oppose[d] itself to the working class” (Debord 100). The Soviet model failed, Debord argues, because the Bolshevik party justified its rule and “*became what it was: the party of the proprietors of the proletariat*” (102).¹⁵ What was intended as the catalyst quietly became the status quo, but the real misfortune lies in the fact that for many, the vanguard party stood “as the only proletarian solution” (Debord 102). The battle was that of revolutionary ideology against

revolutionary theory, and the former proved victorious (Debord 124). Revolutionary ideology accepts a vanguard to destroy the existing state and makes excuses when it does not relinquish its bureaucratic hold. Industrialised or pre-Bolshevik capitalism thus transformed into state capitalism, which is why revolutionary theory is the enemy of ideology: it is not content with a mere changing of the guard. A false and imputed consciousness, if we look to the example of Russia, allows for the continued subjugation of a people. Despite the above claim, there is another 'proletarian solution;' it demands a consciousness which is pure and accepts no substitute.¹⁶ Yet all this discourse, if we turn our focus back upon the West, amounts to very little if the class that was to overturn the bourgeoisie had disappeared (under the weight of consumerism). In short, why write about consciousness when there is no corresponding class?

Debord repeatedly stresses that the proletariat was not disappearing in France, although the peasantry and factory hands were (114). The working class certainly existed, but they could not "recognize and name their misery" (Debord 122). With the post-war boom, the misery of their condition was not so miserable. The Luddites of Victorian England, Debord reminds his readers, targeted the source of their pain by attacking the machines of industry; the working class of the twentieth century must "follow a new 'General Ludd' who, this time, urges them to destroy the *machines of permitted consumption*" (Debord 115). By attacking the literal machines of production, the Luddites could only go so far, but by assaulting the inner logic of consumption (as reward for labour), the proletariat could catch a glimpse of itself. There were, however, considerable obstacles. First, economic expansion, which was a result of Marshall aid in Europe and the Monnet Plan in France, greatly increased the average worker's purchasing power, thus blurring the line between workers and consumers (Sadler 16 and 43). Second, the

economic structure had also changed in the process, with an emphasis on services rather than manufacturing and production (by the middle of the nineteen-fifties there were more white-collar than blue-collar workers). For many these were the halcyon days of high incomes, encouraged freedoms, and increased leisure and tourism. Some theorists went so far as to suggest that capitalism was transformed by its own successes into a “progressive society free from class and ideological conflict” (Plant 2).¹⁷ Considering this backdrop, Debord’s task was an arduous one: convince the working class that it not only was *the* revolutionary class, but that it possessed real strength and significance.

Accordingly, Debord’s task turns the discussion back to the issue of perspectives and the common theme of either failing to see the whole or failing to gain a favourable position with which to take in that whole. There was, moreover, a practical consideration: how does one awaken a class which is - under the spectacle’s influence - lulled to sleep? This class does not even realise that it is under the rule of another, for the bourgeoisie excels at masking its own sovereignty. Jappe claims that they “buttress existing hierarchies [while keeping] the true nature of the functioning of society from becoming conscious” (42). The days of the obvious target - the capitalist - had vanished, for he was replaced by a legion of shareholders. The change, however, scarcely mattered, for the situationists argued that the inability of the working class to observe its own subjugation far outweighed its failure to spot its oppressors. Yet Debord and others did not lose hope and, instead, remained considerably optimistic. To puncture the false dream of a “progressive society” required just one attempt. The comprehension of one fragment alone would allow one to see through the complexity of the spectacle to capital’s essentially dichotomous structure. Of course capitalism evolved considerably, but its basis – the valorisation of labour – could not change in any way. Thus the shard that

would render the totality perceptible involved the division (and disparity) between those who stand to profit from and those who stand to suffer from the production process. The rising salaries of the working classes, coupled with the impetus to consume, only complicated the issue. By returning to the simplicity of capital's first premise – the dominance of one group over another - consciousness and its corollary, discontent, would undoubtedly emerge. The city, the SI argued, represented the best opportunity to construct the entirety through the monad of inequality. With that monadic fragment, moreover, the working class could finally catch sight of itself.

When one speaks of the city, one has in mind a collection of streets, buildings, and people; one thinks of infrastructure, diversity, and the intersection of nature (geography) and development (concrete and iron). The urban is all these things, writes Lefebvre, but it is also where “the many elements and aspects of capitalism intersect in space” (Shields 145). Social relations are thus, as Lefebvre wrote in *Les contradictions de l'Etat*, spatial relations (Shields 182). If one's wish were to expose capitalist production, (s)he should turn to the city. For capitalism's greatest lie is that it promises so much to all, but fails to deliver on that promise. Political economy tells us that lives will improve as capital evolves, regardless of class. This claim, however, is untrue and the city offers tangible proof of the deceit - a quick look around Paris would demonstrate how far this 'truth' was stretched. The situationists read the city like a text, extracting the social dynamics of capitalist production from the spatial. They believed that “people don't live somewhere in the city; they live somewhere in the hierarchy” (Knabb 66). To read this urban text required very little in the way of preparation. No secret skill was needed, nor was one expected to be steeped in specific forms of knowledge. The situationists began with one basic premise: that the city was the materialisation of social hierarchies (Jappe 86). In

many ways this hierarchy was obvious, for there were “embarrassing contrasts of wealth” in the city (Sadler 94). The Algerian ghettos of Paris were the most glaringly obvious, placed outside of view on the city’s fringes in the early 1960s.¹⁸ The town of Mourenx – Lefebvre’s hometown – was another, and perhaps more explicit, example. Here city planners used housing “to literally stratify workers according to their social and economic status” (Sadler 52). The majority of the residents of Mourenx worked in the nearby gas fields and petrochemical complex at Lacq, and the labour relations within this oil company were reproduced in Mourenx’s housing. General labourers were placed in apartments if they were single, condominiums if they were married, and semi-detached homes if they had families. Higher income employees, however, lived in their own separate villa, and the managers lived even further away: in different towns (far from Lacq’s industrial plants and Mourenx’s lower classes). But in some respects it did not matter how hierarchical the urban fabric was, for oftentimes the city evades careful scrutiny.

The situationist message was crystal clear: “look to the [literal] spaces of class struggle” (Sadler 47), which was essentially a call to move from the corridors of universities and their libraries to the streets, from the rarefied heights of theory to the materiality of the quotidian. The SI had a deep-seated hatred for the elitism associated with institutional learning – articulated best in Debord’s “The Poverty of Student Life” – and as a consequence, did their utmost to prevent their message from becoming even remotely esoteric. The only obstacle barring access to an understanding of the urban (as hierarchical) was that of sight. The inequalities inherent to capitalist production were best glimpsed in the city, but the eye had to be trained to read the “regimes of signification” within it (Shields 78). Situationist theory was the lens with which one could see the city

for what it was. In many ways, however, we are ahead of ourselves, for all this discourse on vision amounts to very little if the object in question is scarcely observed in its entirety. Many live in urban areas, but rarely do we experience the total scope of the city, let alone a fraction of it. Chombart de Lauve conducted a study which charted the narrowness of a person's experience in an urban environment, fixating on a student who never deviated from her triangular path of the School of Political Sciences, her residence, and the home of her piano teacher (Knabb 50); the majority of us, the SI argued, resemble this Paris student. In *One-Way Street*, Benjamin recounts how a neighbourhood – which he previously ignored - came alive after a friend moved into the area. He writes: “A highly embroiled quarter, a network of streets that I had avoided for years, was disentangled at a single stroke when one day a person dear to me moved there. It was as if a searchlight set up at this person's window dissected the area with pencils of light” (*One-Way* 69). As it was with Benjamin, so it is with us: if we open our eyes to the city, the city will open itself to us. This appeal to the empirical constitutes the cornerstone of the situationist *dérive*.

Conversations regarding this *dérive* or “drift” first took place when Debord was heading the Letterist International, and stem from his strong belief in practice over theory. More a sociologist than a theorist, Debord is reported as saying: “We didn't seek the formula for changing the world in books but by wandering” (Jappe 45). The word ‘wandering’ is slightly misleading, since it denotes an aimlessness with which the *dérive* certainly could not be characterised. On the contrary, the drift through the urban environment was intentional. As one cuts a swath through the city, one “measures the distances that effectively separate two regions of a city, distances that may have little relation with the physical distance between them” (Knabb 53). Simply put, the idea was

to measure the economic distances within the city by walking through parts of it. That modest goal, as the idea of the drift passed from the situationists themselves to scholars writing about the SI, was somehow misconstrued, and the *dérive* was transformed into something entirely different.

Despite its seeming straightforward appearance, many misconceptions surround the *dérive*. Some have seen the *dérive* as a new kind of *flânerie* and the situationist as a *flâneur* for the twentieth century (Sadler 56). Both figures, Sadler continues, skirt “the old quarters of the city in order to experience the flip side of modernization” (56). Solnit also draws a similar comparison between the two, but scoffs at Debord’s attempt to present the *dérive* as something new and radical (212). In no way, however, does Debord make such an outrageous claim – the surrealist strolls through the city were too well-known for the SI to claim ownership over walking (if that is even possible) or pass it off as something intrinsic (and novel) to their movement. The connection between the drifter and the *flâneur* is in itself dubious, for a gulf separates the two. The *flâneur*’s task was to link the seemingly disparate (crowds with goods); the drifter was concerned with exposing the inequalities of capital. A more glaring error, however, is the suggestion that the *dérive* was somehow aimless, a claim that Wollen, Shields, and Highmore all make.¹⁹ To describe the situationist drift in such a fashion was – there is no other explanation – poor scholarship. In sharp contrast, the surrealist walks were certainly aimless, for Aragon, Breton, and the others were governed solely by “whim and desire” as they strolled through the streets of Paris (Plant 50). Their urban walks were not unlike their practice of automatic writing. The surrealists would put pen to paper and write for long stretches, feverishly scribbling down random and incoherent thoughts in an attempt to tap into the unconscious; their strolls were much the same: they kept walking until the city’s

unconscious was penetrated. In defining a *dérive*, Debord begins by telling his readers what it is not. The situationists, he writes, see these surrealist strolls for what they truly were: “dismal failures” (Knabb 51). For the subordination to the random, which was so characteristic of the surrealist walks, was entirely unproductive when one’s desire was to search out the material proof of capital’s lie.²⁰ The surrealists, in short, relied on the accidental, but the situationist drift, which was more scientific than spontaneous, left little room for chance.

In his 1956 essay “Theory of the *Dérive*,” Debord explains that during a drift the “element of chance is less determinant than one might think” (Knabb 50), which is a colossal understatement. The evidence suggests otherwise. The situationists produced maps for their drifts, which were extremely detailed. Sections of a map of Paris were enlarged to make room for notes and a host of arrows connected certain streets and neighbourhoods with other parts of the city.²¹ The maps hint at how precise and premeditated these walks really were, but the fact that a number of *dérives* were limited to a single neighbourhood or block (or even a static *dérive* in a train station) demonstrates beyond a doubt that the situationists left little opportunity to chance. In point of fact, with all its calculations the *dérive* resembled something of a science. The SI worked out the ideal duration and amount of people for a successful *dérive*, which varied in different cases.²² With such precision, all thoughts of an aimless stroll had to be jettisoned in favour of something more accurate. If one merely wandered through the city (s)he might experience the urban, but by no means was an understanding of that environment guaranteed. The situationists, by transforming walking into a science, strove for some kind of objectivity which would transcend the inner experience of the surrealist stroll.

By burrowing themselves in the deeply subjective, the surrealists placed more importance on the internal than on the external. Certainly the *dérive* had subjective elements to it – the situationists were concerned with the atmospheric effects of certain urban environments on individuals – but it was with a view to formulating some objective truths. For the modern city was, for a large part, under-theorised, and the *dérive* stood as the countermeasure to this problem. The drifter explores the connection between the individual and his/her surroundings, instead of seeing the relationship between the two as something merely given. When capital grows in strength and stature – to the point where it is a totalising force – nothing remains given. All must be explored, even something as seemingly benign as one's city.²³ Behind its innocent façade lies the deliberate use of space, of zoning, of turning a blind eye to dilapidated areas while improving affluent areas with parks and tree-lined boulevards. City-planning is no haphazard endeavour, but is, on the other hand, highly sophisticated, involving a keen understanding of how an urban population can be shaped through its environs. In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord moves from the topic of consciousness to the issue of the urban with relative ease, which comes as no surprise to his readers. The two are not separate. The very materiality of the city, he argues, prevents (revolutionary) consciousness from emerging. Some could suggest that Debord is more a conspiracy theorist than a theorist – for how could city planners the world over arrange municipal space in a consistently ideological way? – but such a charge evaporates when his work is given a context. While most Marxists were interested in studying relations of production, Debord and the situationists were traversing uncharted territory, looking beyond production to the question of social reproduction. They inquired into the preconditions which enabled the relations of production to exist in

the first place (*The Reader* 78). The city, moreover, was where questions of social reproduction appeared.

The SI argued that the modern city was divided into a number of different zones: work, residence, leisure, etc. These zones are not blended together into a kind of unity, but are separated, giving the false impression that life is not at all integrated either. Alienation, as such, is not an all-encompassing phenomenon; it is relegated, as doctrinaire Marxists would have it, to the workplace. As work is separated from home and leisure in terms of the cityscape, so it is in life: the material boundaries reify the immaterial boundaries. The suburbs exemplify this rigid division of work life and home life. Historically, they were created to diffuse revolutionary energy. Debord writes: "After the experience of the French Revolution, the efforts of all established powers to increase the means of maintaining order in the streets finally culminates in the suppression of the street" (172). The urban conditions of production drew a mass of workers together, which in volatile times, like 1871, led to imminent unrest. The suburbs atomize that dangerous force through a "general movement of isolation" (172), dispelling the workers to their own separate homes on the outskirts of the city. Now, however, the suburbs represent something a little more insidious: they give the lie to the notion that life is separated from production (traffic circulation makes this illusion possible).²⁴ The result of this strict division is devastating, for it breeds complacency; workers can go to their homes satisfied that there is respite (and some distance) from their work, and can sleep well knowing that in all societies labour is a fact of existence, but in the present age only forty hours of work have to be performed in a given week. As car culture grew and the suburban home became more and more appealing, alienation was tolerated (discontent was left at the workplace), and any longing for a unity of existence had eroded.

The *dérive* is certainly intended as an exploration of this division between zones (and a shattering of the ideology behind this separation) but there is a more practical reason for this discourse on drifting. There is a sense of urgency to the situationists' essays and publications, which, given the speed with which France was transforming after World War Two, had to do with a desire to seize hold of the city before it was too late. The SI was not a group of nostalgics. They did not urge others to walk through Paris because parts of it – like the old Ville de Paris – would not survive the postwar redevelopment of the city. The 1950s and 1960s saw France turn from a predominantly rural nation to an industrialised, urban one. French society, notes Highmore, experienced a period of hypermodernisation unrivalled by any other western country (*Everyday Life* 130-32). Towns in war-torn provinces were rebuilt, and the capital city, as De Gaulle wished for its rise to European prominence, received massive renovations. As entire sections of the city were demolished and old buildings razed to make way for new ones, Paris was growing increasingly homogenised. One neighbourhood looked identical to another, and those sites which distinguished different areas, like the old marketplace in Les Halles, were paved over to make room for shopping complexes. Gone were those “spaces of different temporalities [and those] outmoded spaces with distinct cultural characteristics” (*Everyday Life* 141). But as those spaces were bulldozed over, the ability to see the disparities and the unevenness of capitalist development grew considerably less.²⁵ Highmore claims that the city “that evidences dereliction and decay alongside glamour and wealth is a city that can rupture the false historicism of modernity, a revelation that can awaken us from the dream of commodification” (*Everyday Life* 141). The juxtaposition of class was what the *dérive* was intended to exploit, but the ‘new’ Paris left little room for such stark contrasts. Paris was socially-structured,²⁶ and was

certainly hierarchical,²⁷ but that was quickly changing. Understood in this light, the drift through the city was absolutely critical, for the situationists had to capture capitalism's blemishes before they were covered up. The homogeneity of Paris, however, did not simply threaten to mask disparities; it also deprived the city of its character, its uniqueness, and its charm. When the city lost its three hundred year-old wine market - so that the University of Paris could erect a new building for its Faculty of Sciences - it was not the old story of art versus science. Instead, the splendour of the old was replaced by the sterility of the new.

The city exerts a tremendous power over the individual, which is something Dickens already observed in *Hard Times*. His tale of Louisa Gradgrind's struggle against Victorian pragmatism and utilitarianism opens with a description of a bleak industrial backdrop:

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it [...]. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of buildings full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, [...] inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow [...]. (Dickens 28)

This place is aptly named Coketown, but Dickens did not have to resort to the fictional, for many urban centres in nineteenth-century England would have sufficed. The lack of colour in the cityscape - the red of the brick was covered over by the black residue of pollution and there was little in the way of vegetation or trees - matched the grey in people's lives. This perfect congruence between the external and the internal was no mere

coincidence; the individual corresponded to his/her surroundings since, in the author's view, the latter shapes the former. Underneath the story of the Gradgrind family lies a subtle reflection on the relationship between environment and human subjectivity, and Dickens concludes that the industrialised landscape acts as a kind of incubator for the factory worker. In this dreary town it was as "though every house put out a sign of the kind of people who might be expected to be born in it" (Dickens 68). The narrator can describe these people only generically: they are called "the Hands." The materiality of Coketown prepares the individual for the production process. The gloom that hovers over the city gives one little hope for something better, and the sameness of the streets and houses eradicates any concept of the individual: the townspeople are all factory hands, which is their shared fate and their only reality. *Hard Times* is a novel which gets lost amid some of Dickens's more polished works – like *Great Expectations* – but his writing on the close relationship between the city and its inhabitants is to be celebrated for what it accomplishes: it breaks new ground. In the following century figures like Simmel, Lefebvre, and Debord only began to scratch the surface of the issues that Dickens had raised, and yet, despite their efforts, the urban question remained largely ignored. If the city did indeed affect the individual's emotions and desires, it was of little concern to most people outside of sociology and geography departments. But as masses of people flocked from the countryside into metropolitan areas after World War Two, as they did in France, this urban question grew more and more vital.

The city does more than affect the individual: manipulation occurs in the most subtle of ways, from "the width of streets, [to] the heights of buildings, the presence of trees, advertisements and lights, the circulation of traffic, the colours of front doors, and the shapes of windows" (Plant 57). The relationship between the material and the

subjective is, as Plant suggests, highly complex, which is perhaps why the *dérive* was mapped out and not spontaneous: an understanding of how urban phenomena shape the city dweller demanded a deliberate and systematic approach. The SI premised their drifts through Paris on the science of *psychogeography*, which they defined as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals” (Knabb 5). The drift in no way resembled a simple stroll through the streets, for it distinguishes itself “from the classical notions of the journey” (Knabb 50); as the situationists phrased it: the *dérive* was a “technique of locomotion without a goal” (Plant 58). The intent was not to travel – to move from one point to another – since what mattered most was not the destination but what occurred along the way. Putting the theory into practice, the *dérive* was the principal means to explore how “certain areas, streets, or buildings resonate with states of mind, inclinations and desires” (Plant 59). At its most basic, the *dérive* measured disparities and revealed hierarchies in the hopes of drawing out a proletarian consciousness, yet as these inequalities became less obvious (through the homogenisation of the postwar city), the focus of the drift shifted; it gained in complexity. Instead of proving that cities were socially-structured, the situationists inquired into the effect of such structuring. Their work on the suburbs – as the false separation between work and home – points to this change in concerns, although it only represents a beginning. The SI knew that the city’s materiality conditioned its residents; the *dérive*, with its psychogeographic emphasis on mood, behaviour, and desire, was an exploration into how it did so. Coketown’s bleak atmosphere, characterised by the smokestacks and uniform streets, produced despair and compliance among its townspeople. In a similar way, the aesthetic of 1960s Paris conditioned its residents. De Gaulle envisioned a glorious city which would have no

European rival, yet the redevelopment did little more than drain his capital of its charm and character. Such a sterile environment, it seemed, would have a devastating effect on the inhabitants of Paris.

During the first two decades after the second continental war, Paris underwent a massive “stylistic revolution,” the scale of which was matched only by the transformation of the city during the time of the Renaissance (Sadler 11). The word ‘stylistic,’ however, is used liberally, for “modernism’s functionalist and rationalist tentacles” squeezed all the life and beauty out of Paris (Sadler 11). Of course Sadler’s claim is an exaggeration – there are many who would argue that Paris still retained its brilliance – but for the residents who witnessed the redevelopment firsthand, the city’s charm evaporated at the moment the bulldozers and demolition crews appeared on the scene. Areas like the old Ville de Paris, despite its cultural heritage, did not survive the restructuring. Here utility’s sovereignty was assured, but Debord comforted his readers with the assurance that this allegiance to function was nothing new. He writes: “The notion of utilitarianism should be situated historically. The concern to have open spaces allowing for the rapid circulation of troops and the use of artillery against insurrections was at the origin of the urban renewal plan adopted by the Second Empire” (Knabb 5). Debord points to Baron Haussmann, the figure who had demolished arcades and run-down neighbourhoods in the previous century, to suggest that utility had long been established as having more worth than culture or character. To lose historical landmarks was just collateral damage in the pursuit of progress. The inhabitants of Paris could do little in the face of this redevelopment, but the situationists argued that, at the very least, they should not be so naïve as to think that such renovations were in any way neutral, which is perhaps why Debord alludes to

Hausmann: Napoleon III employed him, first and foremost, for the purposes of police control.²⁸

There is a blackmail of utility, write Kotanyi and Vaneigem, “which hides the fact that architecture and conditioning are really useful only in reinforcing reification. Modern capitalism dissuades people from making any criticism of architecture with the simple argument that they need a roof over their heads” (Knabb 65). In the 1960s functionalism was the order of the day, but necessity did not dictate that it be so. The SI urged its readers to, at all costs, remain sceptical. We accept architecture as given because we cannot live under the open sky.²⁹ Likewise, we blindly place television sets in our homes “on the grounds that [we] need information and entertainment” (Knabb 65). The analogy works because city-planning and television programming are both ideological, both part of the spectacle. Once we recognise them as such, we will no longer overlook “the obvious fact that this information, this entertainment and this kind of dwelling place are not made for [us], but without [us] and against [us]” (Knabb 66). The concept of the spectacle - which functions as a lens - allows us to look through the complexities of modern existence and locate the real, which exists beyond the ‘real.’ For once we see urbanism for what it actually is, we will rightfully observe that the city reinforces reification;³⁰ that it is divided into various zones; that it is hierarchical. Furthermore, once we understand that the city is spectacular, we can see through functionalism’s façade; instead of examining *how* the city establishes hierarchies and reifies social relations, we can study *why* it does so, which, during the period of the Paris redevelopment, was the more pressing of the two questions.

The situationists, however, did not have to work too hard to find an answer. In point of fact it was quite simple: “A functionalist environment,” they argued, “bred

functionalist behavior” (Sadler 157). If there is any insight in Dickens’ portrait of industrial England, it is contained in his observation that human beings internalise their environment. The *dérive* seemed to verify such an observation, for as the situationists walked through Paris, they grew to understand how the internal reflects the external, that a process not dissimilar to osmosis occurs as one cuts through the urban fabric. As the less concentrated solution passes through a porous partition to the more concentrated solution until equilibrium is reached, so a balance exists in the city-dweller between the inner self and the outer environment. The city drains into the individual, which is a process we already glimpsed in Benjamin’s study of nineteenth-century Paris. The city’s arcades, over time, helped create a consumer class by dazzling the alienated mass into a state of submission. Likewise, when one encountered a functionalist aesthetic, the same result occurred: the aesthetic was inevitably internalised. As a principle, functionalism obeys the logic of the miser; it spends only what is absolutely necessary and clings onto the rest. Functionalism hangs a price tag on beauty and then dismisses it as too expensive. In short, aesthetic appreciation is bad for the profit margin. Yet when residents saw their old neighbourhoods replaced with slabs of concrete, there was no outcry. They quietly surrendered to the logic behind such drabness and bought apartments in these new buildings, rented space in the new office towers, and frequented the new shopping malls. The situationists interpreted the complacency in which Parisians took to their city’s reconstruction as a resignation with not just their environment, but with modern existence in general. The attitude, especially in sharp contrast to the unrest in the previous two centuries, was defeatist in tone; it almost seemed mathematical: no magic equals no hope, and no hope equals no desire.

There is a situationist riddle that asks: If dreams spring from reality, but reality (the city) does not allow for dreaming, can we still dream? May 1968 seems to solve this conundrum, for the inhabitants of Paris did not let their sterile surroundings diminish their ability to dream. The events of May were an astounding success: it was the largest general strike to halt an industrialised nation's economy, and was the first wildcat general strike in history; it was "the complete verification of revolutionary theory" (Knabb 225); and it symbolised "the sudden return of the proletariat as a historical class," which was perhaps May's greatest achievement (Knabb 225). The arcades cloaked the lower classes in consumerism, but May 1968 saw them shedding that mantle, en masse. The numbers alone were astonishing: on the twentieth of that month, six million workers were on strike, and in a matter of days four million more workers joined the others. But was this eruption of consciousness based on the materiality of the city? In all likelihood those ten million striking workers were not discussing the negative effects of a functionalist aesthetic, yet there certainly exists a strange relationship between revolt and materiality in the history of Paris.

A little less than a hundred years earlier, Haussmann recruited workers from the French countryside to build his boulevards, but things went horribly awry: the influx of workers directly allowed for the possibility of the Paris Commune.³¹ No one would suggest that this revolt was a reaction to the urban environment, but one could claim that the urban environment did bring the insurrectionists together. In contrast, the uprising at the university in Nanterre – for many the catalyst for May 1968 – was inextricably linked to the city, through the functionalism of Nanterre's buildings. In the early months of that year a group of students, along with a handful of artists, held protest meetings and occupied a number of buildings on campus. Their motivation was not grandiose (like a

general despair over modernity), but was a reaction to the alienation they felt was a by-product of the campus and its immediate surroundings. The university was situated in one of the poorest areas in the western part of Paris, and the campus consisted of “functional buildings that [were] utterly devoid of character” (Shields 16). Yet despite its drab and colourless aesthetic, the university still stood as a symbol of privilege amidst a neighbourhood full of decay and hardship, and it was this contrast between wealth and poverty which prompted the students to act. Soon the frenzy at Nanterre spread to other campuses, including the prestigious Sorbonne, and with the student populace demonstrating in the streets, the workers broke free from the influence of the trade unions and the PCF (who urged the workers to remain compliant and moderate) and took to the streets themselves.³²

The SI did not view the students as forerunners, but they did not see themselves as occupying the role of vanguard either. The situationists were invited to the occupations meetings at the Sorbonne and other schools where they spoke, handed out pamphlets, and bestowed their audiences with slogans which later appeared as graffiti on Paris walls and buildings. Yet to insist on a vanguard would detract from the magnitude of 1968, which in the eyes of Debord and others was nothing short of the emergence of a *pure* proletarian consciousness. A clarification, however, is required: one must distinguish between urban awareness and class awareness. Did 1968 have anything to do with the city? No, it was more a result of momentum and a chain of events unfolding in rapid succession than anything else; May was the Vesuvius of consciousness – a massive eruption – completely unrelated to the city, but at the same time the urban lurks in the background because the city’s materiality brought about the conditions for the disappearance and reappearance of consciousness. The arcades caused the proletariat to lose sight of itself and the social

structuring within the city caused the working class to internalise the hierarchy so characteristic of capitalist societies. Furthermore, the postwar reconstruction made this hierarchy palatable. The destruction of the arcade passageways – so as to widen city thoroughfares – allowed for an expansion of consciousness: a giant *dérive* as thousands upon thousands of demonstrators took to the streets. In a tidy way things came full circle, for the allegorical stroll of the *flâneur* began on the crowded streets of Paris and concluded in its arcades; the surrealist walks, metaphorically, never left the arcades as desire prevented them from leaving, and in 1968 the streets were overcrowded once again. This time, however, the streets were not peopled with an alienated mass but were filled with a procession of people alive to their world. These *drifters* were not the somnambulists of Baudelaire's or even Benjamin's day; they were, in contrast, a people fully awake and fully conscious.

The death of the arcades, a little less than a century after Haussman, literally paved the way for the communal *dérive* through Paris; here intention met its goal and the *dérive* fulfilled its purpose: it led to a mass awakening. For the state, 1968 was certainly disastrous, but for the SI it was entirely encouraging, even if it proved them wrong. They mistakenly believed that if the conditions for dreaming were eliminated, change would not come about. Between the work of both Haussmann and De Gaulle, these conditions were almost wiped out by a functionalist aesthetic, but the effects of dreaming occurred nonetheless. May 1968 may have been a deception of sorts, something akin to an "Indian Summer" as Jappe puts it (146), since that explosion of awareness did not last. The month of May was merely "a paroxysmic expansion and subsequent collapse of consciousness" (Wollen 150), and thus the Left could scarcely rest on its laurels. On the other hand, they did not have to bemoan the fact that the energy of May could not be sustained, and that it,

very quickly, fizzled out. The situationists could take comfort in this truth: that once the spectacle is shattered, something tremendous can take place. The world observed this truth before in a town in California, three years before the events of 1968.

In the lower-income suburb of Los Angeles, in a town called Watts, the residents rioted for four days in the middle of August. Some have presented the rebellion in gross caricature: African-Americans looting stores, but the SI took a more sophisticated view of things. What occurred in August 13-16 in 1965, they write, was a “rebellion against the commodity, against the world of the commodity in which the worker-consumers are *hierarchically* subordinated to commodity values” (Knabb 155). Understood in this light, the word ‘looting’ cannot fully begin to describe the Watts rebellion and, in fact, characterises it in a negative way. For the residents did not merely appropriate what was not theirs; instead they took literally the spectacle’s “publicity of abundance,” and scrambled to take all that they could gain possession of. The motivation was not covetousness, however, since they destroyed whatever goods they initially stole. The spectacle gives the lie that happiness is mediated through goods; the residents of Watts, by emptying stores of their goods, only to set fire to them or dash them to pieces, revealed their deep mistrust of a commodified existence. In short, they declared war on the spectacle, refusing to believe that the accumulation of ‘stuff’ would ever truly satisfy. Above all else, Watts demonstrated that the spectacle – once punctured – would eventually collapse by folding in on itself. The *dérive* obeys this logic. The drift through the urban environment was always intended as a means of rupturing the false image of a progressive and egalitarian society. At its most basic, the purpose of the drift was to expose societal inequalities through the urban fabric; on a deeper level the *dérive* was a means to understand how social structuring – through the very material of the city –

caused people to grow complacent. The degree to which this complacency spread throughout the working class, infecting this populace with resignation, made for a particularly bleak picture, but there was hope, which was glimpsed in 1965 in a suburb of Los Angeles and again three years later in the streets of Paris. There was a good chance, the SI argued, that hope would be glimpsed once again. There is, however, a precondition: that, like the townspeople of Watts, we want more than what the spectacle offers. The situationists appropriated a surrealist slogan which, in turn, a 1968 demonstrator wrote on a Paris wall with a can of spray paint; it reads: "I take my desires for reality because I believe in the reality of my desires" (Wollen 136).³³ By succumbing to their own desires, the surrealists ended up straying from reality, but the call was to inject desire into reality (fusing the two together, yet never fleeing the dictates of the real). May 1968 gave the proof of the success of such a programme: ten million workers cried out and a million of them took to the streets of Paris (Plant 99). They desired more than what the modern age provided.

'Desire,' at least in the preceding chapter, was a slippery word, denoting a withdrawal (either slight or substantial depending on one's view of the surrealists) from the real world. In situationist hands, however, this word signals a longing for something far better than the poverty of our present age. To desire, then, is to be driven to change. The first step towards change begins with an understanding that the spectacle is not a veil draped over reality; the spectacle is a distortion of the real. Sadler claims that the result of drifting is a "flowering of consciousness" (98). Yet there is a context. Consciousness can only come about when the *dérive* opens up a vista. A panorama, or at least a view to the panorama, is a necessary precondition for the emergence of consciousness, which is something we already observed in Benjamin's study of Paris. The *flâneur* stood as the

single monad in which the (near) totality of capitalist production could be glimpsed. Through the fragment of the consumer, the working class could see that it had been 'bought-off,' and that its revolutionary potential withered in the face of the phantasmagoria. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the proletariat's transformation into consumers was complete; in addition, capital grew increasingly complex and such a shard as the flâneur's allegorical walk proved incapable of bringing the mosaic into view. The spectacle complicated matters considerably and, as a result, a new monad was required. The situationists, quite matter-of-factly, argued that if the spectacle was a distortion, what was needed was an exploration of this contorted reality. The *dérive* – on one level – was certainly an act of exploration, for the drifter cuts through the city in the hopes of dissecting it. But to suggest that the *dérive* is mere exploration is too simplistic a summary: a better word is penetration. Drifting through the urban environment allows one to penetrate not just the city, but also capital itself (by targeting its vulnerable spots). For the situationists, that entry point into the totality was the issue of inequality, which is the first premise of capitalist production and an economic law it cannot deviate from, no matter how progressive the society. Capitalism exists through the logic of profit and valorisation, and the city – its poverty and hierarchy - confirms that this iron-clad law cannot be overruled. The transformation of the worker into a consumer was an attempt at masking class divisions, but the *dérive* acted as the antidote to this deception. According to Debord and the situationists, the city is the site where the theoretical meets the empirical, and the *dérive* was the means to secure the proof.

The situationists gave a name to the intensification of capital: they called it the 'spectacle.' As a contortion, the spectacle blurs reality. In a world where life is experienced second-hand and desire is broadcasted directly into people's homes, it is

difficult to make one's way through the haze. The SI wished to clear the air: to evade the spectacle's many tentacles by fixating on its basic structure. Despite being a total system, twentieth-century capitalism still retained its essential shape and, in consequence, could be condensed into something tangible. The monad of inequality is the fragment which unlocks a vast reality and draws the disparate into a coherent whole. The rest – the totality of capitalist production – could be inferred from this one shard. More important, the issue of inequality answers the one question which had plagued many thinkers, the question of revolutionary desire and its disappearance in the West (desire of a kind that led to mass events like the French Revolution or the 1848 street-fighting). The drifter – with this aim in mind – searches out the city's poor, locating that class which many believed had disappeared with the rising prosperity of postwar Europe. Over time social unrest was quelled because the phantasmagoria had broken down its barriers and, unleashed from the arcades, invaded the furthest reaches of people's lives. In short, the rise of the phantasmagoria had replaced a desire for change with a desire for goods. Yet there still existed the poor – the drifter spotted them on his walks – and despite the restructuring of Paris during the 1950s and 1960s, there existed an even greater number of the working class which had been disguised by the new aesthetic. The city in this case had concealed a dormant force with the camouflage of 'prosperity' but the sheen was wiped away in May 1968 when this force came to the surface. For those areas of obvious class disparity there was certainly a set of problems: divisions were reified by the city-dweller as (s)he internalised the social hierarchy, settled into place, grew complacent and, if disappointment set in, negotiated discontent with the accumulation of commodified things. However, the real problem areas – those sanitised places where class and privilege lay hidden – had a more daunting set of challenges. The situationists had to expose the

true nature of capitalist societies by tearing away the façade of the city; behind it stood this fact: that there would always be a proletariat, necessarily so, no matter what the apologists claimed. Where there is a proletariat, moreover, there is suffering; the city, once exposed, testifies to this fact. And where there is suffering there is dreaming.

In *Hopeful Monsters*, a priest explains to one of the protagonists that “people should [...] go about on foot, then there might be time for things to sort themselves out” (Mosley 177). The *dérive* is exactly that: as one strolls through the city the urban is unraveled. Ivan Chtcheglov writes: “The *dérive* (with its flow of acts, its gestures, its strolls, its encounters) was to the totality what psychoanalysis is to language” (Knabb 372). How does the analyst come to an understanding of the patient: by employing psychoanalysis as a kind of strainer – just let the patient keep talking. The *dérive*, likewise, employs the same strategy. Keep walking because the drifter will confront the totality (and comprehend it to some degree) by drawing upon ideas regarding urbanism and psychogeography. The *dérive* is not cognitive, nor is it theoretical; it is entirely practical, calling one to pierce the city by walking through it in order to experience reification and experience the camouflage of the sanitised city. ‘Experience’ is the watchword here, which is not surprising considering how Debord and others looked at the USSR, union bureaucrats, and political communists. Consciousness cannot be imputed; it must be experienced or felt.³⁴ People do not fight behind barricades or march through the streets because they cognitively accept change. They do so because they *feel* a desire to force change. The *dérive* is, in the truest sense then, the mapping out of revolutionary desire. The arrows on Debord’s meticulously mapped out routes, connecting certain neighbourhoods with others by way of specific streets and avenues, are metaphoric of the precision in which the SI sought to draw out a dormant consciousness. These arrows,

moreover, delineated a pathway to a felt desire to change life, a pathway that crisscrossed through lower income areas into renovated, functionalist districts of Paris, past Nanterre and the Sorbonne and onto the wide boulevards where thousands upon thousands of Parisians expressed their desire by marching in solidarity. But, it needs to be asked, is the *dérive* really an allegory?

There is no real allegory of walking, and certainly not with either the situationists or the surrealists. Perhaps the flâneur's walk is genuinely allegorical, but that fragile allegory was supported by two sentences in a book that spans a thousand pages: "The gaze of the allegorist, as it falls on the city, is the gaze of the alienated man. It is the gaze of the flâneur, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller" (*Arcades* 10). To extract an allegory of walking out of these two sentences is an act of deception – a fiction – but it remains true to the spirit of Benjamin's methodology: that a single fragment can unlock an entirety and render it perceptible. The allegory, then, helps explain how consciousness undulates, withering with consumerism (Benjamin), sinking with desire (the surrealists) and re-emerging in May 1968 (the situationists). At the end of his *Trauerspiel* book Benjamin declares: "Allegory goes away empty-handed" (*Origin* 233). The same could be said of this study. Allegories of walking are myths, but walking behaves as one in that a totality is brought into view by way of its allegorical form. The flâneur's walk abbreviates a total world by linking the alienated crowd with the arcades, and the *dériver* abbreviates the complexity of twentieth-century capital by simplifying it with the single notion of inequality (and its disguise). The surrealist stroll, on the other hand, abbreviates only half a world, the world of commodity fetishism (the dangling canes in the storefront window), and as a consequence the totality can not be glimpsed. This failure, however, is scarcely that, for it

alerts us to the symbiosis of totality and consciousness: the two imply each other.

Benjamin's attempt at unearthing a revolutionary consciousness began with an understanding that phantasmagoric distraction had blinded the lower classes to the source of their alienation, hence the allegorical walk of the flâneur which conjoins the seemingly disparate and, at the same time, approximates the totality of capitalism. The situationist drift also condenses the whole by targeting inequality, thereby waking the proletarian population from its spectacular sleep. In contrast, the surrealists never, metaphorically speaking, left the arcades, and with only half a vision of the totality their project faltered. The narrative which threads together Walter Benjamin, Louis Aragon, and Guy Debord demonstrates that consciousness can only emerge with a comprehension of totality. The allegorical shard provides for this insight.

Like one who sits in a confession booth, more than a single sin must be admitted. The entire notion of allegories of walking was fictive, yet there is more to be confessed. Earlier, in the introduction of the essay, it was stated that the allegory brings the past into view, but that was a lie as well. The claim was made to convince readers to embrace the allegory for its ability to preserve the past, but the intention was for readers to embrace the monadic properties of the allegory instead. The distinction between the two is significant. According to what was stated in the introduction, the past cannot be fully revisited but, by condensing a bygone reality into a fragment, it can be preserved. The city walker, whether a flâneur, a surrealist stroller, or a *drifter* (it makes no difference), pulls that distant reality into the present. We will, for example, never set our eyes on the Passage de l'Opéra and we will never see the Paris that existed before Haussmann and De Gaulle, but the allegorical walker will not, in truth, magically contain this world within itself. Nor does this figure have to, for the real concern is not with the preservation of the

past but rather with an ability to discern a world and come to understand it. The allegory as monad provides a window into a vast world, enabling us to see the entirety in miniature. Since the whole is condensed into the singular, we do not have to strive to accomplish the impossible: we do not have to take in the full mosaic in one glance. This negotiation of the singular and the whole, the monad and the totality, is of interest, for during the one hundred and twenty years of Paris life - from the barricades of 1848 to the demonstrators of 1968 - the issue of sight has been lurking in the shadows. Revolutionary consciousness dissipated in a city rife with a history of social unrest because people did not see the entire panorama. The allegory explains how totality and consciousness are interconnected. The concern with condensing a past world was merely a garden path.

One final question remains. Are oscillations of revolutionary consciousness really tied to a notion of the totality? Certainly the masses do not need to have an orthodox understanding of the totality, but if the proletarian populace cannot recognise itself as such, then unrest dissipates. The idea of totality holds up a mirror to the working class, revealing that they are disguised (Benjamin's consumer) and have internalised the hierarchy (the reification of Debord's city dweller); the tiny fragment that contains the entirety can, however, initiate change. In the nineteenth century, the immaturity of the production process was transparent. The existence of the lower classes was given, disparities were obvious, and revolutionary desires were very real. As the production process matured, growing in complexity, a monad was needed to pave the way for desire and change. Unfortunately this paper ends in a kind of cul-de-sac, since history tells us that the fervour of May 1968 rapidly faded. In point of fact, 'revolution' is so far from memory that its connotations are negligible. Plant observes that only a little while ago French society was on the brink of revolution (31), but now the "the word 'revolutionary'

has been neutralised to the point of being used in advertising to describe the slightest change in an ever-changing commodity production” (77). This dead-end is really just an illusion though, for the concerns in this paper are not of a prescriptive nature; the topic is method, not emancipation. This paper is a treatise on induction and physiognomy, and, if it posits anything at all it is this: that there is much truth contained in Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” Unable to take in the whole in its entirety, we must select the proper fragments from which we can come to understand our reality.

Endnotes

From Chapter One:

¹ Deborah Madsen notes that for Benjamin, “allegory represents the antithesis of symbolism” (122). The allegory is a “less mystified method of figuration” because it makes *plain* its rhetorical movements (122). Simon Brittan contextualises Madsen’s remarks by returning to German symbolism, which was the framework for Benjamin’s study of the seventeenth-century Baroque. In *Werke*, which Brittan quotes from, Goethe sketches the essential difference between allegory and symbol: “Symbolism transforms the experience into an idea and an idea into an image, so that the idea expressed through the image remains always active and unattainable [...]” (Brittan 170). Allegory, however, “transforms experience into a concept and a concept into an image, but so that the concept remains always defined and expressible by the image” (Goethe quoted in Brittan 170). What appears as a deficiency in allegory is in actuality its most cherished feature: the allegory is not open like the symbol and, as a result, maintains a level of objectivity that the symbol cannot attain.

² ‘Worlds’ is a word pluralised for a reason: the allegory-as-monad reveals two distinct worlds. Consider Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. The allegory of walking (or pilgrimage) condenses the entire narrative into the single image of Christian’s walk from his humble beginnings as “Graceless” through to his journey’s end at the gates of heaven, the “Celestial City.” Everything contained in the story is absorbed by the allegory – the characters, the various settings, the unfolding of the plot, etc. are all held fast by the allegorical walk of the Christian. The walk, in short, encapsulates the entire tale, or rather, the entire tale is encapsulated by the image of the walk. But the allegory condenses more than the internal reality of the text; *Pilgrim’s Progress* also reveals the world in which it was composed: Restoration England. During that time religious freedom was scarce, class antagonism was surfacing, and the nation was torn between self-government and royal absolutism. Bunyan’s England was a place of religious and political instability, and Christian’s walk offers the reader a view to the text’s external reality of dissenting churches, Restoration nonconformist policies, and religious persecution. Bunyan spent one-third of his adult life in prison (twelve to thirteen years) for leading a separatist congregation. In that time he wrote *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and this world seeps into his allegory, in both the general theme – the believer’s walk is an arduous one – and in the particulars like characters and setting. At one point in the narrative Christian visits the Palace Beautiful where he is given a sword and armour. For many scholars this palace represents the illegal separatist congregation which equips the believer with the armour of God and the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6: 10ff). The state church, by inference, is incapable of bestowing gifts upon believers, and, in point of fact, represents the enemy of the true believer. Shortly after Christian is given the sword and armour he is confronted by Apollyon and is forced into combat against him. The passage follows the chivalric model but the language contained in this episode suggests a deeper meaning: Apollyon wants to claim Christian as his “subject” just as the Anglicans tried to coerce separatists to join the established church. Bunyan infuses the religious with the political here, and although this cursory look at *Pilgrim’s Progress* is exactly that (nothing more than a sketch), one can still observe how seventeenth-century life drains into the allegory. Christopher Hill suggests that “allegory was traditionally a way of circumventing the censor” (201), which only helps to support the claim that the allegory contains within itself an external reality. For the real world is certainly present in Bunyan’s book: it lies under a publishable façade. Underneath the generic conventions of romance literature resides a defense of non-conformist faith and its practice (*Reading Dissenting Writing* 129). The allegory provides a view to two distinct worlds, but when we move from Bunyan to Benjamin, Aragon, and Debord, our concern with the first world quickly fades. For the monadic allegory provides an understanding of the inner reality of their texts, but allegory’s potency rests in its ability to open up an outside reality. With Bunyan this world was one in which church and state towered over the believer with immense power and authority; with Benjamin, Aragon, and Debord the external world was one rich in revolutionary history but poor in revolutionary consciousness. The flâneur, the stroller, and the drifter condense this world and, in the process, render it perceptible.

From Chapter Two:

¹ For the introduction of price tags, and the further alienation of buyer and seller, see Highmore *The Everyday Life Reader* (26).

² Unless one barter one good for another, money of course mediates exchange, but the fixed or non-negotiable price, denoted by the price tag, suggests that money, not goods, takes centre stage.

³ The arcade roof, at this point in time, was made of wood (*The Arcades Project* 32).

⁴ Gas lighting, introduced during the days of Napoleon III, enabled storeowners to stay open until well beyond the evening hours. Stores usually stayed open until ten o'clock at night (*Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet* 50).

⁵ Ben Highmore is the author of *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* and editor of *The Everyday Life Reader*. To avoid confusion, the shorthand *Everyday Life* refers to the former, *The Reader* refers to the latter.

⁶ The term applied specifically to commodities is found first in Marx, but has since proliferated among later writers.

⁷ Baudelaire's *Prose Poems* (67). For more on the use of mirrors in the arcade shops, see Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (537-8), where he suggests that mirrors provide the smaller shop with an artificial expansion, giving the illusion that the storeowner has an abundance of merchandise.

⁸ The term as understood in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* where alienation is presented as three-pronged: alienation from nature, from life-activity, and from fellow man.

⁹ The reflection of the base in the superstructure – for our purposes the expression of the economy in the crowd – was taken quite literally by some. Georg Simmel saw economic conditions as having a direct bearing on the individual's inability to communicate with others. In "The Metropolis and Mental Life" he writes: "For the division of labor demands from the individual an ever more one-sided accomplishment, and the greatest advance in one-sided pursuit only too frequently means dearth to the personality of the individual" (422). In Simmel's view the individual is "reduced to a negligible quantity," so much so in fact that (s)he cannot even relate similar experiences to others. The crowd, then, is the explanation of such failure – a throng which should be united, but remains divided. Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" is perhaps a better example of the near-perfect reflection of the base in the crowd. Poe's jostling London crowds, as Benjamin reads them, mimic the abrupt movements of machine production. He states that the pedestrians "act as if they had adapted themselves to the machines and could express themselves only automatically" (*Illuminations* 176). In *A Lyric Poet* Benjamin expands on his analysis, suggesting that the reflex actions of the crowd – they all jostle each other and then bow profusely to the jostling culprits – are completely similar. The significance is that Poe "does not show the hopeless isolation of men in their private interests through the variety of their behaviour [...] but expresses this isolation in absurd" uniformity (*Lyric Poet* 53). Here Benjamin combines this idea of literal reflection with a more causal understanding of how the alienation of crowds results from a specific type of economy.

¹⁰ It is mystifying that Benjamin ends his quotation so abruptly, for Engels writes in the very next sentence: "The dissolution of mankind into monads ... is here carried out to its utmost extremes" (*Unreal City* 17). Curious that he would exclude such a sentence since it could only buttress his argument. The individual is likened to a monad, and since a monad acts as a window to the whole, one person is as good as another: they all express this sense of extreme isolation. To apply the principles of induction to the crowds (to see the general through the particular) is to seek solidarity among men and women where before there was only division and alienation. Let the one stand in for everyone and his/her singular problems (related to the production process) become universalised.

¹¹ Simmel suggests that the indifference metropolitans exhibit towards each other may be termed "reserve." Consequently, one could fail to recognise those who have been living next door for many years. Simmel's observation is, no doubt, an exaggeration, but his point is that the skirting eyes of passers-by have reached new levels of unfriendliness. This reserve, moreover, runs deep: "This inner aspect of this outer reserve is not only indifference but, more often than we are aware, it is a slight aversion, a mutual strangeness and repulsion" (Simmel 415-16).

¹² The crowd, as mentioned above, was perhaps the best expression of such alienation, but more concentrated forms existed elsewhere. Benjamin cites Simmel's observation of the dynamics involved in taking public transit: "Before the development of buses, railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century,

people had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another" (*Lyric Poet* 38). Here the alienation almost seems stifling, since in a closed environment like a bus or railway car, there is no respite from the silence and cold looks.

¹³ A discovery the poet makes in "The Crowds" (*The Prose Poems* 44).

¹⁴ Growing up among the crowded streets of Paris, Baudelaire had taken the crowd as a fact of existence. He sees the crowd as a natural phenomenon, and as a result, "it is rare to find a description of [the crowds] in [Baudelaire's] works" (*Illuminations* 167). Something analogous occurs in Borges' "The Argentine Writer and Tradition." In this piece, the author defends the position that a writer can be patriotic and nationalistic without filling the pages of his/her works with local flavours, local parlance, and local themes or concerns. He writes: "Some days past I have found a curious confirmation of the fact that what is truly native can and often does dispense with local color; I found this confirmation in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Gibbon observes that in the Arabian book *par excellence*, in the Koran, there are no camels; I believe if there were any doubts as to the authenticity of the Koran, this absence of camels would be sufficient to prove it is an Arabian work. It was written by Mohammed, and Mohammed, as an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were especially Arabian; for him they were a part of reality, he had no reason to emphasize them; on the other hand, the first thing a falsifier, a tourist, an Arab nationalist would do is have a surfeit of camels, caravans of camels, on every page; but Mohammed, as an Arab, was unconcerned: he knew he could be an Arab without camels. I think we Argentines can emulate Mohammed, can believe in the possibility of being Argentine without abounding in color" (181).

¹⁵ 'Phantasmagoria' is a loaded term for Benjamin, but here it is not a reference to the Parisian arcades. Instead it denotes the immateriality of the flâneur, who is scarcely visible in the mass, but stands apart nonetheless.

¹⁶ Some have seen Baudelaire as a type of flâneur, which is not unreasonable considering that he was a poet who took to the streets. Benjamin is careful, however, to suggest that this connection is a false one. The flâneur was one who strolled through the streets in a nonchalant manner; Baudelaire did not possess this style. Nadar writes: "Baudelaire walked about his quartier of the city at an uneven pace, both nervous and languid, like a cat, choosing each stone of the pavement as if he had to avoid crushing an egg" (*Arcades* 230). If Nadar's description is not convincing enough, consider Baudelaire's poetry. In "One O'clock in the Morning" the poet writes: "Alone at last! Now all that you can hear is the rumble of a few tardy and exhausted hackney cabs. For a few hours, we'll possess silence, if not repose. At last! The tyranny of the human face has disappeared, and now I will suffer only at my own hands. At last! So I am at last allowed to relax in a bath of darkness! First, double lock the door. It seems to me that the double turn of the key will increase my solitude and strengthen the barricades which currently separate me from the world. Horrible life! Horrible city!" This lamentation belongs to no flâneur. It is, on the other hand, the cry of one tired of the streets. In 1848 Baudelaire stood behind the barricades. Now he employs the word to designate his fatigue from urban life.

¹⁷ Rebecca Solnit argues that in some cases, these carriages "mangled pedestrians without fear of reprisal" (180). One is reminded of perhaps the most vivid case of such mangling in fiction: Marmeladov's death by carriage in *Crime and Punishment*, which sent his family into a tailspin of ruin.

¹⁸ John Gay, in his poem "Trivia; or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London," describes the how walking must become an art if one wishes to avoid the varying degrees of obstacles on early eighteenth-century London streets. He moves from the somewhat trivial concerns of mud and mire which fling from the hoofs of horses, to the more serious, thundering wagons and carts. In the third and final section of the poem he warns readers about the pickpockets and violent thieves who come out at night. In the day these robbers are humble beggars, but at night the "crutch which late compassion mov'd, shall wound / Thy bleeding head, and fell thee to the ground" (lines 137-38). These hazards are external and can – if one heeds Gay's advice – be avoided. The dangers in the arcades are of a subtle nature and represent internal struggles, either submitting to what is on display or resisting the commodity's siren song.

¹⁹ In Protestant culture idleness is not only unproductive; it is also self-indulgent and ungodly. Benjamin, however, turns the tables and suggests that idleness is something to be praised, not abhorred. He reads a Baudelaire poem – where anchored ships rot in the harbour – allegorically: the modern is the time when the hero is "not provided for" (*Lyric Poet* 96). The hero is likened to those sturdy ships which never set out to sea; he is both ready and willing but there is nothing for him to do. He is abandoned to "everlasting idleness" because there is no role for him outside of commodity production. Unless he opts to sell his labour-power for a wage, he remains a "Hercules with no work" (*Lyric Poet* 96). The flâneur takes to the

street, in part because he possesses many idle hours, but he displays, as outlined above, his heroism in his walk by resisting the allurements of the phantasmagoria.

²⁰ Walter Ruttmann's 1927 film, *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, does for Berlin what Benjamin's flâneur does for Paris. The film depicts a day - from sunrise to midnight - in the German capital. The rolling train in the first frame sets the tempo for the following scenes of frenzied early morning commuters with briefcases and lunchboxes in hand. What follows are many shots of alienated labour: heavy manufacturing, industrial automation, and smokestacks. The first three acts of the film trail the masses into their offices, manufacturing plants, and other places of employment. A subtle critique of this massive apparatus of labour seems to emerge, most specifically when the filmmaker cuts from all these scenes of the workplace to a shot of two dogs fighting each other on the streets, suggesting the barbarous nature of such an existence. The portrait of labour - the feverish pitch matches the fury of the soundtrack - culminates with the suicide of a woman as she jumps from a bridge. Once the workday ends, however, scenes of alienation seem to evaporate in the midst of such leisure activities like sailing, spectator sports, swimming, horse races, dining and dancing. The final act begins with an electrified Berlin at night (the city is ablaze with electric and neon lights, flashing bulbs and well-lit storefronts). The streets are filled not with a self-estranged mass, but with liberated people as they go about the city watching circus acts, cabaret performances, ballets, jazz musicians, boxing matches, and hockey games. The film closes amid a barrage of fireworks, celebrating this great city of distraction. It is difficult to read Ruttmann's intentions. Does his critique of political economy dissipate in the face of leisure, or does he suggest that one's nightlife cannot compensate for the toil of the day? Regardless of his motivations, he makes the same connections as Benjamin does in *The Arcades Project*; the last shot is of celebration, but the film's most vivid scenes involve the bustle of the alienated, reminding the viewer that the consumer is foremost a labourer.

²¹ For more on allegorical clarity, see Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator." The piece is, as the title indicates, about translation, but what he says has some affinity with his views on allegory. He writes: "A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully" (*Illuminations* 79). Translation and allegory are both forms of representation. When the translator, liberated from the tendency to faithfully reproduce the text, focuses on the text's "intentio," (s)he constructs a window into that other world, the original work. The translator represents the original source, guided not by fidelity but by intention, and in so doing adds clarity without leaving any marks. Likewise, the allegory does not block the light of the foreign reality, but allows that world to shine through itself.

²² Aristotle's writings on the justification for induction are not entirely analogous to the monadic allegory (as the encapsulation of the whole within the singular), but Aristotle proves helpful in his rigorous demands for an assured particular, for his entire theory of knowledge rests on the translatability of the sensible (particular) into the abstract. In his schema, *epagōgē* is the reasoning faculty which allows humans to make this move and the perception of tokens or types guarantees the leap; exemplarity, moreover, further buttresses the validity of Aristotle's epistemology. Irene Harvey contests his notion of the example, claiming that it cannot provide the "intellectual elixir" to move from the particular to the general (2). The example functions as one part to another - as "part to part" (Harvey 210), but it cannot fully justify any movement toward the general since the example is, in essence, one particular referencing another particular. Aristotle's use of the example as an inductive tool is demonstrated in the following scenario: when one asks for a bodyguard, that person has designs on making himself a despot (Aristotle lived in a time when, in Athens and other city-states, democracies could give way to the rule of tyrants or oligarchs). By citing two such examples, Aristotle establishes a general rule. Harvey spends much of the book deconstructing the inductive principle of exemplarity, but the idea has more currency - in terms of the concerns in this paper - in a Leibnizian understanding of the word. The singular monad, as an *example* of the whole (because it contains the whole), provides a view to the entirety. The flâneur, since he abbreviates the total scope of commodity capitalism, is an inductive tool; with this singular figure we can perceive the imperceptible.

²³ The detective, Williams continues, represents the mastery of rationalism over the chaos of the city. This conquest is best exemplified by Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, whose logic always trumps the irrational.

²⁴ The individual is dissolved not just by numbers, but through superficialities of attire as well. Stefan Zweig, in a piece called "The Monotonization of the World," strongly laments the tidal wave of American culture which crashes on the shores of Europe. The essay, written in 1925, could easily describe contemporary views of the hegemony of American cultural imperialism. His thesis is simple enough: that the monotonisation of culture threatens, or rather, ends individuality. Zweig observes: "It is not with

impunity that everyone can dress the same, that all women can go out in the same clothes, the same makeup: monotony necessarily penetrates the surface" (398). Benjamin argues that the labour process contorts the social essence of humans, transforming them into inward-looking, anonymous beings. What he sees he traces back to the economic base, suggesting that the urban, alienated crowd is an expression of capitalist production. Zweig claims otherwise, remaining in the superstructural realm. It is a shallow, colourless, pedestrian culture which transforms individuals into an undifferentiated mass. His view is not superficial; those external similarities like clothing and makeup slowly penetrate the skin, and move inward, affecting the psyche. Yet what terrifies Zweig most is not the sheer force of this imperialism, but the fact that it is embraced so enthusiastically. There is a "passion for self-dissolution," he notes (Zweig 400). There is no antidote for this illness, for "if humanity is now letting itself be increasingly bored and monotonized, then that is really nothing than its deepest desire" (Zweig 400). This drive to relinquish one's individuality for absorption into the mass is a desire which Robinson reads in Baudelaire's "Loss of a Halo." The marks of the individual, Robinson writes, are more "a burden than a consolation and a strength" (98). Baudelaire, as remarked earlier, was no flâneur, and thus did not cling to his individuality with the same intensity as the Parisian stroller; in point of fact, Baudelaire – in Robinson's reading of the poem – parted with it quite quickly.

²⁵ Again, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* comes to mind. After butchering two women with an axe, Raskolnikov slides the murder weapon into the inside of his overcoat and slips out onto the street, disappearing without a trace among the mass of pedestrians. For measures to combat the difficulties in maintaining order and safety in metropolitan areas, see *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet* (47). Here Benjamin discusses how Paris countered this problem: standardised house numbers, which Napoleon made obligatory in the capital in 1805.

²⁶ Later in the novel, M. Jackal crosses paths with an escaped convict in the sewers of Paris. Gibassier promptly tells the Police Chief that he is a reformed man. Jackal doubts his claim, because if he had indeed turned from crime, then his facial features would, accordingly, be changed beyond recognition. Holding a lantern to his face, Jackal disregards Gibassier's words, for his face "has not changed a whit" (135).

²⁷ The topic of hidden labour is treated more extensively earlier in this paper, on pages 14 and following.

²⁸ In "A Small History of Photography," Benjamin wonders about the harmful affects of advertising, since it seems to further the concealment of labour. He writes that the photograph, under the direction of advertisers, "can endow any soup can with cosmic significance but cannot grasp a single one of the human connexions in which it exists" (*One-Way Street* 225).

²⁹ Aragon's book was the foremost inspiration for Benjamin's study, not – as some would claim – the poetry of Charles Baudelaire; his first notes on the arcades were derived from Aragon's book. *Paris Peasant* was, moreover, an exhilarating read: Benjamin admits that in evenings in bed he could not put the book down (Solnit 206).

³⁰ Benjamin's hashish experiments are well documented. His first recorded hashish session took place in 1927, with subsequent sessions in 1928, 1930, and 1934. Other participants were two physicians – Ernst Joel and Fritz Frankel – and a neurologist, who was a cousin of Benjamin's: Egon Wissing. The predominantly scientific background of the participants strongly suggests the serious tone of their inquiry.

³¹ Above all, hashish-induced physiognomy ends in failure because the surrealists did not have a concept of totality. Physiognomic induction is absolutely crucial if one wishes to glimpse the entirety of capitalism, but proves fruitless without such a concept. In the second chapter of this essay there is a more developed discussion of this theme.

³² The surrealists are more revolutionary than artistic, Benjamin argues. The idea of *l'art pour l'art* "was scarcely ever to be taken literally; it was almost always a flag under which sailed cargo that could not be declared because it still lacked a name" (*Reflections* 183–4). The emphasis on art is thus a sheen, something to cover or mask what is of true import: the notion that the poverty of everyday life must be transcended.

³³ The verb 'constructs' is a misleading word since it denotes the building of some thing. By inferring from the particulars – as a physiognomist would do – the flâneur does not *construct* a totality: he gives shape to it (renders it perceptible) through his walk. By giving it form, he enables others to see the whole from the shard. The allegory – it is worth repeating – has monadic properties in that the minute or singular provides a view to the vast. In *The Arcades Project*, the allegory of walking reveals a world of crowded streets and phantasmagoric allure as it is stretched over the length of the text. The external reality of Benjamin's book (the reality of life during its composition) is also revealed through the allegory. As Restoration England permeates Bunyan's allegory, so a pacified proletariat seeps into Benjamin's allegory. The dazzling arcades

and the alienated mass were images of the nineteenth century, not the twentieth century. And thus we recognise that Benjamin unites the two only to explain how revolutionary energy erodes: it dissipates when the working class takes on the role of consumer.

From Chapter Three:

¹ Wollen traces a long line of the entanglement of art with politics in French history: De Sade freed from the Bastille in 1789, Baudelaire behind the barricades in 1848, and Courbet tearing down an historic column in 1870. The surrealists and other avant-garde movements, he argues, followed in these footsteps (*Raiding the Icebox* 120).

² For more on the surrealists' alignment with the PCF, see Sadie Plant *The Most Radical Gesture* (52). Here she writes: "The surrealists were convinced that the achievement of an impassioned social experience in which authentic communication, the realisation of art, and the union of individual and world would characterise everyday experience was possible only with the end of capitalism and the dawn of a new, ludic, age. Nevertheless, this awareness did not prevent the surrealists from pursuing their experiments in the cultural domain; indeed, their insistence on the autonomy of their project and its importance to a successful social revolution was the main point of their disagreement with the PCF, who failed to see why the surrealists seemed to accept so much of the Marxist project while refusing to drop their activities in favour of political duties. Of course, the surrealists considered that their actions were political, arguing that their propaganda of desire was as necessary as the Party's own work and insisting that although surrealism might consider itself 'in the service of the revolution,' it would remain free to determine the nature of that service."

³ Breton chastised a young Lefebvre for not reading Hegel, a philosopher Breton did not swerve from. Playing the hero, Breton recounts his resurrection of this thinker: "The fact remains that ever since I first encountered Hegel, that is, since I presented him in the face of sarcasms with which my philosopher professor, around 1912, André Cresson, a positivist, pursued him, I have steeped myself in his views and, for me, his method has reduced all others to beggary. For me, where the Hegelian dialectic is not at work, there is no thought, no hope of truth" (Wollen 131). Breton's martyr act – introducing Hegel to a scolding academic – is one thing; his treatment of Lefebvre is another thing altogether. In a well-known story, Breton showed Lefebvre a translation of Hegel's *Logic* and disdainfully asked: "You haven't *even* read this?" (*Everyday Life* 118; my italics). A few days later, Lefebvre began to read Hegel, and from there was led to Marx. He reanimated French Marxism, moreover, with his belief that all of life was colonised by capitalism, which stems from an understanding of the Hegelian totality.

⁴ Aragon's vision is not unlike Benjamin's view of capitalism as a "discrepancy between the tremendous means of production and their inadequate utilization in the process of production" (*Reflections* 242). The hand which loses its hold on the wheel is like that apparatus which can meet many needs but does not. He writes: "Instead of draining rivers, society directs a human stream into a bed of trenches; instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities" (*Reflections* 242). When the grip is lost, the wheel falls back upon the person holding it; Benjamin allows us to glimpse this crushed figure.

⁵ For more on the misconception of seeing 'life-activity' or 'being' as only a means for existence, see Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* under the chapter "Alienated Labour."

⁶ Jacques Derrida, in his book *Specters of Marx*, is the first figure to invoke the ghost of Hamlet's father and tie it to Marxism. In his reading of Shakespeare, Derrida claims that the prince's inheritance is an injunction to act, which is a type of debt or responsibility. We share in Hamlet's debt, for the spectre of Marx calls out to us. The most fascinating aspect of this book is the projection the reader has to suffer through; Derrida, as a post-structuralist, is the one ignoring Marx's call for decades, not his readers.

⁷ Aragon recounts: "It was while sitting here one afternoon, towards the end of 1919, that André Breton and I decided that this should henceforward become the meeting place for ourselves and our friends, a choice motivated partly by our loathing for Montparnasse and Montmartre [two upper class student destinations], but partly also by the pleasure we derived from the equivocal atmosphere of passages" (87).

⁸ *Paris Peasant* was written in 1924, but was published in 1926. In between those years, the Passage de l'Opéra was demolished to make room for the expansion of the Boulevard Haussmann. This arcade was already targeted for destruction as early as 1860, and then again in 1873, but when the opera house burnt down, the arcade was deemed unnecessary (*Everyday Life* 55).

⁹ This struggle is an interesting one, for it involves a conspiracy of sorts. The Haussmann Building Society, which was supposedly a civic department, had ulterior motives for the demolition of the arcade. It had ties with a massive department store, Galeries Lafayette, which would stand to benefit from the demolition, attracting consumers who previously shopped in the arcade. Ben Highmore bills it as the old story of the small shopkeeper versus big business. For more see *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (55-56).

¹⁰ Under capitalist production, all wage-earners are commodities in the sense that they sell their labour power (potential) for a sum of money. The prostitute sells more than just potentiality, selling her very body. Thus she personifies the commodity in a way that others cannot. Incidentally, the gendering of the word 'prostitute' is in no way a loaded gesture, but is simply in keeping with the surrealist literature which features only female prostitutes.

¹¹ Sadie Plant puts it in Freudian terms: "Surrealist activity [...] was a rejection of the reality principle in favour of the pleasure principle. But whereas Freud had argued that some repression of the drives to pleasure was essential for the maintenance of civilisation, the surrealists wanted the entire social world to be arranged in harmony with desires, pleasures, and imaginings" (49). Plant's observation is somewhat of a caricature (the imagination was intended to instill a desire for change in the real world), although one cannot blame her entirely for misrepresenting the movement when its own members commit the same error. Consider what Salvador Dali writes: "I believe the moment is at hand when, by a paranoiac and active effort of the mind, it will be possible [...] to systematise confusion and thus help to discredit completely the world of reality" (*What is Surrealism?* 136; quoted from Dali's *La Femme visible*).

¹² To be fair, part of the reason for the depiction of Paris as a village rather than a metropolis is that it is a necessary narrative technique, enabling Breton (as a character) to repeatedly cross paths with Nadja as they walk the streets separately. This narrative device, however, does not negate the fact that Paris is depicted in a much different fashion than Baudelaire's Paris or Poe's London: it is not alienating in the least. Instead, Breton's Paris is more like a small town or village where encounters (of the sort in *Nadja*) are possible.

¹³ To judge the entire movement by one text is, admittedly, unfair. The surrealists' concerns were – for the most part – rooted in the real world: one has only to look at the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" to discover how hard they fought to stay within its bounds. The PCF certainly did not make it easy. One party member lost 200,000 francs in a single day by gambling in Monte Carlo, money entrusted to him for the purpose of producing revolutionary propaganda, yet this man – Morhange – was not repeatedly interrogated or barred from entering the PCF headquarters like the surrealists were (*Manifestoes* 142). Surrealism is not an intellectual pastime, writes Breton. Instead, it is for those "who refuse to knuckle down" (*Manifestoes* 133). Yet throughout their years in the Communist Party, the surrealists had to continually make the case that they were committed to the real-world task of human liberation. Breton and others firmly believed that the "liberation of man [could only] result from the Proletarian Revolution" (Lewis 128), but the PCF remained convinced that surrealist ideology was opposed to Marxism (Lewis 85). When they finally left party politics, the surrealists plunged into art and here – in the realm of art – the movement fell headlong into desire. No longer feeling the constraints of having membership in the PCF, surrealist artists enjoyed unbridled poetic liberty. But when one thinks of something like Dali's pornographic contribution to a surrealist journal, a piece where he describes the fantasies he had as he performed self-pleasure in front of a young girl (Lewis 111), one gains an understanding of where desire can lead an avant-garde. To properly evaluate the movement – if that was one's wish – one would have to situate the surrealist project in time (either early, middle, or late). The purpose of this footnote is not to judge the surrealists, but only to demonstrate the depths of desire and its sheer potentiality. Desire can be the first step on the road to revolution; desire can also be the first step in the opposite direction.

¹⁴ The connection between vista and proletarian consciousness is an integral one, which becomes clear in the final section of the paper. For now it is worth noting that the monadic shard helps to recovery the proletariat's true identity; previously they were blind to this loss (of identity) when they took on the role of consumer, which is what the flâneur's allegorical walk was intended to correct. With a nod to Hermann Lotze, Benjamin supplies the singular piece which explains the whole (and in so doing, helps to unearth a dormant consciousness). Lotze's concern with a unifying view of the universe, that "One Truth should control the Manifold of Reality" (594), is not too far from the methodological concerns in the *Arcades* study, and thus deserves – perhaps – our attention. The central question in Lotze's system is one of movement: moving "from the many things presented to our senses [...] to the unity of the world, this ordered cosmos without which the many cannot be" (Santayana 21). There certainly exists a paradox in his view – a "simultaneous attribution of unity and multiplicity" to the universe – but this paradox disappears

once we see that what is multiple is really a “single spiritual process” (Santayana 185 and 155). For Lotze the world is like a melody (the one) and the notes in the melody are the many; every individual note – that is, every individual thing or person – has its place in the melody, which is how unity is formed out of the many parts. To be, then, is to be in relation to some thing else, but the question remains: how does one come to realise this truth? In *Microcosmus*, Lotze hints at how he arrives at such a conclusion: “Enclosed within the great machine of Nature stands the smaller machine of the human mind” (25). He can piece the many into a cohesive whole, is justified in doing so, because we, as humans, do so innately. We convert the many singulars into the whole when we unite sense perceptions, which is how the “machine of the human mind” functions. Lotze provides an example: when one first perceives a tree with blossoms or leaves on it, the single image of a tree is preserved, but this image is not disrupted when we glance upon a barren or leafless tree, or when we merely look upon the trunk of a tree. The ability to piece the particulars together (the trunk or a leafless branch), to combine the separate, is the “form of *Judgement*” (Lotze 234), which, thus far, is similar to Aristotle’s theory of knowledge. In Lotze’s conception, however, judgement is instinctive, and, as it is based on experience, is not too far from how an animal functions. Judgement enables us to “ascribe phenomena to beings that appear, events to causes, and laws to the connection of things,” but there is still a “higher cognitive energy – the activity of *Reason*” (236). Reason separates us from animals because it moves beyond the connection of things to the idea “that the sum of reality can exist only as a perfect unity and totality” (237). This footnote on Lotze is nothing more than a sketch, but the idea that the ‘little world’ of the human mind provides a view to the larger world (that the mechanics of human judgement [piecing the whole from the parts] enables us to see that the relation *between* parts is really a connection *between all* things) is monadic, and thus has some affinities with the concerns in this paper. Benjamin’s allegory is a little world, which results in the glimpsing of a larger world. Aragon does not portray a microcosm – it is half a world – and, consequently, the view to the whole remains out of reach.

From Chapter Four:

¹ There is much debate over this name. Wollen writes: “Artists were to break down the divisions between individual art forms, to create *situations*, constructed encounters and creatively lived moments in specific urban settings, instances of a critically transformed everyday life. They were to produce settings for situations and experimental models of possible modes of transformation of the city, as well as to agitate and polemicize against the sterility and oppression of the actual environment and ruling economic and political system” (121). Wollen’s summary is somewhat perplexing, but it encapsulates perfectly the confusion surrounding the word ‘situation.’ Sadler believes that a situation is “some sort of performance” or “theatrical experience” (105), which is a claim founded on the literature of the SI; Debord speaks of experimental theatre, directors, actors, and spectators, although he distances himself from figures like Pirandello and Brecht (Knabb 25 and 44). Sadler, however, retreats from his initial explanation to suggest that a situation is a kind of mood or behaviour stimulator, like the maze Constant built in Holland (106). The most reasonable explanation, it appears, comes from Plant. She writes: “‘So far philosophers and artists have only interpreted situations,’ [the SI] declared, paraphrasing Marx and taking a swipe at Sartre: ‘the point now is to transform them. Since man is the product of the situations he goes through, it is essential to create human situations. Since the individual is defined by his situation, he wants the power to create situations worthy of his desires’” (Plant 20). Thus the name designates not an interest in theatre or labyrinths, but points towards activity: stripping “away the veils of commodified experience to gain the immediacy of a world directly lived” (38). This activity, moreover, is based on critique but is centred on transformation. Wollen writes: “Existence, Sartre had argued, is always existence within a particular context, within a given situation, which is not simply lived-in, but also lived-beyond, through the subject’s free choice of the manner of his or her being within that given situation. Debord, following Lefebvre’s injunction to transform everyday life, interpreted that as a positive injunction to construct situations – as an artistic and practical activity – rather than accept them as given, to impose a conscious order at least in enclaves of everyday life” (125-6). To call oneself a situationist is to resist the totalising forces of twentieth-century capitalism, and – while never assuming the role of vanguard – to pave the way for others to follow. This programme is not countercultural, for it demands much more: radical change of a kind that May 1968 scarcely offered a glimpse of.

² Over its fifteen-year span, the SI had seventy total members, but at no point did it grow much larger than its original size (of eight persons), perhaps a result of Debord's maniacal control: all but four had been expelled or had resigned (Plant 83).

³ Jappe suggests that the surrealist movement lost its currency long before World War Two, but its decadence became brutally obvious when it entered the world of advertising and hung in "the temples of bourgeois art" (50).

⁴ Not wishing to travel down that same road of eventual self-negation, the situationists suppressed art (Plant 56), and later cleansed the movement of art altogether. Members were expelled or pressured to resign because of contacts they had made in the art world. And by 1962, all professional artists like Constant and Asger Jorn were replaced by militants who had no background in the arts (Wollen 122 and 149).

⁵ French Marxists, at least in the university system, had embraced *Capital* and the *Manifesto*, but brushed aside all his other works, especially the early writings. This allegiance toward one or two of his works is absurd, argues Lefebvre, for "it is false [...] to consider that Marx's thought was born like Minerva springing forth from the head of Jupiter" (*Critique* 80). To pass over the 1844 *Manuscripts* is to ignore Marx's conceptualisation of alienation, which bridges the gap between the philosophic and the economic, since alienation "is rooted in the production process [...] and is understood as being generated from the division of labour" (*Everyday Life* 120). Lefebvre, moreover, was vicious with dogmatists. In *Critique of Everyday Life* he writes: "Dogmatism is a great evil which comes in countless forms. If we are to exterminate it we must hunt it down in every nook and cranny and drag it from its hiding place by the tail like a rat" (56).

⁶ An idea that Lefebvre stumbled upon in a conversation with his wife. He noticed a strange enthusiasm and joy in the tone of her voice as she praised a particular brand of laundry soap (Shields 66). When one grows enthralled with a cleaning product, the triumph of capitalism over the quotidian is assured. This market – that of daily life – was considerably larger than any geographical market. French Marxists, however, did not initially embrace Lefebvre's views. He had to convince them first that analysis had to shift away from the base and toward the superstructure if the full scope of alienation was to be understood.

⁷ A dispute arose over an allegation of plagiarism. The situationists claimed that Lefebvre had stolen their ideas on and analysis of the Paris Commune. Not many contest this claim, but Highmore is the only one to point out the inconsistency in the situationist position. For in theory they did not care for the ownership of ideas – the proof of which is the fact that Debord's writings have no copyright – yet in practice they took a hard line with offenders like Lefebvre (*Everyday Life* 139).

⁸ One such stunt was heckling Charlie Chaplin at a press conference.

⁹ Since Debord's book lacks page numbers, the citations refer to the numbered paragraphs and aphorisms.

¹⁰ Neither is the spectacle "the culture industry, the mass media, [nor] the reign of images" (Jappe 146). The mass media, Debord writes, is the "most glaring superficial manifestation" of the spectacle (31).

Furthermore, the notion of a culture industry (and its reign of images) is just the spectacle at its most obvious. The word 'spectacle' denotes the visible and, in that sense, is a misleading word, for it extends far beyond sight; it is, as Shields writes, the wholesale commodification of dreams, identity and lifestyle (77).

¹¹ Jappe writes: "The spectacle is thus not a pure and simple adjunct to the world, as propaganda broadcast via the communications media might be said to be. Rather, it is the entirety of social activity that is appropriated by the spectacle for its own ends. From city planning to political parties of every tendency, from art to science, from everyday life to human passions and desires, everywhere we find reality replaced by images. In the process, images end up becoming real, and reality ends up transformed into images" (7). Or, as Debord puts it, the spectacle is "not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society" (6). Perhaps an epigraph from the first chapter of *Society of the Spectacle* is helpful here. The quotation, taken from Feuerbach's preface to the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity*, reads: "The present age [...] prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence." Such a passage takes on new meaning in a time when an advertisement sells a lifestyle over a good, and features the brand name and not the product itself.

¹² Debord writes: "Economic growth frees societies from the natural pressure which required their direct struggle for survival, but at that point it is from their liberator that they are not liberated. The *independence* of the commodity is extended to the entire economy over which it rules" (40).

¹³ The concept of the proletariat was somewhat passé as academic Marxism shifted away from economics and history (and, by extension, from talk of revolution) towards philosophy and aesthetics. Debord brought the discussion back to the proletariat and historical materialism through thinkers like Luckács. The main

theme of classical Marxism, the proletarian revolution, was largely “discredited by the cruel experience of Stalinism” (Wollen 127). Today, even the word ‘proletariat’ is distastefully dogmatic, attesting to how far Marxism has strayed in the last 60 years.

¹⁴ The economy in the West, after World War Two, was booming. Keynesian capitalism proved itself strong, allowing Europe to recover from continental devastation, and establishing the United States as a super-power. Amidst a time of such economic prosperity, it was difficult to make out the class which would bring about the end of the bourgeoisie. In point of fact, some have argued that the open antagonism between the working class and the bourgeoisie had been averted completely by post-war affluence (*The Production of Space* 24).

¹⁵ Debord’s brazen attitude towards the USSR was certainly refreshing, for “in the nineteen-sixties [...] despite widespread condemnation of Stalinism and defection from the French Communist Party, virtually no Left thinkers dared so much as describe the Soviet Union in plain language as a class society” (Jappe 88).

¹⁶ Debord’s views do not exist in some abstract theoretical realm, but are applied practically. He opposed the vanguard of the PCF and the trade unions during May 1968 for the same reason that he criticised Bolshevism: that consciousness had to arise within and could not be assigned to an intermediary. The trade unions and the French Communist Party, he argued, would establish a bureaucracy which, in turn, would create a divide (and hierarchy) amongst itself and the working class. Debord strongly espoused council communism instead, since it allowed for working class self-governance and self-expression.

¹⁷ By the nineteen-sixties, most scholars and theorists argued that the proletariat had disappeared. Debord was in the minority in his insistence that the proletariat did indeed exist, which he describes as the “vast mass of workers who have lost all power over the use of their own lives” (Jappe 28). Misery and material poverty certainly diminished over the century, but since alienated social relations extended to all areas of “lived experience,” the proletariat’s existence was guaranteed and its numbers enlarged (Plant 2 and 15). Twenty years after *Society of the Spectacle* was published, however, Debord retracted his statement. In *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* he suggests that the proletariat has been absorbed by the middle class, although he admits that, in turn, the lives of the middle class have been proletarianised (Jappe 29).

¹⁸ Highmore adds that the urban geography of French cities “internalized relations of colonization” (*Everyday Life* 117). He continues on the following page: “Urban space articulates relations of global domination in its ethnicization of inner cities into impoverished and ‘racialized’ zones.” Before the emergence of slums (at the city’s edge), the lower classes lived among the more privileged class. The bourgeoisie “lived on the lower floors, and workers and servants [lived] in the garrets. The one-room slum dwelling that had once been found, typically, at the end of a dark passageway, in a back courtyard or perhaps even in a cellar, was [over time] banished to peripheral neighbourhoods or suburbs” (*Production of Space* 316). Lefebvre suggests that this move away from the centre, and towards the outskirts, was motivated by “the lowest possible *threshold of tolerability*” (316): if the lower classes were to be tolerated, they would most certainly have to keep out of sight.

¹⁹ It comes as no surprise that these scholars share the same position, but it is certainly odd that in all three descriptions the word ‘aimless’ features a prominent role. Wollen describes the *dérive* as “drifting, unpremeditated journeys through actually existing cities in order to experience rapid, *aimless* and unpredictable changes of environment” (148-9; my italics). Shields suggests that drifting “was a matter of wandering *aimlessly* to see where one would end up and what surprises one might discover, rather than purposefully traversing the city to a predetermined destination” (184; my italics). Lastly, Highmore characterises the *dérive* as “observant *aimlessness*” (*Everyday Life* 139; my italics).

²⁰ The subordination to the random, in one particular case, was a worthwhile endeavour. Debord writes about a friend who wandered through parts of Germany with the aid of a map of London. Really this exercise is nothing more than a game, he writes, but it finds its justification in its “insubordination to habitual influences” (Knabb 7). In any other scenario, however, there is no room for the random in the situationist *dérive*.

²¹ Sadler writes: “The plethora of arrows implied a massive number of permutations for drifting, and Jorn and Debord’s wish to squeeze so much [...] information onto the map may account for their decision to explode the fragments, freeing room on the paper. If situationists spent as much time drifting as they claimed, then it is possible that all these permutations were tested. And the precision of the maps was achieved only by some tough-mindedness about which streets were truly capable of transforming urban consciousness” (89).

²² The ideal amount of time for a successful *dérive* varies, Debord argues, but the statistical average is one day. But since the *dérive* rarely occurs in its pure form (“it is difficult for the participants to avoid setting aside an hour or two at the beginning or end of the day for taking care of banal tasks; and toward the end of the day fatigue tends to encourage such an abandonment”) it often takes place within a limited period of a few hours (Knabb 52). In Ivan Chtcheglov’s case, the *dérive* was dubbed a “continual *dérive*” and it lasted three or four months, but that of course was an extreme case. As far as the ideal amount of people is concerned, Debord writes: “One can *dérive* alone, but all indications are that the most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same awakening of consciousness, since the cross-checking of these different groups’ impressions makes it possible to arrive at objective conclusions” (Knabb 51).

²³ In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues that “spatial practice consists in a projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice” (8). If capital is totalising, which it is, then ‘social practice’ is made manifest in all spheres of life; everything can be traced back to the base. The city is no exception. We must, Lefebvre urges, quit seeing space as a “passive locus of social relations” (11) and, on the contrary, understand that there exists an active role of space “in the existing mode of production” (11).

²⁴ In the essay “Elementary Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism,” Attila Kotanyi and Raoul Vaneigem address this traffic issue. Not only does it produce isolation by making travel from suburb to city possible; it further produces alienation by eliminating opportunities for camaraderie to develop between workers. They write: “[Traffic] is the opposite of encounter, it absorbs the energies that could otherwise be devoted to encounters or to any sort of participation” (Knabb 66). The automobile might pollute our air, but for these situationists, the car pollutes our essence as well, turning the inherently social into asocial beings.

²⁵ In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre writes about the contradictions of space: if twentieth century capital was as progressive as many had claimed, why did the modern city contain so many class disparities? Over time (during the 1950s and 1960s) those inequalities became less apparent as urban conditions improved. However, reality still contradicted myth – the lie that capitalism produces egalitarian societies; the observer’s task merely grew more difficult as (s)he had to look harder for the (urban) evidence to refute the myth. Lefebvre’s foremost concern is not the gathering of evidence. Instead, he writes about the disappearance of spaces of contradiction in order to alert his readers to the need to move from perceptions of the ‘real’ to the real itself – the difference between the seemingly equal and true equality (*Production of Space* 319).

²⁶ Lefebvre was one of the first thinkers to talk of the social structuring of the city, “of the complex way in which cities are divided into distinct quarters, [and] based on class occupation or function [...]. Of course, city planners and administrators were well aware that cities are subdivided, and indeed that they had to be if they were to function efficiently. But sociology now implied that traditional planning, which had grown up under a rationalist umbrella, reduced the intricacy of city structuring to fallaciously simplistic levels” (Sadler 20).

²⁷ In *Les contradictions de l’Etat moderne*, Lefebvre writes: “Social space became a collection of ghettos: those of the elite, of the bourgeoisie, of the intellectuals, of the immigrant workers, etc. These ghettos are not juxtaposed, they are hierarchical, spatially representing the economic and social hierarchy, dominant and subordinate sectors” (Shields 178). In *La pensée marxiste et la ville*, he writes: “Cities are transformed into a collection of ghettos where individuals are at once ‘socialised,’ integrated, submitted to artificial pressures and constraints [...] and separated, isolated, disintegrated” (Shields 178). The word ‘ghetto’ is a loaded term, especially for those living in North America: a better word would be ‘zones’ in this context. The real ghettos or slums in France disappeared during the economic boom after the World War Two. Class disparities grew less perceptible, on one level anyway, but in “suburban space [...] detached houses contrasted with ‘housing estates’ just as sharply as the earlier opulent apartments with the garrets of the poor above them” (*Production of Space* 316). Cities will always remain hierarchical as long as society is similarly structured, because the social will inevitably manifest itself spatially, which is Lefebvre’s point. However, the degree to which they are hierarchical will inevitably vary, which is the SI’s point.

²⁸ Haussmann certainly introduced a functionalist aesthetic, but functionalism, specifically in Paris that is, persisted long after he died. One of the most significant problems with such an aesthetic is that what appears ‘neutral’ or non-ideological is in fact the reverse: that despite the rationalist garb, architecture and urban planning are indeed ideological (*Production of Space* 317). The wide boulevards are perhaps the most

obvious example, but, for the situationists at least, examples of functionalism were less important than its effects.

²⁹ The situationists argue that the absence of a critique of architecture stems from the realisation that shelter, in most climates, is a necessity; as a basic need then, housing, etc. evades scrutiny. Lefebvre, however, takes a different view. Why, he asks, is there no "architectural or urbanistic criticism on par with the criticism of art, literature, music and theatre"? (*Production of Space* 92). His answer: conventional criticism has both a subject and an object, but a critique of space lacks both. Upon closer inspection though, such a critique has an object, "strategic space," and a subject, "the state (along with its foundation in specific social classes and fractions of classes)" (94). The reason why there is no critique, given the existence of both a subject and an object, is that criticism is diverted by treating what is suspect – the work of urbanists and planners – as beneficent: "[O]ne occasionally hears talk of a 'pathology of space,' of 'ailing neighbourhoods,' and so on. This kind of phraseology makes it easy for people who use it – architects, urbanists or planners – to suggest the idea that they are, in effect, 'doctors of space.' This is to promote the spread of some particularly mystifying notions, and especially the idea that the modern city is a product not of the capitalist or neocapitalist system but rather of some putative 'sickness' of society" (99).

³⁰ Cities reinforce reification because people identify with their surroundings (Knabb 66). Marx once wrote that "men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves." When social relations are displayed spatially, they, over time, become internalised and naturalised, which is why the situationist programme was so urgent. If the urban remains unexamined and undertheorised, the city will, like the fictional Coketown, continue to exist as an incubator for the production process. Of course the SI came and went and cities still remained essentially the same, but the sheen, at least, was wiped away.

³¹ Haussmann's restructuring of Paris was motivated by a desire to quash revolutionary action – like barricade-fighting – but had led to a revolt during the actual renovating process. Highmore quotes from Lefebvre's *Writings on Cities*: "One strong aspect of the Paris Commune (1871) is the strength of return towards the urban centre of workers pushed out towards the outskirts and peripheries, their reconquest of the city, this belonging among belongings, this value, this oeuvre which has been torn from them" (*Everyday Life* 139). More ironically, his wide boulevards provided the ideal conditions for mass demonstrations like those in May of 1968 (Solnit 219).

³² There is another version of the events of May '68 which gives the students very little credit for their involvement. Instead of being called the vanguard, the students were seen as the "rear guard of the whole movement" (Knabb 232). Accordingly, the students were scarcely a factor in the events, something the numbers reveal: compare the ten to twenty thousand students (and scarcely a thousand during the violent street confrontations) with the ten million striking workers. A significant fraction of French students, the situationists would admit, took part in the movement, but the workers were the central agents and May – it could not be disputed – was more a strike than a student revolt.

³³ Wollen writes: "Debord wanted to free the ego, the conscious self, from the determinism of the unconscious and the displacement of the surrealist notion of poetic freedom, as the uncompromising release of repressed desire, into the practical and political register of council communism. This displacement also involved, of course, semantic shift in the meaning of the word 'desire' (from the unconscious to conscious) [...]" (136).

³⁴ In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson argues that there certainly exists a divide between what many call 'modernity' and 'postmodernity,' and as one who espouses historical materialism, he sees this schism as the result of changes in the production process. The three major shifts in capital – which Jameson borrows from Ernest Mandel's periodisation – are market capitalism, the monopoly stage or imperialism stage, and multinational capitalism (sometimes referred to as postindustrial capitalism). The fundamental difference between our own age (multinational or postmodern) and the first two movements (modernity) is that we have difficulties representing our world in a way that those living in the preceding age did not. Jameson cites the work of Duchamp, Marinetti, and Diego Rivera to demonstrate that the technology of the day (the means of production) was prominently featured in the art of these figures. Today, however, one finds little emblematic power from a computer monitor. "It is immediately obvious," writes Jameson, "that the technology of our own moment no longer possesses this same capacity for representation" (36). But the problems of artistic representation are "figurations of something even deeper, namely, the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism" (37). The analysis of art, then, is just a careful ruse; Jameson is working with metaphors here, for the inability to

represent technology stands as a metaphor for the inability to grasp “the whole new decentered global network of the third stage of capital itself” (38). The confusion and uncertainty associated with living in a ‘postmodern’ time is thus nothing other than a failure to grasp our (economic) reality, due in part to its total dimensions. In short, the vertigo of the postmodern age is symptomatic of the impossibility of understanding our present world. According to Jameson the remedy is simple: we need a secure footing from which we can take in the totality. This foothold is the Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, built by John Portman in 1977; in his hands Jameson turns this building into an image of the totality and our failure to grasp or comprehend it. The hotel’s entranceways do not lead to the lobby, he observes, at least not directly. Two of the entryways are through the back gardens on the sixth floor and, upon entering, one must walk down one flight of stairs to find the elevator which one takes to finally reach the lobby. The front entrance is similarly confusing: it admits the guest onto the second-story shopping balcony and from there (s)he must take an escalator to the registration desk. Jameson reads this unorthodox architectural design of the lobby (that one cannot access from the street) as an attempt at “being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city [...]. Portman’s Bonaventure ought not to have entrances at all, since the entry way is always the seam that links the building to the rest of the city that surrounds it: for it does not wish to be a part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute” (40). The aesthetic of the exterior seems to support Jameson’s claim. The Bonaventure is clothed in reflective glass which repels the outside city. Instead of incorporating itself into the urban landscape the outer walls erase the presence of the hotel, for when one looks upon it from the street one does not see the Bonaventure – one sees “the distorted images of everything that surrounds it” (42). To buttress his argument, Jameson returns to the lobby. The hotel is a structure with four symmetrical towers, but, given their symmetry, “it is quite impossible to get [one’s] bearings in this lobby” (43). The second floor shopping area, moreover, suffers from the confusion of the four identical towers. There are many stores to frequent, but if one discovers a store of his/her liking, (s)he finds it nearly impossible to locate on a second visit. The end result is that the merchandise is marked down considerably in order to entice guests to shop in such an unpleasant, labyrinthine space. Jameson is making a case for a metaphor here; the Bonaventure is a total space (not part of the fabric of the downtown L.A. since it repels its surroundings) and the confusion and vertigo one experiences in the hotel lobby is the decentredness one feels when one cannot cognitively map his/her position in this third stage of capitalism. The hotel guest’s confusion is really our confusion with the entirety of capital. As the guest cannot locate him/herself in the lobby, so we must position ourselves *outside* of the total space in order to achieve some measure of “critical distance.” Jameson writes: “What the burden of our preceding demonstration suggests [...] is that distance [...] has been abolished in the new space of postmodernism. We are submerged in its henceforth filled and suffused volumes to the point where our new postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and practically [...] incapable of distantiation” (48). Does the Bonaventure as metaphor for the total dimensions of capital provide a space from which we can take in the whole? Certainly Jameson’s reading is effective in that it condenses a whole world into a single image, but a populace which understands his analysis of Portman’s building will not take to the streets. Benjamin also condensed an entire world, but his work bore little in terms of (revolutionary) results. The monad is important because it provides a view, or, as Jameson phrases it, a footing from which we can understand the whole. The *dérive* is the crucial next step after establishing a foothold, representing the need to move beyond mere cognition. The Bonaventure is a useful way to comprehend our world, but it cannot bridge the gap between thought and feeling. The situationist drift, conversely, accomplishes this feat through its emphasis on the experiential.

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