Benjamin, Adorno, Surrealism

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There is little doubt that one of the more enduring aspects of Critical Theory has been its contribution to the field of aesthetics. This is a fact that has seemed baffling and irksome to those for whom the inordinate concentration on the aesthetic dimension in the work of thinkers such as Adorno, Benjamin, Lowenthal, and Marcuse cannot help but appear as the sublimated fulfilment of more deep-seated political urges—a form of *trsatz* praxis, as it were. Even the more intelligent and sensitive commentaries on Critical Theory that have appeared in recent years are not wholly free of the atavistic materialist suspicion that time spent away from the practical sphere is time ill-spent. Yet such attitudes risk becoming a "defeatism of reason"[1] in an era in which the applicability of the Marxian approach to changing the world has dot only been thrown into serious doubt, but in which that approach has become ideologically responsible for a historically new form of oppression.

At the same time, there can be little doubt that the aesthetic interest of Critical Theory retains an essential ***radical quality*** insofar as this interest is unfailingly wedded to questions of human emancipation. However, in this new frame of reference, such questions cease being reducible to the simplistic matter of changing the ownership of the means of production—the answer long associated with traditional socialist perspectives. Rather, they have become relevant to the ***transformation of life in its totality***, i. e., in its cultural, psychological, and everyday apsects, as well as its economic and political forms. Only a thoroughly reconstructed theoretical perspective would be capable of providing a frame work adequate to such radical and wide ranging needs; and it was precisely such a framework that Critical Theory sought to provide through its work in a variety of intellectual fields, not the least of which was the aesthetic.

The task of a systematic reconstruction of the aesthetics of Critical Theory would be an admirable and necessary subject of future research.[2] The present essay, focusing on the variegated links between two Critical Theoristis—Benjamin and Adorno—and surrealism, represents only a very partial step in this direction. At the same time, it is important to note that in an historical era in which social theory had become "social science," philosophy irredeemably scholastic, and in which objective prospects for social change were seemingly crushed beneath monolithic authoritarian and welfare state formations, Critical Theory increasingly turned to the aesthetic sphere as a unique repository of qualitiative difference, negation, and critique.

Benjamin once remarked : "My thought is related to theology like a blotter to ink. It is wholly soaked up by it, If it were left to the blotter, however, nothing would remain."[3] One could make an analogous claim concerning his innate attraction to surrealism. Indeed, the elective affinities between surrealist attitudes and Benjamin's characteristic mode of philosophizing account for one of the most fundamental motifs throughout his work.

Technically one must date Benjamin's itterest in surrealism from his 1925 reading of Andrē Breton's "Manifesto of Surrealism." In a letter to Rainer Maria Rilke of that year, Benjamin would write enthusiastically: "In particular what struck me about surrealism..was the captivating, authoritative, and definitive way in which language passes over into the world of dreams."[4] The following year Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* appeared, a work that would provide the ultimate stumulus for Benjamin's celebrated *Passagenwerk* (Arcades Project), the uncompleted masterpiece of his later years. At a later date, Benjamin described his initial reaction to Aragon's book as follows: "at night in bed i could never read more than two or three pages at a time, for my heartbeat became so strong that i was forced to lay the book down.[5]

Unquestionably, it was in the execution—as fragmentary as it remained—of the *Passagenwerk* that Benjamin's passionate encounter with surrealism was put to its most significant—if at times controversial—employment. To this crucial episode in Benjamin's development we will return shortly. However, in the present context it is perhaps of equal importance to indicate that well before these momentous initial encounters. Benjamin's thought already inclined in surrealistic directions.

Despite the fact that in his early years (1916-1925) Benjamin displayed a primarily Germanistik focus (with the important exception of his interest in Baudelaire and Proust), what one might call proto-surrealist stirrings can be found in two significant works from this period: the 1918 essay "The Program of the Coming Philosophy" and the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" to his 1925 *Trauerspiel* study (*The Origin of German Baroque Drama;* Benjamin's faild *Habilitationsschrift* eventually published in 1928).

At first glance it would seem inherently problematical to characterize "The Program of the Coming Philosophy" as Proto-surrealistic". The focus of the essay is a Kant-critique directed against the neo-Kantianism that had attained the status of a school-philosophy during Benjamin's university years (the later 1910s). The brunt of Benjamin's criticisms are directed against the concept of experience that a Kantian theory of knowledge yields, one Benjamin correctly identifies as deriving unambiguously from a mechanistic, Newtonian world-view, and which he mercilessly castigates as being "of inferior rank."[6] "That Kant could commence his immense work under the sign of the Enlightenment means that it was undertaken on the basis of an experience reduced to a nadir, to a minimum of signification, so to speak," Benjamin observes, with reference to the physicalist biases of high Enlightenment thought[7]. Lest there remain any doubt concerning Benjamin's pronounced antipathy to a Newtonian conception of experience, in which all is calculable, predictable, and law-like, Benjamin adds his conviction that this was "one of the most base experiences of views of the world."[8]

It is clear that what Benjamin found most objectionable about the remnants of a Newtonian, causalist perspective in Kant's theory of cognition was the resultant ontological separation between phenomenal and noumenal realms. Concerning the latter, according to kant, we could have no "knowledge" properly speaking: since the noumenal traescended the (Newtonian) bounds of experience, claims directed toward this sphere of being remained hollow and empty, ultimately succumbing to the folly of "dialectical illusion." Yet, this is precisely what Benjamin desired from a "theory of experience" that would be worthy of the name: access to noumenal truth; that is, contact with a form of knowledge/experience that would be transcendent vis-a-vis the preductable, law-like regularities of the prosaic phenomenal world. The latter world-view promoted a conception of existence that was statistical and mechanistic, hence "inferior" in Benjamin's eyes. Only what

he dubbed a "superior concept of experience"[9] would be capable of doing justice to the true dignity and worth of human existence and its higher capacities. As Benjamin remarks, "What the Enlightenment lacked was authorities, not in the sense of something to which one would have to submit uncritically, but rather as spiritual powers that would have been capable of providing experience with a *superior content*."[10]

The conclusion Benjamin draws from the youthful Kant-critique *prima facie* could not be more removed from surrealist consider attons : an authentically superior concept of experience must "render possible not only mechanical but also *religious experience*." However, if one isolates the key positive conception found in the essay—that of a "superior concept of experience"—the links with surrealism will seem less parochial. Indeed, the surrealists, too, sought to surmount the inherent narrowness of a Western rationalism which resulted in the prevalence of a thoroughly mundane and routinized cosmos. This rationalist spirit—or anti-spirit-had resulted in the unprecedented carnage of World War I, in which scientific knowledge had been applied to methods of mass annihilation on a previously unimaginable scale. Moreover, its killing sobrietv was responsible for the banishment of all mystery, romance, and transcendence from the center-stage of human existence, in favor of the bourgeois values of confromity, calculation, and profit. As Fredric Jameson has remarked, "Surrealism presents itself first and foremost as a reaction against the intellectualized, against *logic* in the widest sense of the word, subsuming not only philosophical rationality, but also the commonsense interests of the middle-class business world, and ultimately reality itself."[11]The surrealist revulsion towards the spirit of bourgeois rationalism can be seen clearly from such "a-rational" privileged surrealist media as automatic writiting, *l : hasard objectif*, and—of paramount importance for Benjamin—the realm of dream experience. As Andrē Breton would remark in his 1925 "Manifesto": "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are so seemingly contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak. It is in quest of this surreality that I am going."[12] Indeed, it was a similar quest for an "absolute reality" that motivated so much of Benjamin's youthfull literary activity.

The other moment of Bentamin's early development that may be described as incipiently surrealist was his theory of knowledge in the *Trauerspiel* book. Here, too, at first glance, cogent parallels would seem hard

to come by. Nothing could be more foreign to the surrealist enterprise than the construction of a theory of knowledge, a all too traditional philosophical undertaking. To be sure, a thorough discussion of the nermetic Prologue to Benjamin's *auerspiel* book would far transcend the scope of this essay and is a matter I have addressed at length elsewhere.[13] But there is little doubt that methodological basis of Benjamin's theory of knowledge is the principle of *montage :* an immediate juxtaposition of intrinsically unrelated elements: a principle that Peter Bürger has referred to as "the fundamental principle of avant-gardiste art."[14]

The key to understanding Benjamin's early theory of knowledge (which he considered to be "dialecticlal," if not yet "materialist") is the concept of "constellaticn." By regrouping material elements of phenomena—the objects of knowledge—in a philosophically informed constellation, Benjamin sought the emergence of an "Idea" through which the "redemption" of the phenomena would be effectuated—in-so far as contact with the "Idea" would facilitate their elevation to the homeland of unconditioned truth. In this admittedly recondite procedure, the function of conceptual (i. e., rational) knowledge is strictly delimited its sole task is to facilitate the *arrangement* of the phenomena or material elements in the constellation. As Benjamin asserts, "Conceptual distinctions are above all suspicion of destructive sophistry only when their purpose is the salvation of phenomena in ideas."[15] But the ultimate goal of this process, the emergence of the ideas themselves, is to be a product of the montage like juxtaposition of the material elements alone. It is not, strictly speaking, a result that is achieved by the employment of the traditional philosophical means of induction, deduction, or logical argumentation, if the latter nevertheless remain useful as auxiliary methods. To be sure, what Benjamin has in mind is something more akin to a momentary epihany, a sudden burst of insight, that he would later explicitly associate with his materialist version of the constellations of the *Trauerspiel* book, the "dialectical image." As Benjamin would say of the later : "The dialectical image is a flashing image. Thus, the past must be grasped as an image that flashes in the Now of recognition. Redemption, which is accomplished in this way and only in this way, can be attained only as that which in the next instant is already irredeemably lost."[16] As a *Jetztsein* or Now-time, the constellationor dialectical image approximates the neo-Platonic/theological notion of *nunc stans.* As defined by Franz Rosenzweg in *The Star of Redemption* (a work known to have influenced Benjamin) *nunc stans* signifies that

"mankind is redeemed from the transience of the moment" and the latter is "refashioned as the ever-persisting and thus intransient, as eternity."[17] The theological distinction between "historical time", prone to decay and disintegration *(Verfall)*, and "Messianic time", a time of permanent fulfillment, was indeed one of the most enduring motifs throughout Benjamin's lifework; it dates originally from a crucial 1916 fragment "Trauerspiel und Tragodie"[18] and pervades the 1940 "Theses on the Philosophy of History," where Benjamin speaks of the *Jetztzeit* as "shot through with clips of Messianic time," in contraposition to the empty and degraded, "homogeneous" time of the historical era.

Benjaminian constellations (also described at times as "monads") bear affinities with the surrealist search for transcendence (a "sur-reality"). As we first saw with reference to his 1918 Kant-critique, and again through his emphasis on a Messianic time of permanence and fulfillment, the secular bent of Benjamin's philosophy is throughout interspersed with theological residues of no small moment. Yet, if one observes carefully, it is apparent that Benjamin's search for transcendence transpires, like the surrealists, *within* the sphere of immanence. Hence, in his *Trauerspiel* book theory of ideas, the latter, while of ontologically superior value, remain, unlike the Platonic doctrine, *this-worldly* in origin. That is, they emerge spontaneously from the conceptually mediated arrangement of the phenomena themselves. In Benjamin's theory it is clear that ideas are denied an existence independent of the phenomenal being. This claim is crucial for it is the basis upon which he hopes to surmount "dualism". As he observes at one point : "For ideas are not represented in themselves, but society and exclusively in an arrangement of concrete elements in the concept : as the configuration (constellation) of these elements." He seeks to summarize the relationship between ideas and phenomena through use of the following bold, if characteristically elliptical metaphor : "ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars."[19] That is, neither ideas nor constellations exist independently of the material elements that comprise them, but instead first emerge therefrom.

One can only date the explicit emergence of surrealist motifs in Benjamin's work from the aphoristic *Einbahnstrasse* (1928) and the seminal "Surrealism" essay of a year later. With reference to the former, Bloch was quick to see in a 1928 review that the basic intention was "to render philosophy surrealistic."[20] He recalls that Benjamin reacted

favorably at a Berlin cafe when Bloch showed him a review which compared the book to a "store-opening, with the newest spring fashions in metaphysics in the display window."[21] Bloch noted further that Benjamin had consciously shunned a systematic, discursive means of presentation in favour of the surrealist-inspired principle of montage : "Surrealistic philosophy is exemplary as a montage of fragments that, however, remain pluralistic and unconnected."[22] In *Einbahnstrasse* Benjamin first formulated the methodological precepts that would define the construction of the *Passagenwerk*, whose initial composition occurred in these years. As Benjamin remarks in his notes for the *Passagenwerk:* "Method of this work : literary montag. I have nothing to say. Only to show. I will pilfer nothing valuable and appropriate for myself no clever formulations. Only rubbish and refuse, of which I will make no inventory; rather, I will allow them to come into their own in the only way possible : by employing them."[23] This methodological plan was the object of an extensive critique by Adorno, who feared the *Passagenwerk* in its entirety would ultimately be composed of a montage of citations, devoid of supporting commentary or interpretation. Support for this conviction is seemingly contained in the abovo quoted dictum, "I have nothing to say. Only to show."[24]

What was it above all that Benjamin prized about surrealism ? To begin with, rhe surrealist technique of montage seemed an ideal way of surmounting the staleness and convention of traditional, discursive philosophizing. It was a procedure more likely to yield sudden flashes of insight ("the dialectical image is a flashing image") rather than pre-calculated, deductive truths. In addition, the *imagistic* character of montage—e.g., in the thought-montages or colleges that comprise *Einbahn-strasse*-lends it greater affinities with the sensuous, objective side of truth—i.e., with the things themselves that truth seeks to grasp. Such a technique stands in oppositian to he typical philosophical emphasis on "conceptual" primacy and against the modern philosophical pre-eminence of the epistemological subject. Benjamin was vehemently opposed to such conventional philosophical practices, which he felt could never truly reach the "in itself" of phenomena.

Moreover, surrealistic modes of apprehension—above all, surrealism's unhesitating immersion in the concrete particularity of every-day life—seemed to harmonize especially well with Benjamin's own

partisanship for philosophical micrology : his conviction that the universal is not something that must be foisted upou the particular from on high, but rather must be gently coaxed from the latter of its own accord. To do otherwise would be merely to violate the delicate contours of particularity as such, to subject the latter insensitively to the abstract "will to power" of the conceptual sphere. Bloch has aptly commented on Behjamin's talents as a philosophical micrologist as follows : "Benjamin had what Lukacs so enormously lacked: he had a unique sense for the significant detail, for the near at hand, for the fresh elements which burst forth in thinking and the world, for singularities which are unsuitable for practical use and thus deserving of an entirely unique consideration, Benjamin possessed a peerless micrologicalphilosophical sense for such details, such significant signs of the off the beatentrack." [25]

Benjamin himself describes his methodological reliance to micrology and its relationship to montage in an important note to the ***Passagenwerk***, There, Benjamin grapples with the problem of how to reconcile a "heightened sense of telicity to the subject matter [***Anschaulichkeit***] "with the" Marxist understanding of history. "His conclusion : "The first step on this path will be to incorporate the principle of montage in the study of history. Thus, to construct the grandest edifices from the smallest, most precisely fabricated building-blocks. Thereby to discover the crystallization of the totality in the analysis of the small, individual elements." [26] Hence, the procedure of montage is designed both to surmount problems stemming from the abstract superimposition of "methed" on "material" (method here being the "Marxist understanding of history") as well as to facilitate greater ***Anschaulichkeit*** or fidelity to the being-in-itself of the subject matter. It is a technique that inclines intrinsically toward respect for the material rather than bromoting the abstract primacy of the concept. [27]

The enchanted, micrological transformation of fragments of everyday life was a quality of surrealism that Benjamin especially revered. In the letters referring to his 1929 "Surrealism" essay, Benjamin leaves no doubt concerning its fheoretical centrallty for the ***Passagenwerk***. At one point he refers to it as as "an apaque paravent in front of the Arcades study; "at another he speaks of it as a type of "prolegomenon to the Arcades project. "[28] The "Surrealism" essay, he says, represents an

attempt "to determine the most concrete qualities of an epoch as they present thsmselves here and there in children's games, a bullding, or one of life's random situations."[29] Not only was the essay to be about surrealism; it was itself supposed to be surrealist in spirit.

Benjamin praises the surrealists for their attempt to narrow the gap between art and life. As such, one of the movements most salutary features is its concerted assault on the bourgeois realm of ***belles-lettres***. It presents itself as a definitive challege to the illusionistic, other-worldly complacency of "art for art's sake"—which Benjamin describes as the "secular religion of art." He therefore praises Breton for "his intention of breaking with a praxis that presents the public with the literary precipitate of a certain form of existence while withholding that existence itself."[30] The ***promesoe de bonheur*** of bourgeois art should no longer be confined to the supramundane sphere of aesthetic illusion, but should instead be transferred to the plane of material life itself. As Breton declared : "Transform the world, Marx said; "change life" said Rimbaud. For us these two watchwords are one."[31] The writings of this circle had become bluff, demonstration and provocatian; they had thus ceased being works of art in the purist, affirmative sense. Yet, for the surrealists this transformed conception of the relationship between art and life-praxis meant that not only was art to be brought closer to the domain of real llfe, but also that shards of real life were to be absorbed within tne artistic process. Once transformed within the surrealist college, these shards, newly arranged, would produce inspired, "profane illuminations." In perhaps the most representative passage of the essay, Benjamin explains his veneration of the surrealist movement in the following terms : "The surrealists were the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the outmoded, : that appear in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution—no one can have a more exact concept of it than these authors. No one before these vislonaries and augurs perceived how destitution—not only social, but architectonic, the poverty the interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects—can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism, Leaving aside Aragon's ***Passage de l'Opera***, Breton and Nadja are the lovers who convert everything we have experienced on mournful railway journeys (railways are

beginning to age), on God-forsaen Sunday afternoons in the proletarian quarters of great cities, in the first glance through the rain-blurred window of a new apartment, in to revolutionary experience, if not action. They bring the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in these things to the point of explosion."[32] This "enchanted" relationship to the discrete phenomena of everyday life satisfied Benjamin's longstanding yearning for a "superior concept of experience. "Moreover, it possessed the potential political advantage of existing in profane, exoteric form.

Undoubtedly, one of the most crucial links between surrea lism and the Arcades Project stemmed from the former's emphasis on the superior experiential value of dream life. In his first manifesto Breton affirms the value of dreams to such an extent that he ultimately calls into question the conventional priority of waking over dream life. He observes, "Freud very rightly brought his critical faculties to bear upon the dream. It is, in fact, inadmissible that this considerable portion of psychic activity ...has still today been so grossly neglected. I have always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends credence and attaches much more importance to waking events than those in dreams."[33]

In Benjamin's work, too, dreams occupied a very special locus. For him dreams would become an autonomous source of knowledge and experience, a privileged key to the secrets and mysteries of waking life. In no uncertain terms, they became repositories of the utopian visions of numanity. Dreams provide a necessary sanctuary for the higher aspirations and desires of humanity, desires and aspirations that are systematically denied on the plane of material life. Adorno touches on this point when he observes that for Benjamin, "the dream becoms a medium of unregimented experience, a source of knwledge oppossd to the stale superficiality of thinking." In dreams, "the absura is preseuted as if it were self-evident, inorder to strip the self-evident of its power."[34] Dreams thus represent the realm of the possible, the non-identical; they serve to contest the pretension to "being-in-itself" of the dominan reality principle.

In an 1843 letler to A. Ruge, marx makes his famous observation that "the worla has long been dreaming of something of which it must only become conscious in order to possess it in reality—a saying

with which Benjamin was quite familiar and which he explicitly cites in the *Passagenwerk*.[35] indeed, the Marx cltation may be plausibly read as the theoretical germ-cell of the *Passagenwerk* in its entirety. The work's central methodological concerns are unamolguously contained in the following remarks by Benjamin bearing on the relationship between dreams, awakening, and the 19th centuly: "The attempt to awaken from a dream as the best example of dialectical transformation...The utilization of dream elements in awakening is the canon of dialectics...Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-sleep, containing a reacti vation of mythcial powers, came over Europe...The coming awakening stands iike the Greek wooden horse in the Troy of the dream...The collec-tlve expresses its conditions of life. In the dream it finds its expression and in awakening its interpretation...The critique of the 19th century must in a word begin here, Not with its mechanism and machinism, rather with its narcotic historicism its addiction to masks, in which however is hidden a sign of true historical existence that the surrealists were the first to grasp. The task of the present work is to decipher this sign. And the revolutionary, materialistic basis of surrealism is a sufficient guarantee of the fact that in the sign of true historical existence just mentioned, the economic base of the 19th century has attained its highest expression."[36]

Capitalism, as a "natural phenomenon," has unleashed a neo-mythological dreap-sleep over Europe, whose manifestations are the super-structural material elements of 19th century life first investigated by the surrealists (who, moreover, through their salutary investigations of the latter, have provided a guarantee of "true historical existence") and soon to become the privileged phenomena of analysis in Benjamin's own *Passagenwerk* : phenomena such as the arcades, fashion, the world exhibi-tions, the bourgeois interior, the streets of Paris, etc. The dream-sleep signifies *not* merely false consciousness, i.e., it is irreducible to the purely negative moment of objective delusion. Rather, it is simultaneously a repository of utopian potentials and wish-images that point in the direc-tion a meaningful historical existence. The latter of course will accrue to humanity—the "collective"—only with the moment cf historical awakening. The intention of the—inconsummata—*Passagenwerk* was nothing less than the redemption of the superstructural *Erscheinungs-formen* from their indigent, natural state through their reassemblage in a

surrealistically inspired montage; it was this procedure, and this procedure alone, that would release the utopian wish-images from their reified imprisonment in the fetishistic world of bourgeois cultural consumption. In this respect Rolf Tiedemannn makes the pertinent observation in his introduction to the *Passagenwerk* that "Benjamin attempted to do for the superstructure of capitalism what Marx did for the economic base."

At several points in the study, Benjamin insisted on the importance of the category of "ambiguity". "Ambiguity is the metaphorical *bildliche* appearance of the dialectic, the law of dialectic-at-a-standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image thus a dream-image."[37] The ambiguity lay precisely in the fact that the phantasmagorical image-sphere of the bourgeois cultural landscape can neither be conceived of strictly in terms of historical disintegration *Verfall* nor in terms of the modern theory of progress (upon which Benjamin heaps such scorn in konvolut N of the *Passagenwerk*. Rather the regressive and utopian potentials are inextricably interlaced and both moments are contained in the dialectical image. There is certainly little difficulty in making sense of this judgment from the standpoint of an orthodox Marxist lexicon. Marx always considered capitalism an "ambiguous" social formation, insofar as the development of objectively progressive forces of production was retarded by retrograde capitalist relations of production. Benjamin pays lip-service to this insight when he comments that in his chapter on commodity fetishism, Marx shows ,"how ambiguous the economic world of capitalism is—an ambiguity greatly enhanced by the intensification of the capitalist economy; this is very clear in the case of machines, which heighten exploitation instead of improving the lot of man."[38]

A detailed, lapidary summation of the methodological intentions of the project as a whole is provided in the following crucial remarks: "There exists an entirely unique experience of dialectics. The compelling, drastic experience which refutes all 'gradualism' and shows all apparent 'development' as an eminently thoroughing dialectical transformation is the awakening from a dream...The new, dialectical method of historiography appears as the art of experiencing the present as a world of awakening in which that dream which we call the past is related

to truth. To experience the past in dream-remembrance !—Thus : Remembrance and awakening are intimately related Awakening is namely the dialectical, Copernican turn of remembrance." "The state of a consciousness that oscillates between sleep and awakening need only be transposed from the individual to the collective. Much that is merely extrinsic to the individual is intrinsic to the collective : architecture, fashion, even weather are internal to the collective in the same way that organ sensations, the feeling of sickness or health are internal to the individual. As long as they persist in an unconscious, unshaped dream form, they remain mere natural processes such as the digestive process, breathing; etc. They stand in the cycle of the eternaly same until the collective effects political mastery of them and sets them on the path of history."[39]

The foregoing observations indicate a seminal change in Benjamin's utilization of the sumealist—inspired notion of dream experience. Originally, like the surrealists, Benjamin valorized—indeed fetishized the *manifest contents* of dream experience by viewing them as autonomous sources of value and meaning. In the more mature version of the *Passagenwerk*, however the emphasis has switched from the manifest content of the dream-images to the moment of interpretation or *awakening*. And here, in opposition to surrealism and closer proximity to Freud, the category of awakening is emphatically associated with that of *remembrance*. The act of awakening is produced via a lobor of interpretive remembrance. The *Passagenwerk* may thus be understood as an elaborate effort *"die Vergangenheit aufzuarbeiten"*—to re-master the historical past—which otherwise threatens to fall victim to the somnabulance of the dream—state. It represents a quasi-Freudian attempt to make the unconscious consious—albeit, on the level of the *collective* rather than that of the *individual* past. It is Benjamin's own *Traumdeutung* in the service of human emancipation. i.e., in the raising of historical life fromthe level of an unconscious "natural process" to something consciously produced and lived.

The *Passagenwerk* then represents the consummation of Benjamin's initial flirtations with surrealism in the 1920s, an attempt as it were to transpose surrealist "powers of intoxication" from the cafes of the right bank to the panoramic domain of 19th century historiography.

That Benjamin never completed the project is a well known fact and usually attributed to circumstantial considerations : his precarious

situation as an impoverished German emigr'e in the 1930s, his untimely death on the Franco-Spanish border in September 1940. Gretel Adorno once suggested that Benjamin failed to consummate the work for deep-seated personal/psychological reasons. However plausible these explanations may be, I would like to suggest that the inconsummate nature of the ***Passagenwerk*** must be at least in part attributed to certain substantive difficulties inherent in the conceptual master-plan of the work itself. But for the time being I would like fo bracket this claim and take it up once more subsequent to the discussion of Adorno's critique of surrealism.[40]

When it comes to the question of Adorno's relationship to surrealism, the secondary literature displays a startling degree of unanimity. Indeed, the fine studies by Buck-Morss, Lunn, and Jay seemingly couldn't be in more agreement on this point.[41] All three commentators seize on what is assuredly the dominant thrust of Adorno's reservation toward the movement : the tendency of surrealism (at least in its ***visual*** manifestations) to succumb to a type of object - fetishism. Surrealism absorbs the fragments and detritus of everyday life in its disjointed construction. Adorno's question, however, is whether,the ***unmediated absorption*** of the fragments of immediacy in surrealist collages does not in the last analysis amount to a crass duplication of everyday life in its indigent given state. As Jay has Pointed out, Adorno's critique of surrealism results in strange bedfellows : it dovetails surprisingly with Lukas' rejection of modernism ***tout court*** for fetishizing the immediacy of bourgeois fragmentation, Needless to say, Adorno and Lukacs were, apart from their comparably damning judgments of surrealism, diametrical antipodes in aesthetic taste : Adorno was as a rule one of the staunchest defenders of aesthetic modernism, whereas Lukacs in contrast championed the "critical realism" of 19th century authors such as Stendahl, Balzac, Tolstoy (and in the twentieth century, Thomas Mann; another figure on whom. curiously, Adorno ana Lukacs find themselves in agreement).[42]

Both Jay and Lunn, while resting their cases primarily on Adorno's 1956 essay "Looking Back on Surrealism," cite a revealing footnote from ***philosophy of Modern Music*** to exemplify Adorno's reservations concerning surrealist art. In Adorno's view, "Surrealism is anti-organic and rooted in lifelessness. It destroys the boundary between the body and the world of objects, in order to convert society into a

hypostatization of the body. Its form is that of montage. This is totally alien to Schoenberg. In the case of surrealism, however, the more subjectivity renounces its rights over the world of objects, aggressively acknowledging the supremacy of that world, the more willing it is to accept at the same time the traditionally established form of the world of objects."[43]

To be sure, these remarks penetrate to the heart of Adorno's rejection of surrealist techniques. Here, the central thematic objection concerns the category of *montage*-precisely that aspect of surrealism that Benjamin found methodologically most serviceable. As a result of its renunciation of the category of mediation, surrealism accepts the material elements of bourgeois society as such and uncritically. For this reason it remains "inorganic and lifeless," since these elements remain untransformed in the surrealist contructions, i.e., they are not re-inserted in a new, conceptually integrated organic whole. Yet, "inorganicity" and "lifelessness" were the chief traits of high capitalism under conditions of total reification, which fostered *social* relations between things—commodities—and *objective* relations between persons. Hence, Adorno's conclusion that surrealism at its worst, celebrated a reified immediacy in its montages He illustrates this contention in a frequently cited passage form the 1956 essay. "Its montages are true still lifes, "remarks Adorno, "In as much as they rearrange the outmoded, they create *nature morte*." This is true insofar as surrealism represents the "capitulation of abstract freedom to the supremacy of things, hence to mere nature." He then goes on to make the following observations : "These [surrealist] pictures are not something that derive from within the subject, rather they are commodity-fetishes on which the subjective, the libido was once fixated, They bring back childhood by fetishism, not by self-immersion...Detached breasts, the legs of mannequins in silk stockings in collages—these are remembrance of those objects of partial instinctual gratification to which the libido once awoke. The forgotten reveals itself in them, thing-like, dead, as what love really desired and what it wants to make itself like —what we are like, Surrealism as a paralyzed awakening is akin to photography. to be sure, it utilizes imagos*, yet not the invariant, a-historical

* An unconscious, idealized image from childhood, usually representative of a parent.

ones of the unconcious subject...but historical ones in which the innermost being of the subject appears as something external to it; as the imitation of socio-historical being."[44]

In this characteristically terse, but essential passage Adorno identifies the manifest weakness of surrealism's assimilation of psychoanalytic concepts. Early in the essay, he had already taken issue with the surrealist appopriation of dream-life. The surrealists fetishize the manifest content of dreams, whereas in psychoanalysis of course it was always the latent dimension of ***dream-interpretation*** that received pride of place (yet, it must be pointed out that however much Breton et al, may have misunderstood the letter of freud's doctrines themselves, they of course had no pretension to becoming ***practicing analysts.*** Hence, as ***practicing artists,*** if their creative misinterpretation of pyschoanalytic principles yielded results that were aesthetically fruitful – so much the better !) Adorno also wished to point out that their claim to being in immediate contact with the unconscious or dreams, whose powers they claimed to be able to release at will for artistic purposes, was a sham. In the case of automatic writing, for example, such ***ecriture*** could hardly be an unadulterated product of the unconscious, since the very act of sitting down at a desk pen in hand —as well as the idea of a "program" of automatic writing itself – was the result of a prior conscious decision. He proceeded to cite the analytitic truism that veritable contact with unconscious components of the psyche can only be the product of a concerted and laborious therapeutic re-working of the past. It is not something that can be summoned up at a moment's notice for artistic purposes, however worthy these might be.

Similarly, his ctiticism in the preceding citation warns of the dangers of a precipitate appropriation of psychoanalytic concepts. Above all, if the fragmentary imagos of childhood are transposed ***tel quel*** into the surrealist collages without having first been (conceptually) deciphered, one runs the risk of promoting unilateral ***regression.*** This in Adorno's opinion is the upshot of surrealist "image fetishism." It recovers images of childhood libidinal attachment not as something first subjected to the healing powers of analytical self-insight ("self-immersion"), but rather in unmediated, inchoate form, i.e., qua "fixations". In focusing on the libidinally charged, dismembered torsos that figured so prominently in surrealism as a visual medium, Adorno seems to be operating with analytic

concepts borrowed from the "object-relations" school rather than orthodox Freudianism.

At the same time, it is important to register Adorno's insistence that the "imagos" of the surrealist collages are not reducible to the archaic, de-historicized images of a Jungian stamp (the Benjaminian conception of archaic wish-images would seem to fall victim to this characterization). Instead, their "truth-content" seems to lie in a measure of fidelity to the "socio-historical" present; albeit, a "reified" present, in which, as Adorno expresses it, the "innermost being of the subject appears as something external to it." A distinct sociohistorical component manifests itself in the surrealist montage, insofar as the latter is in a large measure comprised of veritable fragments of contemporary social life: familiar objects such as railway tickets, newspaper headlines, etc. It is precisely in their capacity to convey, however immediately, something of the historical present that surrealist collages avoid lapsing into ideology pure and simple (the case with Jung's archaic images) and establish a relation to truth.

To be sure, Adorno's hesitancies concerning surrealism and its favored technique of montage are already discernible in his criticism of certain of Benjamins's *Passagenwerk*-related studies from the 1930s. Two instances in particular are noteworthy. First, Adorno's epistolary response to Benjamin's 1935 Arcades Expose "Paris, Capital of the 19th Century". Among the numerous elements Adorno found objectionable in this crucial, initial formulation of the designs of the *Passagenwerk* was Benjamin's uncritical employment of the surrealist belief in the sacrosanct character of dream-experience As a motto for what is perhaps the most seminal passage of the Expose, Benjamin cites Michelet's saying "Chaque epoque reve la suivante." He goes on to propound an undeniably fanciful theory whereby the prehistoric past, which Benjamin lauds as a "classless society". has deposited utopian wish-images in the collective unconscious, which are reactivated as it were by the utopian potential of high capitalism As Benjamin observes : "In the dream in which every epoch sees in images the epoch that is to succeed it, the latter appears coupled with elements of prehistory—that is to say, of a classless society. The expriences of this society, which have their storeplace in the collective unconscious, interact with the new to give birth to the utopias which leave their configurations

in a thousand traces of life, from permanent buildings to ephemeral fashions,"[45] It is precisely these utopian potentials that Benjamin wished to release in the dialectical images of the *Passagenwerk*.

Adorno literally pounces upon the more tenuous aspects of Benjamin's construction. He objects stridently to the neo-romantic characterization of prehistory as a 'Golden Age'—a classless society; also to the uncritical reliance on the Jungian category of the "collective unconscious" which in Adorno's view is a mythological notion designed to mystify contemporary social antagonisms.

But his fundamental objection is to Benjamin's pseudo-surrealistic attempt to recast the dialectical image as a dream. As he remarks, "If you transpose the dialectical image into consciousness as a dream...you also deprive it of the objective liberating power which could legitimate it in materialistic terms. The fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness; rather, it is dialectical in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness."[46] In other words, by equating the problem of commodity fetishism with the world of dreams, Benjamin risks occluding its true origins in the sphere of production. Hence, he risked reducing problems of material life to "facts of consciousness"—dreams; consequently Adorno accuses him of an idealist deviation from the original materialist focus of the project. As a problem originating in the sphere of material life, commodity fetishism cannot be resolved—only mystified—by being transposed to the world of dreams; not to mention the specious role played by the Jungian "dreaming collective."

Three years later Adorno and Benjamin would disagree over the first draft of the latter's Baudelaire study. Again the central point of contention concerned Benjamin's uncritical use of surrealist techniques; in this case, the technique of montage. Since this debate has received its due in the existing secondary literature.[47] I will merely confine myself here to its essentials. At base, Adorno expressed his extreme reservations concerning the montage inspired methodological orientation of the study which resulted in an unmediated assemblage of data, wholly devoid of supporting commentary. Adorno could hardly disagree more with Benjamin's essay statement, "I have nothing to say. Only to show." What Benjamin's lacks, above all, according to Adorno is "mediation". As he observes, "motifs are assembled but not elaborated. Panorama and 'traces', flaneur

and arcades, modernism and the unchanging, without a theoretical interpre tation—is this a 'material' which can patently await interpretation without being consumed by its own aura ?"[48] In another passage from his detailed letter of criticism, he raises the following charges: "The theological motif of calling things by their names tends to turn into a wide-eyed presentation of mere facts. If one wished to put it very drastically, one could say that your study is located at the crossroads of magic and positivism. That spot is bewitched. Only theory could break the spell —your own resolute, salutarily speculative theory."[49]

The same principle is at isssue in both Adorno's criticism of Benjamin's 1938 Baudelaire essay ("The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire") as well as his 1956 discussion of surrealism: the unmediated absorption of material elements in montage-constructions relapses into a positivist affirmation of the given, unless these elements are arranged according to a preconceived, theoretically informed plan. However, behind this disagreement lay contrasting estimations about the value-signs proper to the so-called "material elements." Benjamin wanted to view these as "ambiguous": they contained utopian potentials pointing toward immanent prospects for the realization of the realm of freedom once they were reconstituted in the dialectical image. For Adorno, in contrast the moment of "negativity" was dominant: these elements were less the portents of an impending golden age than the signs of a Sisyphean, hellish, eternal recurrence : the presentation of the always-the-same as the eternally new that distinguished the logic of commodity fetishism.

In retrospect Adorno seems to have been right against Benjamin, Yet wrong concerning surrealism. He was right in the former case insofor as Benjamin over-estimated both the inherently redeeming powers of the dialectical image as well as the utopian aspects of a largely prosaic, disenchanted commodity producing society. Benjamin's primary sin was trying to apply methods of literary analysis to sociological material of a very different order, expectiog to produce "epiphanies" proper to the former realm of study in the case of the latter-which, it may be safely said in retrospect, has proven much more intractable than Benjamin imagined. His attempt to apply the aesthetic technique of the dialectical image to recalcitrant historical data thus invites the accusation of "misplaced concreteness": whereas Benjamin might have been able to effect the *aesthetic transfiguration* of social phenomena in the montage-sequences of the

Passagenwerk – following the artistic precedent established by Baudelaire and surrealism—the trajectory of socio-historical life itself follows an independent developmental logic. In this respect, as a viable piece of social analysis, the *Passagenwerk* would have to supply the dimension of theoretical mediation Adorno found lacking or else succumb to the status .of an aesthetically pleasing historical collage. Of course, it is impossible to say precisely what form the finished product might have taken. But on the basis of the evidence available, it seems doubtful that the *Passagenwerk* could have satisfactorily allayed Adorno's pertinent suspicions.

As far as his charge of "image-reification" against the surrealists is concerned—the aspect of his critique that has received the most publicity—a more skeptical verdict is in order, though one must cede a measure of cogency to his standpoint. The surrealists were certainly wont to fetishize certain privileged representations, and these at times were distinctly tainted by regressive traits, as Adorno suggests. If Baudelaire could claim that genius was childhood recaptured, then much of modern art attempted to follow his lead in retrieving the element of naivete that had been lost amid the refinements of civilization. Here, the paintings of Paul Klee, with their child-like insouciance, are models of success. Regression, however, is clearly the risk that any such attempt runs. Like any "ism", surrealism lays itself open to the dangers of formal codification and the attendant hazards of eternally repeating itself. Adorno identifies the historical etiology of this dilemma in his 1956 essay, when he observes that the "shocks" of surrealism lost their power following "the European catastrophe", which conferred an element of normalcy on shock by making it a caregory of everyday life.

Where Adorno errs, however, is in his attempt to measure surrealism qua artistic movement against standards appropriate to the theoretical sphere. The abdication of subjectivity, the refusal to mediate the component elements of the montage, results in the fetishization of a reified immediacy, argues Adorno. Yet, he makes this point after already having exploded the myth of surrealist anti-subjectivism: "The subject is at work much more openly and uninhibitedly in surrealism than in dreams," Adorno readily confesses. In essence, surrealist symbols "show themselves to be *far too rationalistic.*"[50] Contra Adorno, the lack of subjective input he

finds in surrealism is probably no greater than in its 19th century literary precursor symbolism. After all,it was Adorno himself who incisively warned againstthe dangers of taking the programmatic pronouncements of surrealism at face value (e. g., the one concerning the primacy of the unconscious for automatic writing). He himself was forced to admit that montage, if"correctly done", is "by definition also interpreting."[51] Rigorous standards of theoretical construction, though, certainly applicable to a project such as Benjamin's, are out of place, however, when brought to bear mechanically on the aesthetic sphere; a fact which Adorno readily admitted in other contexts. Fimally, it would be a grave error to attempt to extend the charge of "image-reification" from surrealism qua visual art form to the *poetic* and *literary* dimensions of the movement, aspects that are certainly less readily assimilable to Adorno's germane montage-critique.

In point of fact, Adorno's proximity to surrealism is much greater than it may at first appear, a fact that suggests that the inordinate attention conferred upon his critical remarks in the 1956 essay is misleading I would like to develop this point in some detail.

To begin with, one must take cognizance of what was perhaps the pet methodological category of negative dialectics, "constellation," a term whose Bejaminian origins are self-evident. In our discussion of the *Trauerspiel* book it was asserted that Benjamin's employment of the category reflected proto-surrealist stirrings, especially with reference to the category of montage. Does not Adorno's philosophical modus operandi bear the same affinities ? Given Adorno's critique of the montage -idea of the *Passagenwerk*, this is certainly an analogy one would not want to push too far. Nevertheless, there exist unmistakable parallels between the paratactic, non-discursive features of Adornian philosophical presentation—all of which hinge on the concept of constellation—and the surrealist technique of montage. This claim holds good as long as one recognizes the fact that in Adorno's case, these thought-monrages remain *conceptually mediated* to an extreme—unlike those of the surrealists and, on occasion, those of Benjamin.

The procedural centrality of constellation is expressed by Adorno in the following passage from *Negative Dialectics* : "The unifying

moment survives, without the negation of the negation, and without having to be responsible to abstraction as the highest principle, insofar as concepts do not progress step by step to the highest general concept, but instead enter in to a constellation...Constellations alone represent from without what the concept has excluded from within : the non-identical [*das Mehr*] that it wants to be so much but cannot."[52] In relying on constellations; Adorno incorporated an aesthetic dimension in to philosophy in order to save rhe latter from categorical hierarchies in which the sensuous nature of things themselves is continuously sacrificing on the altar of ascending conceptual abstraction. In this way he seeks to undo the metaphysical violence perpetrated by traditional techniques of philosophical conceptualization against things themselves, the non-identical. This design can be achieved only via montage-derived philosophical procedure, for only the latter avoids the traditional philosophical hierarchical ordering of conceptual elements in favor of an equilateral and non-discriminatory presentation of ideas.

The theroretical complement to Adorno's 1956 reflections on surrealism is provided by the related remarks in his posthumously published masterpiece, *Aesthetib Theory*, (1970). These observations represent an elaboration of the conclusion of the earlier surrealism essay, which Adorno ends on an appreciative note, comparing surrealism favorably to the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, its historical contemporary. Adorno thus relativizes emphatically the negative comments concerning surrealism made earlier in the essay. The movement is lauded for its frank portrayal of the consequences of a repressive and reified social totality, facts denied by *Neue Sachlichkeit's* sobriety. Surrealist imagery represents "the contents of that which *Sachlichkeit* taboos, because this content reminds it of its own thing-like nature, of the fact that its own rationality remains irrational. Surrealism gathers up what ' objectivity' refuses to men : the distorted images show what inhibition does to the object of desire. Through these distortions surrealism redeems the obsolete : an album of idio syncrasies in which the *promesse de bonheer*, denied to man in a technifiad world, goes up in smoke. If, however, surrealism itself appears obsolete today, this is only because men deny themselves the consciousness of renunciation that was captured in the surrealist negative."[53] Surrealist "irrationalism" thus gives the lie to the dominant reality principle by revealing the

bedrock of unreason on which it is based : the prohibition of desire, the perpetual postponement of the *promesse de bonheur*. Its alleged "distortions" are merely the hidden truth of the pretension to objectivity, to being-in-self, of the reigning social totality.

It is not as though in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno's attitude toward surrealism has undergone a diametrical volte-face. Instead, his appraisal takes the form of a balanced constellation. The critique of surrealism for succumbing to an (Hegelian) dialectic of "absolute freedom,'—In which the impotence of the subject vis-a-vis the external, empirical is revealed—is retained. As Adorno remarks, "Surrealism...was done in by its illusory belief in an absolutely subjective being-for-itself, which is objectively mediated and cannot go beyond being-for-itself in the domain of art."[54]

Yet, surrealism is also praised on many counts. It is for example lauded, along with impressionism, for having "put sponteneity on the agenda" of aesthetic modernism (36). In a discussion that amplified the conclusion of the 1956 essay, Adorno argues that :"Currents like expressionism and surrealism, the irrationality of which was highly disturbing to some, acted up against repression, authority and obscurantism" (82). Rather than serving as a confirmation of a reified social order, as some would claim, irrationalism and the "chaotic features of authentic modern art...are the ciphers of a critique of a spurious second nature; they seem to be saying : 'This is how chaotic your order actually is" (138). For Adorno, the use of irrational elements, e.g., the "fantastic" dimension of surrealist painting, performs a crucial de-fetishizing function over against the dominant reality principle, whose rigidity and inflexibleness are thereby unmasked : the latter is indicted by what it refuses to tolerate. The social super ego and its accompanying array of taboos and prohibitions is thus confronted with the absurdity of its own restrictions : "Look how easily things could be otherwise, "might be taken as the secret motto of much surrealist art. For analogous reasons, Adorno endorses the "shock-effects" of surrealist montage, In montage, "the paradox that the operation of a rationalized world is a result of historical becoming is perceived as shock : ...the sensory apparatus of the individual is traumatized by the discovery that the rational is actually irrational" (440). The shock effect de-fetishizes

by exploding the pretense of a rationalized capitalist life-world to being natural and eternal. This realization is produced via the deconstruction and remounting of the everyday imagery of the life-world itself whose transient, historical character thus stands exposed.

Perhaps the most startling turn-about in *Aesthetic Theory* relating to surrealism is Adorno's concerted attempt to legitimate the category of montage, Certain dangers still inhere in montage as an artistic technique : "What makes montage feeble," Adorno observes, "is its inability to expose individual elements," its "adapting the ready-made material supplied from outside" (83). Yet, there are no artistic procedures immune from abuse—not even Schoenperg's employment of the twelve—tone system.

Aside from the above, by now familiar criticism, Adorno goes out of his way to indicate the many positive contributions of montage. For one, montage effectuates a praiseworthy change in conventional habits of perception : as a technique that "reached its zenith with surrealism .. montage shuffles and reshuffles elements of reality as seen by healthy common sense so as to wrest from them a change in direction" (83). "Montage, "Adorno observes, "arose in opposition to mood-laden art" (i, e., impressionism), which sought "to redeem aesthetically what was alienated and heterogeneous." For Adorno, this was a "flimsy conception, all the more so since the supremacy of prosaic thing-likeness over the living stbject just kept increasing." Montage appeared on the scene in salutory contrast to all romanticizing, aesthetic tendencies, in order thereby to give the lie to premature ideological claims to universal harmony and well-being, Montage, which may be defined as the independence of individual elements vis-a-vis the whole, proves fatal to traditional conceptions of organic totality, and thereby testifies to a permanent condition of non-identity. As Adorno comments : "It is against this romantic turn that montage reacted negatively. Montage goes back to the cubist practice of pasting newspaper clippings onto paintings, and so on. The illuslon that art had of becoming reconciled with external reality through figuration was to be destroyed; the nonillusory debris of real life was to be let into the work; no bones were to be made about the break between the two; indeed this break was to be used to be used to good aesthetic effect .. works of art that negate meaning must be able to articulate discontinuity

this is the role played by montage. Montage disavows unity by stressing the disparity of the parts while at the same time affirming unity as a principle of form" (222).Yet montage never remains wholly free of the danger of the "capitulation by art before what is different from it."

There are other features of surrealism that come in for special pr-aise by Adorno as well. Surrealism represents the death-blow to the staiq academicism of all neo-classical academism of all neo-classical art. In it, the images of antiquity are toppled from their Platonic heaven: "In Max Ernst's work they roam about like phantoms among the late nineteenth -century middle class, for which art, neutralized to the form of a cultural heritage, had in fact become a ghost. Wherever those movements which temporarily touched base with Picasso and others focused on antiquity, it was in order to depict it as hell" (415).

Adorno also acknowledges the surrealist dialectic of "art and anti art," a tension that would define so much of artistic modernism. "The surrealist successors of Dadaism rejected art without being able to shake it off completely," (44) Adorno observes. "Surrealism once undertook to rebel against the fetishistic segregation of art in a sphere unto itself. But surrealism moved beyond pure protest and become art" (325). Yet, this ultimate rapprochement with what surrealism once scorned was in no way a compromise with its original intentions (with the notable exception of someone such as Dali, whom Adorno describes as a "jet-set painter"). Instead, this development signaled a process of maturation for surrealism, once it was recognized that the dadaist procedures of bluff and provocation had themselves been recuperated by the insatiable bourgeois appetite for culture and elevated into a new aesthetic norm. Instead, surrealism now sought, unlike dada, to undo bourgeois aestheticism from within, producing a new, de-aestheticized version . As Adorno notes, "eminent surrealists like Max Ernst and Andre Masson who refused any collusion with commercial interests moved towards accepting formal principles...as the idea of shocking people wore off and needed to be replaced by a mode of painting. The step to non-representationality was taken at the moment when surrealists decided to expose the accustomed reality as illusion by illuminating it with the aid of a photgraphic flash, as it were" (363).

In light of such remarks the widespread belief that Adorno simple rejected surrealism in favour of a quasi-mandarin attachment to the music of the vienna school or the "high" modernism in general would seem in need of substantial revision. Certainly, his critique of surrealism (both the 1956 and 1970 verision) was an indirect response to the methodological failings of Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*, that is, Benjamin's materialist conception of the dialectical image as an unmediated montage of *faits sociaux*. This concern accounts for the often ascerbic character of his surrealism critique. As we have tried to show, his fundamental charge of "image - reification" is certainly not without foundation. At the same time, his positive valuation of the movement's worth must also be recognized. It is a valuation that hinges upon the surrealist dialectic of "art and anti-art" : surrealism continues the dadaist assault on bourgeois aestheticism -- i. e., on the bourgeois conception of art as high-brow *divertissement*, yet it astutely perceives that this assult "terminated in something trivial" (44) : infinite repetition or self-caricature. The question surrealism faces then is : how dose one continue to create art after the dadaist unmasking of the extreme complacency of bourgeois aestheticism. The answer given by surrealism -- and that aspect which Adorno singles out ror praise -- is that one incorporates the dadaist anti-aestheticist critique into the very heart of the work of art. In contrast to dadaism, this means one still has "works of art". Yet, these represent works of an entirely different nature from the *affirmative* works of the bourgeois tradition. Instead, one is left with *de-aestheticized works of art* : works of art whish divest themselves voluntarily of the aure of affirmation, in which the moment of refusal or negativity is embodied in the work a priori. For Adorno, this trait represents the hallmark of all authentic mocern art.

In conclusion I would like to return to Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*, specifically to its systematic intentions, which Adorno on occasion found so probiematical.

It is clear that Benjamin himself oscillated in his conception of the *Passagenwork*. From Adorno's 1935 critiqe of the Arcades Expose. it seems it was Benjamin's original intention to portary the phantasmagorical world of nineteenth century commodity production as a kind of mythological hell of eternal repetition (the main motif of Benjamin's discussion of "The Gambler").

This was apparently the fundamental theme of early drafts of the study (circa 1929) which Benjamin had read to Adorno during their "historic" conversations in Koingstein. [56] The problem was that Benjamin differed with Adorno on two of the most fundamental aspects of "negative dialectics" : ideology critique and the ***Bilderverbot***. Benjamin's rejection of both components was inter-related. As Jurgen Habermas has demonstrated, Benjamin, in opposition to the Frankfurt School theorists, related ***conservatively*** rather than ***critically*** to hisobjects of study. [57] He was less concerned with the unmasking of ideological illusion than he was with preserving endangered semantic potentials, a method Habermas has described felicitously as "redemptive criticism". Indeed it may be said that for Benjamin all knowledge that fails to concern itself with the question of redemption remains partial and inferior. This was an attitude, to be sure, he carried over to the Arcades Project. It too would be an exercise in redemptive criticism-- an attempt to redeem forgotten semantic potentials and traces of meaning; yet, one that would surmount the "negativism" of the earlier ***Trauerspiel*** book, where the 17th century was viewed as an age of decline. Indeed, Benjamin felt compelled to remind himself of this attitudinal change on occasion in his notes : "The pathos of this work : no eras of decline (***verfallszeiten***)."[58]

I have already indicated what it was Benjamin hoped to "redeem" from the phenomenal manifestations of the 19th century social life : images of utopia ("wish" or "dream-images") produced by a fruitful intermingling ("correspondences") of past and contemporary historical life. Humanity's dream, dating from the immemorial, for a utopian social order -- a "classless society" -- was sedimented in the phenomenal forms of bourgeois existence; yet here they remained inprisoned in the perverse, distorted framework of a commodity producing society. Only once the iniquitous relations of production were transformed in keeping with the utopian potentiality of the mode of production itself -- which was capable for the first time in history of delivering a society of plenty and abundance -- would this historical situation be rectified. Indeed, the "ambivalence" in capitalism as a social formation lay precisely in the fact that this capacity for a society of utopian abundance remained distorted by the fetishistic traits of a commodity producing society.

Benjamin's intention in the *Passagenwerk* was thus to blast the new times, or moments of utopian potential out of their phantasmogorical imprisonment in 19th century social life. In Benjamin's time, the inter-war years, these potentials lived on as faint memory traces that were growing fainter by the day. Essetially, they took on the form of *ruins*: the 19th century phantasmagoia was not handed down "intact", but in a state of advanced decay. It is not difficult to see that the phenomenal elements he took as privileged objects of investigation in the *Passagenwerk*--arcades, world exhibitions, iron constructions, gas lighting, barricades, etc. --possessed a tenuous if not negligible value while Benjamin was setting his notes for the project to paper in the 1930s. The arcade in which the first half of Benjamin never tried to conceal the fact that his Baudelaire studies embodies a type of *Passagenwerk in nuce*. The essential statement of his positive revaluation of the concept is to be found in the following passage : "Experiences of the aura thus rest on the transposition of a response common to human relationships to the relationships between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in return. ***To perceive the aura of an object means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.***"[60] To perceive the aura of an object means to endow it with humanized, animate traits usually reserved for relations between persons. It means to conceive of inanimate objects *fraternally* rather than manipulatively, to grant them the capacity to project attributes which transcend their simple *Zuhandensein*. It bespeaks an earlier *ensouled* relationship of nature to humanity, one that the modern age has all but repressed. To be sure, there is something of this attribution of supranatural, spiritual characteristics to objects (or nature) in Kant's discussion of the sublime.

Benjamin offers a number of suggestive illustrations from the cultural sphere where the aura is displayed in exemplary fashion. Among these, three stand out. The poetry of Baudelaire is a *locus classicus* of auraticism. The *correspondances* establish a collective relationship to past historical life where nature is viewed fraternally. And as Benjamin observes, "where there is experience in the strictest sense, contents of the individual past combine with materials of the collective past."[61]

Secondly, Benjamin takes up the *memoire involuntaire* of Proust. This faculity produces that wealth of spontaneous, inexhaustible, and elusive associations that crystallize in the stream of *madeleine* - triggered reminiscences. The *memoire involuntaire* is the repository par excellence of non-mechanical, unreifiable experience. As Benjamin states : "If the distinctive feature of the images that rise from the *memoire involuntaire* is seen in their aura, then photography is decisively implicated in the phenomenon of the 'decline of the aura'. "[62]

Yet, it is perhaps in our third example. that of painting versus photography, that Benjamin's *volte-face* in comparison the "Work of Art" essay is most transparent. Whereas photography is eminently non-auratic--it lacks fhe all important capacity to return the gaze--precisely the opposite is true of painting : "the painting we look at reflects back at us that of which our eyes will never have their fill ... [To] the eyes that will never have their fill of a painting, photography is like food for the hungry or drink for the thirsty. "[63] That is, photography is deprived of experience jn the meaningfull sense; its satisfactions are much more mundane (like eating and drinking) ; it is fully implicated in the atrophy of experience characteristic of a reified life-world; unlike auratic poetry, literature, or painting, it provides no effective bulwark against the process of *Sinnverlust* (decay of meaning) that characterizes an increasingly rationalized bourgeois world.

I would like to suggest that what Benjamin was seeking to redeem so fervently in the *Passagenwerk* was precisely the type of "experience in a crisis-proof form" suggested by the foregoing definitions of the aura. It was precisely such experiential traces that he detected in the "wish-images of utopia" that distinguished 19th century life and whose preservation he deemed so essential. Therein lay motivation for the "labor of recollection" that defined his efforts.

In many respects, however, this was a project that was fore-doomed from the outset, not merely because of Benjamin's uneviable material circumstances, but for compelling conceptual reasons. Fredric Jameson has made much of the "nostalgic" dimension of Benja nin's work. [64] Whether or not this category could be said to represent the

dominant aspect of his thought, Benjamin certainly lamented the passing of previous historical eras in which *use - value* had as yet not been fully sacrificed to *exchange - value*. One need only consult the opening pages of "The Storyteller" for irrefutable proof to this effect.

The *Passagenwerk* was uncompletable because the world - historical march of disenchantment outstripped the powers of Benjamin's retrospective gaze. That is, it became increasingly evident that there was nothing left that could return the gaze of the dialectical theorist in his search for auratic traces and *correspondances*. For in order to return the gaze, an object must bear certain vestiges of ensoulment. Such was the nature of the innumerable dream configurations of 19th century life. Yet, this remained true only insofar as in this era alone *artisanal and mechanized production techiques overlapped*. It was this historically unique conjuncture - - a period of transition between precapitalist and capitalist epochs--which alone provided fertile soil for that commingling of old and new elements on which the utopian hopes of Benjamin's project were based. In this sense the 19th century represented the privileged, inimitable locus for Benjamin's study. Yet, if the Weberian *Entzauberungsprozess* has progressed with such implacable sway that the last vestiges of pre-capitalist existence - - i. e., an existence in which objects still bore the distinctive feautures of direct human fashioning, where production was not determined solely by the demands of "abstract labor" - - had been irredeembly extirpated, would the correspondegces Benjamin sought after still be forthcoming ? In this respect, as we have already indicated, the intentions of Benjamin's project paralleled the surrealist interest in infusing everyday objects with the traces of desire and mystery which they were deprived of qua commodities.

If the transitional era described above was the *sine qua non* of Benjemin's *Passagenwerk*, in our epoch his project cannot help but have an anachronistic - - even nostalgic - - ring to it. Expressed indelicately, this means that "his objects are not our objects." We can conceive of such correspondences only as effects proper to an historical past our links with which grow more tenuous by the day. For ours is a world of pre-fabricated images, built-in obsolescence, urban sprawl (and blight), computer languages, a "society of information," in which even nostalgia must be artificially induced by periodic media blitzes. In such a world, not only objects but also other persons have lost the capacity to "return the gaze".

Notes and References

1. Adorno's phrase in *Negative Dialectics* (New York, 1973), p.
2. An all too neglected step in this direction has been taken by Heinz Paetzold in *Neo-Marxistische Asthetik* (Dusseldorf, 1974), 2 volx.
3. Benjamin, *Passagenwerk* I (Frankfurt, 1983, p. 588.
4. Benjamin, *Briefe* I, G. Scholem and T. W. Adorno, eds. (Frankfurt, 1966) p. 390.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 663.
6. Benjamin, "Das Proframm der kommenden Philosophie," *Gesammelte Schriften* II (1) (Frankfurt, 1974), p. 158.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
10. *Ibid.* p. 159; emphasis added.
11. Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, 1971), p. 96.
12. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (A an Arbor, 1974), p. 14.
13. Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York, 1982); see especially chapter 3, "Ideas and Theory of Knowledge," pp. 79-106. See also Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin* of *Negative Dialectics* (New York, 1977),
14. Of. *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 72. For Burger, surrealism becoms the paradigm of the "historical avant-garde". I have criticized Burger' As interpretation of surrealism in my eassy "Communism and the Avant-Garde," *Thesis* 11 (Summer, 1985).
15. Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London, 1977), p. 33.
16. Benjamin, *Passagenwerk* I, pp. 591-492.
17. F. Rosenzwelg, *Der Stern der Erlosung* (1976), p. 323.
    For a conceptual history of nunc stans, see *Historisches worterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 6 (Darmstadt. 1986,)pp. 990-991.
18. Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 34.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Bloch, "Revueform in der Philosophie," *Eroschaft dieser Zeit* (Frankfurt, 1962). pp. 367-371.
21. Bloch, "Erinnerungen," in Adorno et al., *Uber Walter Benjamin* (Frankturt, 1968), pp. 22-23.
22. Bloch, *Erbscnaft dieser zeit*, p. 371.
23. Benjamin, *Passagenwerk* 1 p. 574.
24. It should be pointed out that Rolf liedemann, editor of the magisterial 6-volume edition of Benjamin s work. has recently challenged Adorno's idea that the *Passegenwerk* was to consist of a "montage of citations." Cf. "Einleltung des Herausgebers", *Passagenwerk* I, p. 13.
25. Bloch. "Erinnerungen," *op cit.*, p. 22.

26. Benjamin, *Passagenwerk* I, p. 574.
27. For Adorno's systematic epistemological reflections on the problem, see the section of *Negative Dialectics* entitled " Vorrang des Objekts", mistranslated in English as "Preponderance of the Object "
28. Benjamin, *Briefe* II, pp1 489, 496.
29. *Ibid* , p. 491.
30. Benjamin, "Surrealism," *Reflections* (New York, 1978), p. 179.
31. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 241.
32. Benjamin, *Reflections*, p. 182.
33. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, pp. 10-11.
34. Adorno, *Uber Walter Benjamin* (Frankfurt, 1970), pp. 53-54.
35. The Marx citation can be found in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, R.Tucker ed. (New York, 1978), p. 15. It is cited by Benjamin on p 583 of the *Passagenwerk*.
36. The first two quotations are from pp. 1002 and 580 of the *Passagenwerk*. The ensuing citations are culled from the section entitled "City of Dreams, Future-Dreams, Anthropological Nihilism," pp. 493-496.
37. Benjamin, "Paris. die Haupstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts," *Passagenwerk* p. 55.
38. Benjamin' *Passagenwerk*, p. 499.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 491-492.
40. In terms of the general aesthetics of Critical Theory, it would be extremely germane to examine Herbert Marcuse's attempt to integrate surrealist principles. His major discussion of surrealism can be found in *An Eassy on Liberation* (Boston, 1969).
41. Cf. Buck-Morss *The Origin af Negative Dialectics* (New York, 1977), E. Lunn, Marxism and Modernism (Berkeley, 1982), and Jay, *Marxism and Totality* (Berkeley, 1984) and *Adorno* (Cambridge Mass., 1984), p. 129.
42. For a representative sampling of Lukacs' aesthetic judgments, one might consult the following works ; *Realism in Our Time* (New York, 1971), *Studies in Europeen Realism* (New York, 1964), and *Essays on Thomas Mann* (Cambridge, Mass, 1965. See also the discussion by Lunn *Marxism and Modernism*, pp. 75-145, *passim*.
43. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (New York, 1973), p. 51.
44. Adorno, "Looking Back on Surrealism," in *Litcrary Modernism* Irving Howe, ed. (New York, 1967) p. 223. Any effort to translate Adorno isheroic. It must be said, however, that this translation is lacking in a number of absolutely essential respects. Hence, I have altered it freely in keeping with the German original, which can be found in *Noten zur Literatur* I (Frankfurt, 1958) pp. 155-162,
45. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire : A Lyric Poet in the Era of High*

Capitalism (London, 1973), p. 150.

46. Adrono, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London, 1977), p. 111.
47. Cf. Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, pp. Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism*, pp. 162-172; Wolin, *Walter Benjamin : An Aesthetic of Redemption*, pp. 198-207.
48. Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 167.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 129-130.
50. Adorno, "Looking Back on surrealism," *op cit.*, p. 22.
51. Cited in Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, p. 269n.
52. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt, 1966), p. 162.
53. Adorno, "Looking Back on Surrealism", p. 224.
54. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, C. Lenhardt, trans. (London, 1984), p. 44. All subsequent references will appear in parenthesis.
55. Cf. R. Wolin, "The De-aestheticization of Art : on Adorno's *Aesthetische Theorie*, *Telos* 41 (Fall, 1979).
56. Cf. Adorno's letter in *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 112, in which he specifically reproaches Benjamin for having gone back on the earlier version in favour of the 19th century as a "Golden Age."
57. Habermas, "Consciousness Raising or Redemptive Criticism," *New German Critique* 17 (Spring, 1979).
58. Benjamin, *Passagenwerk*, p. 1-23.
59. Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, 1969), pp. 222 223.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
61. *Ibid.*, 190.
62. *Ibid.*, 189.
63. *Ibid.*
64. The chapter on Benjamin in *Marxism and Form* is entitled "Walter Benjamin or Nostalgia".

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