On Some Motifs in Benjamin: Historiography as an Ethical Mode

Keith Leslie Johnson

I) One or Several Kafkas

*The more we understand particular things, the more
we understand God.* – Spinoza, *The Ethics*[1]

In his recent book on Deleuze, Slavoj Žižek writes, "One of the unwritten rules of today's academia, from France to America, is the injunction to love Spinoza."[2] Perhaps no other philosopher cuts so sympathetic a figure, appealing to quite so broad a range of typically opposed camps. Everyone it would seem has nice things to say about Spinoza. Even some Christian and Jewish pietists, ironically, smile upon him nowadays, though they call him by different names. Whether Benedict or Baruch, Spinoza is the philosopher one *can't help* but love; or can one? Žižek himself hints at the *thorny* nature of Spinoza's amenability in the very act of touting it: tellingly, the injunction – and why is it an injunction, a fiat, and by whom is it levied? – extends only "from France to America." Žižek seems unaware of this equivocation, though he is later explicit about another. But first we must consider those who have apparently escaped the injunction to love Spinoza (not least of whom are the Slovenians!). Isn't the partitioning almost too simple, too straightforwardly political: post-Marxian states east of the Rhine with a soft spot for Hegel versus liberal democracies west of it with a predilection for Spinoza? That is to say, aren't we talking about two opposed ideological dispensations that condition ethical allegiances and not about ethical allegiances per se? Žižek quickly bypasses this (perhaps too obvious) point, contextualizing the issue within the decidedly more rarefied field of Cultural Studies. But this is only a feint, for while Žižek maintains that Spinoza is by all lights "totally incompatible with what is arguably the hegemonic stance of Cultural Studies, that of the ethico-theological 'Judaic' turn of deconstruction best exemplified by the couple Derrida/Levinas," yet both Spinozans and deconstructionists alike are enthusiastically united against Hegel. This intriguing point of apposition is implicit in the first equivocation mentioned above, though here almost entirely stripped of its (geo-) political valence, an uncharacteristic, un-Žižekian reification (of the depoliticizing gesture necessary and prior to the formation of the signifier 'Cultural Studies'), but one nonetheless symptomatic of a deep inconsistency in Cultural Studies itself, what Tom Cohen has called a "'bewitched' spot."[3]

For couldn't we also say of Benjamin what we say of Spinoza, only with all of the political valences inverted? Is not one of the unwritten rules of today's academia – not only from France to America, but the whole world round – the injunction to love Benjamin? And what's more, enjoying the affections of Spinozans, Hegelians, and deconstructionists alike (not to mention new historicists, urban theorists, Marxists, mystics, marijuana-activists), Benjamin would appear to be even *more* loveable than Spinoza. And more problematic as well.[4] True, those who love Benjamin tend to focus on a particular phase of his career to the exclusion of the other "abortive" or "misguided" phases; and true, Benjamin had more phases than most, sometimes more than one at a given time; but must we not conclude that something is pathologically wrong – if not with Benjamin himself, then with the history of his reception – if so many conflicting political agendas claim him for their own? One should hope not! Perhaps a different and less polemical way to put this dilemma is to think of it as a history of "productive misprisions," *mis*takes accomplished with varying degrees of consciousness in the name of some theoretical or political agenda bound up with the stakes of history itself.[5] The competing

claims on Benjamin and the misprisions which structure those claims cannot, though, be seen as negatively delineating some "true," neutral ground of understanding (i.e. what Benjamin "really meant") arrogated unto the disinterested, Archimedean critic; rather, they indicate that such a position – what Adorno all-too-optimistically suggested by the term *mediation* – is impossible: we are all in this sense stuck in a "bewitched" spot, which may take us back to a reading of Žižek's blithe-seeming remark about Spinoza: that one cannot approach him except from within an "erotic" economy of investment, or more simply *desire*.

If, in self-perpetuation, desire multiplies its object, we can begin to see why there are so many Benjamins. Perhaps the salutary thing is to go back to where we began, with Deleuze, that most productive of mis-readers and most enthusiastic of Spinozan pluralists, and examine his way of approaching the "bewitched spot" or crossroads both of Benjamin's thought and its reception. (If the Spinoza-Benjamin-Deleuze circuit seems a bit unnecessary at this stage, it will, I hope, be justified by what follows.) It is not entirely surprising to note that Deleuze's access to Benjamin comes by way of Kafka, whose preoccupations and anxieties were so near to Benjamin's own and whose prophecies and devastations were directed to futures and traditions so vivid to him. [6] John McCole goes so far as to claim that

> the foci of Benjamin's own work were essentially those he attributed to Kafka: a mystical experience of tradition and the experience of the modern big-city dweller. The individual by the name of Franz Kafka might just as well have been named Walter Benjamin.[7]

In other words, the stakes are more or less the same in both Benjamin's and Kafka's work (as Benjamin himself conceived them): the very meaning of modernity – or, perhaps more acutely, the possibility of its meaning – caught in the force-field generated between tradition on the one hand and technology, say, on the other.[8] For both writers, arguably, this force-field becomes most visible when confronted historiographically, not in terms of history itself, but in one's (and one's culture's) expressive relation to history. The question of historiography for Benjamin and Kafka both is essentially an ethical one: how to express history (or even conceive of it) without capitulating to the dehumanizing forces of tradition and technology, each of which "see" history as either the mythical or rational unfolding of its own *telos* and not necessarily as the dynamism of properly human relations (relations with other humans, with animals and objects, with the Other itself[9]). Historiography, in short, is for Kafka and Benjamin the expression of a "particular" world.[10] It is the particularity of the world which mitigates the universality and impersonality of technology on the one hand and the individuality and contingency of tradition on the other.[11] The dilemma of modernity as it relates to its own history, however, is located precisely at this bewitched spot: man in his particularity is inadequate to express history; without recourse to the mythic dimension of tradition – truth has withered away, leaving only "rumor" and "folly" – and with no means of appeal to the inhuman dimension of technology – truth has calcified, becoming only "fact" and "datum" – man gives himself over to a temporality of events [*Erlebnis*] without experience as such [*Erfahrung*]. In the current of these events, man is paradoxically immobilized, and it is this condition of arrest which defines not only man's diminished historical situation, but his ethical one as well.

Like the man in Kafka's parable, then, we dare not enter into the Law for fear of the doorkeepers who guard it, each more formidable than the last. To wait upon our stool is morally rebarbative, to seize the doorkeeper by his "black Tartar beard," impossible. But even if we could gain access to the Law and navigate its endless corridors and offices, the little kiosk of Ethics at its center is permanently closed. To develop this point a bit, we might look at the lesser-known companion piece to the parable of the Law, "An Imperial Message," which describes the inverse state of affairs (i.e. a personalized, specific transmission *from* the Other's impenetrable position). The emperor from his deathbed has issued a vital message for "you" alone, but it will never arrive, despite the efforts of the indefatigable messenger; the royal throng is too thick and the castle-complex too wide. Here it is not the supplicant's timidity and powerlessness that prevent audience with the Other, as in "Before the Law," but the very

symbolic structures – the phantasmatic supports – surrounding the Other (e.g. innumerable chambers and courtyards, stairways and battlements, all of which both *represent* and *effect* the Other's infinite remove). It is important to note, though, that this situation, the situation of infinite remove, does not release one from the thrall of the Other; on the contrary, the asymmetry of the relation – the "humble subject" of the parable is an "insignificant shadow cowering in the remotest distance before the imperial sun" – obligates one all the more: "you sit by the window and dream it all true, when evening falls."[12] The encounter with the Other, such as it is, only occurs at the level of dreams, which is also the level of "truth" for Kafka – or to put it more precisely, in dreams one encounters truth in its inconsistency, in its incoherence. There is no encounter proper – the subject exists in perpetual night, everlasting darkness. But through that darkness comes the vocative: one must wait for the message that never arrives because it is this message, this interpellation which constitutes "you" as a subject; on the other hand, a message unequivocally *does* arrive, namely, that *your message will never arrive*. Put in these terms, the two parables together provide something like an ethical tableau: the irreducible rectitude of the Other (here figured as the impenetrability of the Law) and ceaseless industry of the Self (here figured as the pining subject who, in the absence of the emperor's message, dreams one up). There is no mediating distance between the Self and Other, no *pons asinorum* that, if only traversed, would allow conceptual access from one to the other, each exists in its own spot, bewitched.

It is at such an absurd impasse that Deleuze and Guattari's take on (Benjamin's take on) Kafka becomes so obviously valuable. The concept of "minor literature" presented by Deleuze and Guattari in their study of Kafka is not simply a theoretical end-around but a powerful articulation of the ethical problematic of historiography with which Benjamin himself was so preoccupied. In other words, its theoretical vocabulary (particularly "deterritorialization") is wholly germane both to issues of anti-normative ethics and, simultaneously, to issues of (literary) form. For what is the so-called "tetralinguistic model" of Kafka for Deleuze and Guattari if not an historiographical space opened up by linguistic deterritorialization for an ethical intervention? The interactions – real and virtual – between Kafka's vehicular language (German), vernacular language (Czech), mythic language (Hebrew), and referential language (Yiddish) yield a "blur of languages, and not at all a system of languages"; this blur of languages in turn yields a "blur [of history], a mixed-up history, a political situation."[13] Blurriness, insofar as it is the hallmark of a de-calcified history, a mosaic-history, becomes both the aesthetic and the ethic of literary and historiographical discourse: literary discourse becomes an atonal chorus of languages (Deleuze and Guattari cite Austrian dodecaphonists as exemplars of a corollary deterritorialization) and historiographical discourse can no longer be conceived as the chronological archiving of events within a monolithic temporality or for that matter within any temporality that sustains the coherence of "events." The form in which such a blurry, fragmented discourse occurs must itself undergo a deterritorialization of the sort Benjamin seems to call for in "The Author as Producer" (written the same year as his longest meditation on Kafka, 1934, and furthermore deploying some of the same concepts, notably the *gestus*): it is not enough for the historiographer, like the writer, to possess the "correct political tendency" without the "correct literary tendency": this latter tendency ensures that the ethical historiographer not reify bourgeois values by submitting to the "[traditional] apparatus of production and publication": rather, the correct literary tendency, like Brecht's epic theater, operates through "interruption," "montage," and "gestus," those effects which fragment the generic and formal traits of a text.[14] For the author to become a producer, he or she must shatter and reconfigure (i.e. deterritorialize) form and genre with every text or else tacitly sanction the status quo. Any history, no matter how radical its political tendency, will (counterproductively and against its own grain) end up "working in the services of certain [i.e. bourgeois] class interests," (768) unless it somehow manages to enact such a deterritorialization.

It is remarkable, if we understand Benjamin's position in this essay as obtaining to historiography as well as literature, to note how many great historians, historians with unblemished political credentials, nonetheless fall short of the mark when it comes to the correct *literary* tendency. While it is assumed that Benjamin could appreciate the political and methodological sensibilities at work in Zinn or Darnton[15] or his contemporaries at the *Annales* School, yet he still might have ample cause for

reservation. Cultural history alone, insofar as it might represent the correct *political* tendency, is not enough, it must be couched in a *literary* form which won't undermine it. By way of answering "what is such a form?" we may ask another question altogether. Who are the emblematic figures for Benjamin, his de facto historiographers? The rag-picker scavenging through rubbish heaps, the *flâneur* dawdling before shop displays, the prostitute who can tell you of every cocotte and bobby who ever walked her beat, the collector of salt and pepper shakers, and so on. These figures indeed imply an allegiance to cultural history, but Benjamin isn't simply trading macro-history for micro-history or the history of events for the history of *mentalités*: it is more an intuition of how we might see history, so to speak, otherwise-than-narrative or otherwise-than-"emplotted," to use Hayden White's term.[16] For if, as Benjamin maintains, the materials of culture truly are monadic, then we need not literally reconstitute the *longue durée* as a narrative (even one as magisterial as Braudel's) – a discarded mannequin will suffice for that.

The formal and/or generic deterritorialization required of the ethical historiographer in turn coincides with linguistic deterritorialization. In an essay on Benjamin's conception of language and history, Giorgio Agamben cites a preparatory note to "On the Concept of History" which somewhat clarifies how an ethical historiography might entail such a linguistic deterritorialization:

> The messianic world is the world of total and integral actuality. In it alone is there universal history. What goes by the name of universal history today can only be a kind of Esperanto. Nothing can correspond to it as long as the confusion originating in the Tower of Babel is not smoothed out. It presupposes the language into which every text of a living or dead language must be wholly translated. Or, rather, it itself is this language. Not, though, as written, but as festively celebrated. This celebration is purified of every ceremony; it knows no celebratory songs. Its language is the idea of prose itself, which is understood by all humans just as the language of birds is understood by those born on Sunday. [17]

Agamben uses this rather eccentric passage as a staging ground from which to launch a meditation on both the "idea of prose" – of the formal order considered above – and the "power of nomination" – or the strictly linguistic order.[18] The realm of history, for Agamben, is a profound (because counterintuitive) case where we can witness the ironic fusion of formal and linguistic orders in the very moment of their fragmentation: "The historical condition of human beings is inseparable from their condition as speaking beings; it is inscribed in the very mode of their access to language, which is originally marked by a fracture."[19] The fracture of language becomes thematized as the historical fragment is, in turn, thematized as the ruin, the arcade, the collection, etc. Because of these fragments and fractures, the possibility of a "universal history" is foreclosed to us, but fragmentation itself implies a poetics of redemption.

While redemptive "universal history" is impossible prior to the messianic age, Benjamin indicates how language is to be bound up in it. And as we understand how language is to be bound up in it, we begin to see how form is to be bound up in it. The multiplicity of languages which stand in the way of universal history will not be done away with in the messianic age through the installation of a pure, inviolate, Adamic language, but rather through an act of "translation." We are taken back, stunningly, to an image from an equally seminal text of Benjamin's early career, "The Task of the Translator," wherein the translator restores the potshards of the shattered vessel. It is important to recall in this regard the fine exegeses of Paul de Man and Carol Jacobs, both of whom note that such a restoration does not eliminate the fragmented, fragmentary nature of the vessel, but simply arranges its fragments into a wholeness; in other words, Benjamin sees translation as a situation in which multiplicity is preserved as sublation.[20] Just as the translator is not concerned with (impossibly) replicating the exact, denotative meanings of a text, but rather its "mode of meaning," so too the ethical historiographer does not capture the past "as it really was," but rather "seize[s] hold of memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" in order to "blast open the continuum of history":

> Materialist historiography . . . is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history.[21]

Agamben is careful to note that the redemption of Benjamin's "oppressed past" does not involve its rescue from "obliteration or scorn" but from "a determinate mode of its transmission." Indeed, it would make little sense to redeem history from one mode of calcification only to consign it to another. What vanishes, in a way (and oddly, at first), is *meaning*, at least meaning in its current fallen sense as that which is installed in the *gap* or *fracture* between signifier and signified, between past and present. Agamben reminds us that for Benjamin, the messianic world is one of "integral actuality" wherein it would be non-sensical to say that something "means what it says" as if these were distinct categories (meaning and saying). Rather,

> [the] division of the plane of language, which simultaneously grounded the inextricable intertwining of language and history and guaranteed their asymptotic noncoincidence, now disappears and gives way to a perfect identity of language and history, praxis and speech [. . .] Here language disappears as an autonomous category; it is possible neither to make any distinct image of it nor to imprison it in any writing. Human beings no longer write their language; they celebrate it as a holiday without rites, and they understand each other "just as those born on Sunday understand the language of birds."[22]

———

We have covered a lot of ground very quickly, so it would be prudent to do a little stock-taking. If universal history is the history of the messianic age (even if it is inauthentically and incompletely practices by historians today), then what is the history appropriate to modernity? We have a sense of it, however hazy, from the *Arcades Project* and its lineaments are disclosed as early as the *Trauerspiel* study, but how are they further elaborated in the later works? Beatrice Hanssen has very acutely addressed some of these questions, in the process fleshing out Benjamin's "ethico-theological call for another kind of history, one no longer purely anthropocentric in nature and anchored only in the concerns of human subjects." This other kind of history, this *Natur-geschichte* "referred to a process of transience and to a logic of decay that radically undermined Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment conceptions of human history, anchored in categories of human freedom and historical teleology."[23] The aesthetic of such a history, the one that would determine its form, is most clearly laid out in the section of the *Trauerspiel* book entitled "The Ruin" – a "negative" trope[24] that would preoccupy Benjamin – where the work of art and historiography both are figured as the rubble of thought, the relics of knowledge:

> When, as in the case of Trauerspiel, history becomes part of the setting, it becomes part of the script. The word "history" stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience. The allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history, which is put on stage in the Trauerspiel, is present in reality in the form of a ruin. In the ruin history has merged into the setting.[25]

But there is something more radical about the nature-history, apart from its form and logic of disarticulation: an anarchic quality related to its implicit ethical stance toward the natural world, one which does not privilege the human. This ethical stance takes us back to the emblematic function of

Kafka in Benjamin's philosophy; Kafka, whose attentions to the creaturely open up "an alterity that surpasse[s] the confines of the merely human."[26] It is Kafka who helps us to understand just how startlingly the ethical stakes are raised in Benjamin's historiography, for it is now responsible to multiple orders of existence, to which both man and mouse will appeal for justice! Assessing Benjamin's understanding of Kafka's prose, Beatrice Hanssen notes that "[in] exposing a world filled with boglike creatures, animals, bastard offspring, half-forms, and 'nebulous female creatures'[. . .][it] uncovered the hidden side of the 'legal world of Judaism' that resided in law itself."[27] Secreted in the very heart of the bright world of norms and protocols is a shadow world consigned to oblivion. In other words, our "detour" through Kafka has in some measure clarified what *specifically* this other kind of history will entail for Benjamin (the erasure of the hierarchical distinction between human and animal life, for example) and how it impinges on and responds to ethical concerns. But once we reach that point, once we are able to see why there are several Kafkas, several Benjamins – why they must (until the Messiah comes) ally themselves with equivocality, multiplicity, fragmentation – the whole circumnavigation required to "get there" (Žižek on Deleuze on Benjamin on Kafka) is obviated: the ladder is drawn up behind us and we can now revisit the argument more carefully.

II) To Blast Open the Continuum of History

We need history, certainly, but we need it for reasons different
from those for which the idler in the garden of knowledge needs
it, even though he may look nobly down on our rough and
charmless needs and requirements. We need it, that is to say,
for the sake of life and action . . . – Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*[28]

If only in the abstract, we have thus far achieved some insight into the three gestures which formally define Benjamin's ethico-materialist historiography in *The Arcades Project*: the quotation, the aphorism, and the fragment. Upon such "flimsy" armatures, Benjamin places a great weight: to express, indirectly or apophatically, the condition of man's historical arrest, his fragmentation, his multiplicity – but in a way susceptible to dialectic, to messianic restoration. Convolute N in particular thematizes this burden as it proceeds, through a series of quotations, aphorisms, and fragments, to critique the teleological, Hegelian notion of history, offering itself in its place as a model of historiography sufficient unto the day. As early as the *Trauerspiel* study, Benjamin had maintained that the "spatialization of historical time" was central to the very notion of modernity; "pursue the question," he later wrote in Convolute N, "of whether a link exists between the secularization of time into space and the allegorical perspective."[29] In this fragment he wonders if this aspect of modernity, its relation to historical time (imaged in the ruin), were not prefigured in the allegorical form of Trauerspiel. Form was always very much on Benjamin's mind, even in that early text – and not simply in terms of the formal differences between Trauerspiel and tragedy, but rather in the form his analysis itself should take. Though one can hardly blame Benjamin's habilitation committee for their disorientation, particularly when confronted with the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue," Benjamin's emphasis on (allegorical) form in the text should have been seen as a clue to the text's (allegorical) form – a point that will be considered more carefully in the following section. Returning to Convolute N, it is easy to see how its visual-formal fragmentation – its ruination, so to speak – itself comprises a new form of historiography, one commensurate to spatialized historical time. Benjamin is as explicit on this point as possible: "Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't *say* anything. Merely show."[30] Benjamin's tendency therefore isn't so much to trace out an argument as to display its elements, a tendency which led Fredric Jameson to compare his works to "a kind of vast museum, a passionate collection, of all shapes and varieties of allegorical objects."[31]

Within this montage or *Wunderkammer* of allegorical objects, the ruin emerges as a particularly gravid emblem of both spatialized historical time and historiography both. "Allegories," Benjamin had

written in the *Trauerspiel* study, "are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things."[32] What appears somewhat cryptic in this early formulation is clarified later in Convolute N: "Historical materialism must renounce the epic element in history. It blasts the epoch out of the reified 'continuity of history'. But it also explodes the homogeneity of the epoch, interspersing it with ruins – that is, with the present" (*AP* 474). To sum up what this circuit between the *Trauerspiel* study and Convolute N delineates, then, we have first of all the "baroque vision of history as chronicle, as the relentless turning of the wheel of fortune"; secondly, the correlation of that vision or mentality with the structure of allegory; thirdly, an instance of that structure in the image of the ruin; and lastly, the formal homology of that image in the literary fragment, the quotation, and aphorism – or briefly, in form. The ultimacy of form in this circuit should not surprise us: like an ouroboros it turns about to swallow its own tail. If the logic of Benjamin's historiography is allegorical and if his conception of allegory derives from *Trauerspiel*, then it only stands to reason that Benjamin's historiography should, like *Trauerspiel*, "[veer] about slowly into a question of *form*, which is to say of allegory itself. For allegory is precisely the dominant mode of expression of a world in which things have been for whatever reason utterly sundered from meanings, from spirit, from genuine human existence."[33] What better allegory of such a world, of such an historical situation – one filled to brimming with what Jameson refers to as the "vices of melancholy" – than ruins? For Benjamin, the ruin is not a nostalgic object which re-connects us with a lost or forgotten past; the ruin is very much of the present, it is the palpable reminder of our own ephemerality and of our ethical failure to redeem history. Such a redemption can only occur when we cease trying to reunite historical objects with their "proper" meanings and instead create entirely new meanings and associations – new allegories.

One of the ways this allegorization can be accomplished is through form, and we come back now to the three gestures mentioned earlier: quotation, aphorism, and fragment. What is the specific allure of these gestures and how do they "blast open the continuum of history"? In asking precisely this question, Richard Wolin seems inadvertently to have provided a possible answer:

> how might one describe the central, overall theoretical thrust of the [Arcades Project]? The answer to [that] question is especially complicated by the fact that, as is well known, the [. . .] Arcades Project remains a torso; and moreover, one extremely difficult to reconstruct. Many of the "Konvoluten" for the study consist mainly of citations; and in numerous cases it becomes a matter of sheer conjecture as to how Benjamin himself would have actually made use of the materials in question, owing to the remarkable dearth of supporting commentary (never Benjamin's forte in any event). The point is worth emphasizing, therefore, that in judgments about the [Arcades Project], one is perpetually on shaky ground.[34]

The assumption behind Wolin's comment is that Benjamin must have at some point intended to crochet all of the citations together with exegesis, thereby justifying their inclusion in the convolute and shaping them into a thesis. In other words, Wolin feels that what we have in the *Arcades Project* is not a book per se, but artifactual evidence of a book never written. He certainly is not alone in this completely sensible assumption, but what if it weren't entirely true? Or what if it were true when Benjamin *began* compiling material, but upon reaching a kind of critical mass, the very nature of the project changed? That would certainly induce us to reflect differently on the status of citations within the work.[35] And in fact, several commentators have already begun to move away from the sensible assumption, including Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin who, after summarizing some of the evidence for and against this opinion, conclude that "it seems undeniable that despite the informal, epistolary announcements of a 'book' in the works, an *eigentlichen Buch*, the research project had become an end in itself."[36]

Were it the case that Benjamin began to conceive of the *Arcades Project* in more or less the form in which it has come down to us, what then would be the function of authoritative quotation? We might first of all consider the parade of quotations as a kind of counter-phantasmagoria, intended to mimic and subvert the endless stream of capitalist wish-images found in the *magasins de nouveautés*. Much

like goods in these proto-department stores, quotations appear before one both as dizzying variety *and* gestalt: their procession can leave one a bit disorientated, like the pedestrian whose "attention is spirited away as though by violence" by the diversity of commercial stimuli; at the same time, they appeal to one as a visual mass, like the department store whose "floors form a single space. They can be taken in, so to speak, 'at a glance'." Secondly, the quotations from multiple sources lend the work a choral quality – it is *vielstimmig* – perpetually deterritorializing and reterritorializing itself as each voice is torn from its original context and made to adapt to its new environs, producing in turn strange harmonies and dissonances. Resituating the passages in this way furthermore grants them a kind of *nachleben* or afterlife – they come to exist in a new and dynamic way, severed from their prior existence but for a brief parenthetical citation. Fourthly, the succession of quotations, insofar as it mutes or downplays Benjamin's own authorial voice, undermines the very notion of authorial power while in an uncanny way enacting and enhancing that power in the abstract: the *Arcades Project* might from a certain vantage be conceived as nothing *but* a demonstration of authorial power (though not necessarily Benjamin's). As he writes apropos of Michelet, "[he is] an author who, wherever he is quoted, makes the reader forget the book in which the quotation appears."[37] The *Arcades Project* may in fact be such a book, a book that causes us at each moment to forget it because it prioritizes every other book written on its subject(s) but itself. We might in the end, though, reclaim a measure of authorial power for Benjamin as the orchestrator of this chorus, as the one who deploys the voice strategically, who creates a rhythm of confusions and disclosures. Henry Sussman, for one, perceives just such a rhythm: "Attentive reading of the Convolutes reveals precisely where Benjamin installed critico-philosophical time bombs amid the apparent 'cloudlike mountains'…of seemingly random citations and extracts."[38] For Sussman, the vague passages of the text, its *longueurs* and obfuscations, suddenly give way to startlingly bold and crystalline salvos. The rhythm of the text is one of lulls and shocks, a rhythm, as I've said, orchestrated conscientiously and explicitly by Benjamin:

> Say something about the method of composition itself: how everything one is thinking at a specific moment in time must at all costs be incorporated into the project then at hand. Assume that the intensity of the project is thereby attested, or that one's thoughts, from the very beginning, bear this project within them as their telos. So it is with the present portion of the work, which aims to characterize and to preserve the *intervals of reflection . . .* (*AP* 456, emphasis added)

To produce and intensify these intervals, Benjamin intersperses his quotations with aphorisms and suggestive fragments which either bring out some inconspicuous element of the quotations, or deflect their semantic energies to the next, seemingly unrelated thought or quotation. An example from Convolute H ("The Collector") may suffice to make this point.

Convolute H opens with a brief description of attempts made by the shopkeepers (presumably) of the *Passage Colbert* to attract customers by broadcasting music throughout the rotunda each evening. The subsequent paragraph "inexplicably" invokes Zola's novel *Thérèse Raquin* (which, admittedly, takes place in and around the *Passage du Pont-Neuf* – that is, in the vicinity of an arcade), but the theoretical justification seems a tenuous metaphor at best: "If this book really explains anything scientifically," Benjamin writes, "then it's the death of the Paris arcades, the decay of a type of architecture. The book's atmosphere is saturated with the poisons of this process: its people drop like flies" (*AP* 204). Then a strange fragment – "In 1893, the cocottes were driven from the arcades" – followed by brief discussions of "theatrophones" and finally "cineoramas." What to make of these apparently radical shunts? We are first of all struck by how they follow a conceptual loop between the eye and ear. The arcades are first and foremost a feast for the eyes, a spectacle lavish in visual detail – rebuses, icons, typographies, colors, forms, fabrics, and then of course the throngs of people, rich and poor, determined and dawdling, pickpockets, hausfraus, and so forth. But failing to attract customers, the *Passage Colbert* appeals to the ear with pleasing music which Benjamin informs us "emanated

invisibly from the windows of a mezzanine" (*AP* 201, emphasis added). So the first shunt involves a de-emphasis of the eye in favor of the ear.

Thérèse Raquin situates us once again within the regime of the eye. The *leitmotif* of ethical recollection in this novel is the wide-staring accusatory gaze of Mme. Raquin, Thérèse's mother-in-law, who knows that Thérèse and her lover, Laurent, have killed her son Camille. Struck dumb and paralytic by a series of strokes brought on by this knowledge, Mme. Raquin can only look on helplessly as the murderers slowly resume a "normal" existence, now as man and wife. "Helplessly" is no doubt the wrong word, for Mme. Raquin both accuses and punishes with her eyes.[39] By novel's end, the guilt-wracked lovers have each conspired to kill the other and resolve to consume poison together rather than continue their debauched existence. Apart from the obvious reference to poison, it is above all the motif of the ravening, consuming eye that brings this novel into proximity with the themes of the *Arcades Project*. Mme. Raquin discovers the bodies of Thérèse and Laurent on the floor, now themselves twisted and sprawling ["*tordus, vautrés*"] like paralytics, and for hours she mutely stares at them. Like the shopper transfixed before a window display she stares: "unable to satiate her eyes, she smothered them with her oppressive gaze."[40]

If the loop from eye to ear has been shunted back to the eye via reference to *Thérèse Raquin*, what is the significance of the fragment about the clearing of the cocottes? It may be as much or as little as this: no other seduction is permitted to compete with the arcades themselves. The cocotte both cheapens and distracts from the other wares paraded before the consumer; she brings together the seduction of the eye with the seduction of the ear: the flash of skin and the murmured proposition. In Convolute A, Benjamin had quoted Béraud on this point:

> . . .when the Palais-Royal was invaded by a swarm of practically nude prostitutes, the gaze of the crowd was turned toward them, and the people who enjoyed this spectacle were never the ones who patronized the local businesses. Some were already ruined by their disorderly life, while others, yielding to the allure of libertinism, had no thought then for purchasing any goods, even necessities. (*AP* 43)

It is not then for moral reasons that she must be driven off so much as economic ones. Even Béraud obliquely acknowledges this when libertinism is presented not as an offense in its own right, but as anti-consumerist – those who succumbed to the cocotte's lures "had no thought then for purchasing any goods." The peripheral barter-economy of the cocotte impedes the "legitimate" flow of capital. (Fixed prices and *male* employees were integral to the legitimacy of this flow.)[41] It is no accident that Benjamin later pairs prostitution and gambling in Convolute O: both are morally stigmatized, unwholesome expressions of capitalism itself; their indiscretion is that they openly express its logic: everything is for sale; money (magically) begets money.

But the lesson is learned and technologies associated with the arcades begin to fuse their appeals to the eye and ear into a single multi-sensory or even immersive enticement. The "theatrophone," essentially a primitive form of streaming audio (one could listen to music or news over a dedicated telephone line), etymologically combines the visual and aural, though the visual appeal involved derives not from dramatic enactment or tableau but rather from the incongruity between symphonic grandeur and the image of the mysterious little box that delivers it. Likewise the "cineorama" (itself a primitive form of IMAX or panoramic cinema employing multiple projectors and screens) virtually transports one into a world of sights and sounds – simulated balloon rides were popular; the *Globe Céleste*, "a gigantic sphere forty-six meters in diameter" dominating the riverfront of the Paris Exposition of 1900, allowed one to explore the heavens to the strains of Saint-Saëns: music of the spheres indeed! The logic of these shunts, then, what Benjamin called the "art of citing without quotation marks," is "intimately related to that of montage" (*AP* 458). Quotations, aphorisms, and fragments are not throwaways, neither are they confections or mere transitions, but are central to Benjamin's montage theory of historiography.

Benjamin, of course, was well-versed in the broader tradition of literary fragments and aphorisms as embodied in Romantics like (Friedrich) Schlegel, Novalis, Schopenhauer, and Hölderlin, but it would be two other aphorists, one pre-Romantic, the other post-, who would have definitive influence.[42] The post-Romantic influence, Nietzsche, was likely the first he came upon in any serious kind of way while a student of Gustav Wyneken in 1905 at the Haubinda boarding school in remote Thuringia. Up until the Great War when he became disaffected with Wyneken's militarism, Benjamin modeled himself as a protégé of his former philosophy instructor and was active in the Youth Movement inaugurated by him, publishing several early essays in its organ, *Der Anfang*, under the pseudonym "Ardor." An indoctrination into the thought of Nietzsche was a large part of Wyneken's pedagogical philosophy and many of the formulations and attitudes Benjamin would explore later in life had their origins in this *bildung*. He was immensely attracted to Nietzsche as a stylist and figure – once commenting that Nietzsche's fate was that of "the highest among mature men"[43] – but markedly less enthusiastic about the notion of the Eternal Return, which ran counter to his messianic view of history, a reservation neatly summarized by Beatrice Hanssen: "Benjamin considered Nietzsche's principle of repetition to be an inconclusive and insufficient explanation for one of the central antinomies of history, namely that a principle of repetition manifests itself in the form of historical periods or epochs, while history itself is a singular and unrepeatable process."[44] The goal for Benjamin would be to wed Nietzsche's aphoristic form to a messianic vision of history that could yield an ethical historiography.

The pre-Romantic aphorist who would help Benjamin conceptualize such a model of historiography was Georg Lichtenberg. Benjamin studied the writings of Lichtenberg as part of an extensive bibliography he had been commissioned to produce in 1931-32 but was never able to publish.[45] The material he gathered for this failed project didn't languish long – he worked it into a radio play, *Lichtenberg*, and an anthology of letters by intellectuals called *Deutsche Menschen* – though these new projects were to be as ill-starred as the original bibliography: the radio play was purchased but never broadcast; the anthology (published under a pseudonym, Detlef Holz[46]), after enjoying some initial success, wound up on the index of banned books by 1938.[47] Still, these labors manifested themselves as influences in his own work, whatever their fates as independent lucubrations. It is possible, for example, that Lichtenberg cemented in Benjamin's mind the notion of presenting the *Arcades Project* as lettered convolutes: Lichtenberg's own "waste books" (*Sudelbücher*) are similarly organized, if "organized" is the right word. The lettered notebooks, A through L, are indifferently arranged, their material heterogeneous, individual leaves having been added and removed over time. As a formal, or practically anti-formal, "organizing" principle, the "waste book" (like the convolute) is an interesting one, fraught not only with aesthetic meaning, but politico-economic meaning as well: R.J. Hollingdale informs us that "waste books" was a term "employed in the English business house . . . to designate the ledgers in which transactions of all kinds were entered as they occurred before being transferred to the more orderly and neatly written account books."[48] Aesthetically, it is an uncontrived contrivance; a "spontaneous," pre-literary form. Politico-economically, to assume the metaphorical import of this origin for one's own literary practice no doubt signals an allegiance or solidarity with the humble authors of those humble literary forms (e.g. memoranda, reports, catalogues, etc.) which through an accretion of trivialities create change at the highest levels while remaining themselves unnoticed: "The man who whitewashes has epochs to move, even in his most insignificant gesture."[49]

The two aphoristic texts which most explicitly register the influence of Nietzsche and Lichtenberg are probably "One-Way Street" and "Central Park". "One-Way Street" (composed 1923-26) is the more Nietzschean, particularly in terms of form. Its sections feature witty, often oblique titles – for example, "Germans, Drink German Beer!" and "Coiffure for Easily Embarrassed Ladies" – which are in turn subdivided with italicized intra-titles followed by periods and em-dashes (in the familiar manner of *Human, All Too Human* and *The Gay Science*). Certainly the section entitled "*Thirteen Theses Against Snobs*" must be read as a Zarathustran parody, setting the artistic masterpiece against the lowly document and the triumphant artist against the primitive man: "The artist sets out to conquer meanings," Benjamin swans, while the "primitive man barricades himself behind subject matter."[50]

The ur-text for this distinction would seem to be *On the Genealogy of Morals* wherein knightly, aristocratic types, the "artists of violence,"[51] pit their wills against the "primitive," slave classes. Benjamin wouldn't often permit himself such swooping elitism, even in moments of high self-irony like this one; but the stamp of Nietzsche is pronounced enough, even if it is at the same time being lampooned.

In the wake of Hitler's accession to power, though, the occasion for such self-indulgent foolery had certainly fled. Gone is the mock-bravado, prolixity, and mannered adolescence in the decidedly Lichtenbergian "Central Park" (composed 1938-39), gone are the droll intra-titles and cryptic sub-headings; in their place one finds restrained (almost elegiac) observations – expressed with economy and separated sedately by numbers and fleurons – which nonetheless subtly *swerve* like Lucretian atoms. An exemplary sequence from the fifth main section:

> The grave as the secret chamber in which Eros and Sexus settle their
> ancient quarrel.
>   *
> The stars in Baudelaire represent a picture puzzle of the commodity.
> They are the ever-same in great masses.
>   *
> The devaluation of the world of things in allegory is surpassed within the world of
> things itself by the commodity.

And another from the sixth:

> To write history means giving calendar dates their physiognomy.
>   *
> Prostitution of space in hashish, where it serves all that has been (spleen).
>   *
> From the perspective of spleen, the buried man is the "transcendental subject" of
> historical consciousness.[52]

These are chosen in particular to demonstrate a few things: first, their terse delivery; second, the uncanny way they seem to swerve and collide with one another, forming new symmetries like beads in a kaleidoscope; and third, their preoccupation once again with the task of thinking (historically or otherwise). The bed of the grave gives way to the gods of the bed, which in their turn give way to the beds of the gods (the myriad stars), which in turn give way to myriad masses, which in turn give way to the masses of things devalued first in allegories and then in commodities. In the second example, historiography (the relation of language and time) gives way to physiognomy (the relation of flesh to spirit), which in turn gives way to prostitutes (the flesh) and hashish (the spirit), which in turn give way to spleen (spiritual malaise) which finds itself back in the grave-bed, a transcendental subject which has literally achieved a *ground* of certitude – its own mortality – an absolute condition of being which, *hélas*, it is in no position to benefit from. (Is there an obscure joke here about Husserl's transcendental reduction? That we only achieve the ground of intersubjectivity when we're *in* the ground itself, when we are reduced to ground?) Even as we acknowledge this swerve, we are stalled by it and put in mind of an observation Nietzsche made regarding aphoristic form: "An aphorism, properly stamped and molded, has not been 'deciphered' when it has simply been read; rather one has then to begin its *exegesis*, for which is required an art of exegesis."[53]

Far from providing a refuge for a philosopher manqué like Benjamin, then, aphorism is that form which makes *greater* demands both on its reader and writer, demands which in the end call for as much artistry as discernment. The demands of aphorism are, so to speak, *educed*, as from a state of latency, out of their abyssal, negative form: aphorism is a form which *withdraws* meaning even as it adumbrates it. Like quotations riven from their original contexts, Baudelaire's poetry, the gambler's

coup, aphorism both thematizes and produces shock-experiences, uncanny pixelations of time. One cannot read them like "regular" prose, nor for that matter like poetry, each of which might be thought to absorb disruption as part of its overall rhythm. The effect of aphorism is jarring, an anti-rhythm, a cognitive dissonance. The mode of experience engendered by shock, Michael Jennings reminds us, "far from being retainable or transmissible, is in fact parried by consciousness and leaves a trace in the unconscious."[54] Aphorism should therefore be allied with all the other apophatic gestures Benjamin takes up, gestures which rely on form to produce a meaning-effect retracted from content: for example, interruption, *gestus*, and montage. Addressing such gestures, Howard Eiland acutely hints at their ethical significance:

> The principle of interruption, which is as central to the method of montage as it is to the alienation effect, has here a pedagogical function and not just the character of a stimulus. It brings the action to a halt, occasioning surprise, and hence compels the spectator to adopt an attitude toward the situation in question, and the actor toward his or her role.[55]

The pedagogical compulsion Eiland refers to would seem to have an ethical substrate: the subject is shocked from the reverie of complacent self-mastery, "reception in distraction," and forced to *attend* to the Other.[56] What is radical enough in the dramatic context is more radical still in the historiographical one, but that is precisely the model I have been contending is to be found in the *Arcades Project*, one I will demonstrate had its origins in the *Trauerspiel* study of 1924-25.

———

We will continue to read these texts together – the *Arcades Project*, the *Trauerspiel* book, and various essays – to further draw out the character of Benjamin's ethical historiography. But before embarking on the last leg, it may once again be worthwhile to pause in order to review and recouch the network of ideas we have arranged. We have, first of all, formal objects under scrutiny: quotations, aphorisms, and fragments. We have, second of all, thematic objects: ruins, arcades, and so forth. We have, third of all, conceptual objects: allegory and monad. And we have, finally, philosophical objects: ethics, historiography, and language. Our natural tendency might be to "tier" these objects, but that would tear them from their much more complex (one is almost tempted to say "rhizomatic") relations. We have noted how for Benjamin these objects converge on the question of the ethical form of historiography, a question not properly addressed, by his lights, even in progressive historical materialist ideologies. Indeed, as Irving Wohlfarth informs us, such historical ideologies are so many wolves (teleologies) in sheep's clothing (culture): "The notion of *Kulturgeschichte* that emerges from Benjamin's rare, dismissive comments on the subject is that of a much-diluted Hegelianism in which *Kultur* stands in for *Geist* as the moving spirit of history."[57] In the first thesis of "On the Concept of History" we have an intriguing parallel image: not *Geist* hiding behind *Kultur*, but theology (the dwarf) hiding within historical materialism (the puppet).

Michael Löwy has provided a careful, "talmudic" analysis (his term) of this image which may help to further articulate those relations noted above.[58] The image derives from the famous automaton known as "The Turk," built in 1770 by Wolfgang von Kempelen and later purchased and exhibited world-wide by Johann Maelzel, which Benjamin would have known from Poe ("Maelzel's Chess Player") via Baudelaire. What the Turk's unwitting opponents – who included Napoleon, Benjamin Franklin, Philidor and other such luminaries – didn't realize was that in fact the Turk was operated by a diminutive chess master concealed in its interior.[59] That "historical materialism" (Benjamin uses quotation marks to pique our suspicion) is equated with an automaton indicates firstly lack of autonomy and secondly inauthenticity. This is not "'true' historical materialism," Löwy writes, "but something that is *given* that name [. . .][by] the ideologues of the Second and Third Internationals."[60] For such as these, the victory of historical materialism must be perceived as automatic, a foregone

conclusion, the uncanny movement of socio-economic forces (we, the masses, being the pieces). In what does this victory consist? 1) correctly interpreting history, struggling against the oppressors' view of history; 2) defeating the historic enemy itself, the ruling classes. In 1940 this meant fascism. There is a problem, though: the automaton by itself is a dead thing, inert; it requires some animating principle (a dwarf) which will be disavowed. What must be equally disavowed, it would seem, is that the dwarf (theology) becomes the puppet or agent of the automaton (historical materialism) insofar as it serves only the ends of its "public" aspect. But what exactly is the dwarf? The theological dwarf represents two things, according to Löwy: "remembrance (*Eingedenken*) and messianic redemption (*Erlösung*)."[61] The two terms are closely related. Remembrance is a form of redemption, it is an ethical act bound intimately with historiography as we have seen: it's ethicality consists in the fact that it (remembrance) must be accomplished by an other – one can't re-member oneself any more than Osiris can; the redemption, of course, is from the oblivion of forgetfulness, of historical silence. As post-Levinasian philosopher Edith Wyschogrod has described it, "Walter Benjamin's conception of the historian's task [is] giving voice to the anonymous of history."[62]

So we have here an allegorical image (puppets, automatons) which speaks to the philosophical issues with which we are preoccupied in a compact form resembling parable, putting forward the thesis that the "simple" act of remembering, in effect, blasts open the continuum of history. Seeing the *Arcades Project* in this way, not as an archive but as a book of remembrance, goes some way toward validating the claim that, despite its patent incompleteness, it had assumed something close to its "final" form – a book of remembrance never being complete, strictly speaking. Having considered elements of this form in some detail above and having claimed for it an apophatic structure, three questions naturally occur: 1) why must there needs be an ethical historiography in the first place; 2) why must such a historiography be grounded in remembrance; and 3) how can remembrance be correlated with the shock-experience?

History, as Benjamin conceives it, in order to be *ethical* history and not simply an empirical narrative of the past, must entail restitution, justice. It must, in the words of Simon Critchley, be blasted open "in the name of justice, which would not be [. . .] an end to history, but the continual working over of history as a work of infinite mourning, a politics of memory, the insomniac experience of being haunted by the spectres of the past."[63] (A sentiment which echoes that of Wyschogrod above.) What blasts history open, what rends its fabric, is not a counter- or micro-narrative, but those gnomish, negative forms which by their fragmentary nature arrest the continuity of narrative itself. Such forms "de-complete" history. If I may be permitted a paradoxical formulation: to do justice to history is to fail to "do justice" to history; one must fail to "do justice" if what is meant is a cosmic balancing of the books (after which they may be closed). *Failure* should be registered here in its Kafkaesque or Beckettian modality, as signifying *perpetuum mobile*, the persistent revisiting of the issue, the prevention of its calcification. Two mottoes: first, "to do justice to the figure of Kafka in its purity and peculiar beauty, one must never lose sight of one thing: it is the purity and beauty of a failure"; and then, "Try again. Fail again. Fail better."[64] History is not something which anyway can be "accomplished," so nothing is lost in this failure. To fail to "do justice" then is to remember, and remembrance, lest we forget, is the prayer for the Little Hunchback of *Berliner Kindheit*, the basement dweller otherwise consigned to obscurity. The simple act of remembrance is liberation for such as are passed over by "objectivist" history:

> The corrective to this way of thinking lies in the conviction that history is not only a science but also a form of remembrance. What science has "established" can be modified by remembrance. Remembrance can make the openended (happiness) into something concluded and the concluded (suffering) into something open-ended.[65]

In describing Benjamin's position thus, I don't mean to gloss over the risks of ethical historiography. On the one hand, we must not consign victims to oblivion – and it is the job of the ethical historiographer to remember them – on the other hand, it will profit them little if they are only

remembered perpetually *as* victims, assigned the historical status of victimhood and left to bemoan themselves and be bemoaned. That, as Irving Wohlfarth reminds us, would be analogous to original sin as Benjamin conceived it: "Man committed original sin [. . .] by insisting that it had been committed against him, presumably by his Maker. It is by perpetually claiming that he is its victim that he keeps perpetrating it." The structure of this accusation furthermore mimics that between father and son in Kafka's "Letter to My Father," Wohlfarth continues, the father accusing the son of accusing him and the son accusing the father of having engendered the accusation in having engendered the son. "The trial between father and son," Wohlfarth concludes, "is, clearly, a process – a *Prozess* – that can never end."[66] So there are not one but two dangers involved with ethical historiography, a Scylla and Charybdis: it must be remembrance, but not remembrance which calcifies; and it must be continuous, but not futile. Thus the importance of some formal element which deterritorializes history at the same time that it revives it, that halts it long enough to generate a shock.

III) From *Tigersprung* to *Ursprung*: Reading Benjamin Backwards

> *Fashion is a form of ugliness so intolerable that we*
> *have to alter it every six months.* – Oscar Wilde

Ulrich Lehmann has produced a fascinating study of modernist fashion which takes up and realigns the farrago of ideas presented thus far. His case essentially is that fashion (and what more abstractly is conveyed by the *sartorial*) is the modernist topos *par excellence* because it brings together the material and fugitive. For Benjamin, who is discussed at length by Lehmann, fashion's centrality to modernist thought follows from two of its related properties: it bears within it, first of all, the structure of revolution (as suggested pithily by Wilde, it constitutionally reinvents itself out of discontent); and secondly, as part of that revolutionary structure, it forges a unique relation out of past and present: it "takes its cue from everything" (*AP* 68). In describing this relation, Benjamin deploys a striking metaphor: "Fashion has a nose for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is the tiger's leap [*Tigersprung*] into the past."[67] Lehmann understands this metaphor as referring imagistically to the properties noted above. The leap itself is an image of historical rupture – fashion does not trace its way back to the past in a linear way, but bounds across genealogies, lighting upon what it chooses. At the same time, "the tiger who [leaps thus] is able to land almost motionless *on the spot* [. . .] Its motionlessness alludes to the dialectical standstill, to the time nexus in which the true revolutionary potential is realized or materialized and thus can be freed."[68] Such moments of frozen tension allow monads to emerge, whereby historical time is made available for philosophical contemplation.

John McCole, in discussing Benjamin's dialectical images generally (crystals, constellations, monads), clarifies how philosophical contemplation engages with the image by articulating its "historical index," which "consists in the correspondence between the context of its origin and the moment at which it becomes legible."[69] Fashion is in part privileged by virtue of its exceptional legibility: its quotation of the past is typically explicit as is its phantasmic connection to the present (its novelty). There is then, of course, this other side to the dialectical image which gives cause for equivocation. Edward Cutler shrewdly observes that "[f]ashion, the market externalization of newness, is the commodity equivalent of the experimental impulse in art. The aesthetic embracing of the new, far from transcending commodification, reveals rather that 'art's last line of defense [. . .] coincide[s] with the commodity's most advanced line of attack'."[70] What fashion giveth to the materialist historiographer by virtue of its indexical legibility it taketh away by its fealty to capital. The ambiguity of fashion, however, is precisely what makes it such a cardinal, prodigious resource for dialectic.

The allegorical figure who miters fashion to an historical outlook is the *flâneur*, whose perambulations are historiographical inscriptions on the surface of the city itself. Insofar as these inscriptions entail a remembrance of the obscured or forgotten, they carry with them the potential for

ethical import. The *flâneur* is a kind of amateur historian and accidental ethicist, one who, for lack of a program, can make ethical judgments on the fly. Admittedly this last is an odd-sounding statement. Isn't the *flâneur* – Baudelaire's "passionate spectator" – motivated primarily by aesthetic pleasure, by the wish to gratify desire and curiosity? Isn't the *flâneur* an odious *bourgeois* construct, an expression of narcissistic self-assurance, of one who can *afford* to be an outsider and even relishes disengagement from the affairs of men? These points must assuredly be conceded; and yet in the *flâneur*, as in fashion, there is an inbuilt ambiguity. As opposed to the "dandy," the *flâneur* does not flamboyantly attract attention – though he is "merchandise," he also "sabotages the traffic" (*AP* 42).of commodities. He walks the wrong way and doesn't obey the engineered flow of thoroughfares, preferring instead crepuscular byways, their forgotten and often eccentric shops, the sight of a defunct Roman fountain at the end of an ivy-strewn alley: "The street conducts the *flâneur* into a vanished time" (*AP* 416). The *flâneur* represents an openness to experience generally, an unprepossessing attitude toward the Other, and an attraction to history left behind. In this there is the possibility of an ethics. Even his independence from labor, which ought to disqualify him from solidarity (political and ethical) with the masses, can be read as subversive, as "a demonstration against the division of labor" (*AP* 427) itself. *Flânerie* furthermore renders an identification with the social-historical effacement of dispossessed peoples as part of its dialectical structure; the *flâneur* is "on the one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man" (*AP* 420). Like the roofless and unemployed, the *flâneur* is at once distrusted and invisible. Of course, this identification is as detestable as it is interesting, precisely because the *flâneur* is *not* roofless, has *opted* out where the indigent have been *forced*.

The dialectic image here is as troubling as it is productive. Benjamin, of course, was afforded a practical apprenticeship in *flânerie* at the feet (literally!) of Franz Hessel and this may account for the generous attitude he adopts toward *flânerie* even as he acknowledges its worrisome side (summarized and pathologized in Poe's "man of the crowd," who is both dandy and thug, who conceals beneath his second-hand *roquelaure* both diamond and dagger). Hessel showed him a Berlin lost to the history books, for which Benjamin credits him as "my fifth guide" in "A Berlin Chronicle." There is another, as yet undisclosed relation between *flânerie* and Benjamin's other projects: inasmuch as the *flâneur* embodies an open-ended, transgressive approach to historical categories, he is aligned with the very spirit of the baroque: "The baroque knows no eschatology; and for that very reason it possesses no mechanism by which all earthly things are gathered in together and exalted before being consigned to their end."[71] The baroque, like the *flâneur*, is indifferent to teleology generally and eschatology especially. It is intriguing that Benjamin's first extended articulation of his philosophy of history – his "natural history" – should arrive in tandem with his ruminations on the baroque in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. What is further perplexing is that his notion of this origin, this *ursprung*, "[implies] the redemption of a monadological concatenation of discrete cultural objects fragmented by history."[72] In other words, its seems to involve something very similar to the eschatology he claims is absent in the baroque – what is not there as an end is there as a beginning.

A beginning, Benjamin is quick to remind us, should not be confused with a "genesis." *Ursprung* denotes origin not in the sense of ante-historical punctum, but more literally as the primordial "leap" or movement, the instauration of a pattern, what he calls an "eddy in the stream of becoming."[73] The "origin" of *Trauerspiel* then is not some archaeological project seeking to identify the first instance of the "mourning-play" so much as an analysis of the configuration of ideas that make *Trauerspiel* legible to us as unique. The uniqueness of *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin contends, is bound up in the function of baroque allegory and its relation to a secular vision of nature and history. There has been much debate as to what exactly is signified by "natural history." For Max Pensky, it approximates "the realm of created nature, from the point of view of the subject of profane language [. . .] a petrified and sedimented continuum."[74] Similarly, for Susan Buck-Morss it denotes an inventory of "fossils…the trace of living history that can be read from the surfaces of the surviving objects."[75] Without disagreeing with these definitions, I would like to suggest that they run the risk of conflating "natural

history" with the baroque view of nature itself, the hollow world which provides the precondition for redemption.

Eric Santner and Beatrice Hanssen see "natural history" in a slightly different way, one that belies a kernel of ethicality. For Santner, "*Naturgeschichte* has to do with . . . the breakdown and reification of the normative structures of human life [. . .][it] ultimately names the ceaseless repetition of [. . .] cycles of emergence and decay of human orders of meaning, cycles that are . . . always connected to violence."[76] What is included in natural history, what is fossilized, petrified, and sedimented aren't simply objects themselves, but abstractions – norms, orders of meaning, violences – hidden like the dwarf in the automaton. That natural history should bear any relation to normative structures at all, apart from recording them, bespeaks an intrinsic ethicality. But Beatrice Hanssen will take "natural history" another stunning step; for her the ethico-theological status of natural history in Benjamin could not be more explicit: it is bound up in the notion of the *Kreatur* found in the *Trauerspiel* book and throughout the later works, a notion which is "expressive of an ethical call for an all-inclusive turn toward nature."[77] Natural history becomes justice extended to the most abject examples of life, like Kafka's Odradek, and an acknowledgment of their coordination with humanity. Such a condition collimates ethics and historiography in the manner I've been describing up to this point; the necessity for what Simon Critchley calls *clôtural* reading or "history read from the standpoint of the victims of that history. It is, in a complex sense, *ethical* history." In a way, it is an attitude toward history that not only acknowledges the reality of empirical narratives, but *assumes* them. *Clôtural* reading "is a double reading extended to include the analysis of closure and the question of ethics. A *clôtural* reading analyzes a text in terms of how it is divided against itself both in terms of belonging to logocentric conceptuality and achieving the breakthrough beyond that conceptuality."[78]

What Critchley sees as necessitating a deconstructive methodology (which would still occur at the level of content), I am claiming can be accomplished through formal analysis alone. The possibility for such a reading and such a history redounds on the formal resources that are available for apprehension. "The task of the critic," Christopher Fynsk reminds us, "is to read language – not as signified meaning, but *language*, where it gives itself as such [. . .] The problem for a philosophically grounded criticism is one of articulating this offering as it is presented in literary form, in what Benjamin terms the *Formensprache* of a work."[79] For Benjamin, the *Formensprache* will inevitably bear an apophatic relation to the content itself which overshadows the effect of form – form is therefore in a position of muteness, of unsaying or negating or otherwise rerouting the content.[80] "Benjamin saw himself as the vehicle for the expression of objective cultural tendencies," Martin Jay tells us, "a belief that made the *mode* of expression particularly crucial."[81] The modes of expression, the forms, that become so crucial for Benjamin – allegory, montage, aphorism, quotation – became crucial largely owing to his realization of an ethical onus (involving a creaturely conception of history) foreclosed to traditional philosophical and historiographical discourse. Looking back on George Steiner's introduction to the *Trauerspiel* book, we see that in fact it is already all there: the form which must mutely express, which must "act out at the same time that which is being determined"; the centrality of quotation which "energizes or subverts the analytic context," and of its "fragmentary, possibly aphoristic tenor" – in short, we see all the reasons Benjamin couldn't just give us an enchiridion of ethics.[82] But the significance of these elements does not strike us properly except from the perspective of Benjamin's later works on historiography, to glean the message we must enact our own tiger's leap into the past, we must read Benjamin backwards.

Notes

[1] Part V, Prop. 24. Spinoza, *The Ethics and Selected Letters* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), 216. The section in which the epigraph appears is devoted to freedom and its relation to (the perfection of) reason, but heard in the "key of B(enjamin)," the epigraph begins to sound more like the kind of

materialist-kabbalist historiography discussed in part two of this essay, "To Blast Open the Continuum of History."

2 Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 33.

3 Tom Cohen *Ideology and Inscription: "Cultural Studies" after Benjamin, de Man, and Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The phrase is taken from a letter in which Adorno is critical of Benjamin.

4 For an elaboration of some of these problems, particularly as they arise out of translation issues, see Betsy Flèche, "The Art of Survival: The Translation of Walter Benjamin" *SubStance* 28. 2 (1999): 95-109.

5 Without making too much of the concept (it is neither particularly original nor strong), I do want to differentiate it from what Žižek calls "productive misreading" in the introduction to *Organs without Bodies.* The phenomenon he describes is the more common occurrence of misunderstanding upon which influence is grounded; in his view, the history of philosophy is not a transcript of "dialogues" between philosophers – Plotinus and Plato, say, or Marx and Hegel – but a catalogue of "encounters." (ix) What I am calling "productive misprisions" – wherein the commensurability of particular concepts is hallucinated, exposing new possibilities in each – are in structure similar to metaphor. (That is to say, two objects naturally unrelated of themselves – say "dark wine" and "sea" – are yoked, as it were, through a kind of violence which reconfigures them into a third object: the "wine-dark sea." This third object in turn reconfigures its constitutive objects – one sees how they were always already like the metaphorical one – and at the same time surpasses them: the "wine-dark sea" is more than simply a sea dark like wine, it is a chronotope. Whenever it is invoked, Achilles gazes out upon it, grieving for Patroclus.)

6 Of course, I don't mean to suggest that Benjamin and Deleuze see eye to eye when it comes to Kafka, but rather that this constellation helps us to see more clearly how Benjamin uses Kafka to articulate his philosophy of history. For a fine explication of the strictly Deleuzian, "machinic" attitude toward Kafka, see chapter three of Ronald Bogue's *Deleuze on Literature* (London: Routledge, 2003). For a straightforward and admirably thorough account of Benjamin's persistent attention to Kafka, largely of bibliographic rather than theoretical interest, see Hans Mayer's "Walter Benjamin and Franz Kafka: Report on a Constellation" in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988)

7 John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 20-21.

8 The very bugbear of modernism, "technology" (as I'm using it here) is shorthand for the autonomous, self-perpetuating, instrumentalist metaphysics (together with its accoutrements) decried by Heidegger and Ellul.

9 Kafka's "animals," for example, his Gregor and Josephine, the giant mole in "The Village Schoolmaster," his academic ape and philosophical dog, the unclassifiable Odradek, even the Hunter Gracchus (whose name, Guy Davenport reminds us, means "grackle" or blackbird – *kavka* in Czech), all these do not represent fantastical departures from anthropocentric reality; his uncanny revelation is that humans already occupy this non-differentiatesd space whose architecture could be called "oneiric" were there the possibility of waking from it. In Kafka, the concept of *humanity* is smeared across the

natural world (as is *animality*); each particular human, however, is a discrete, anomic punctum. "I am divided from *all* things by a hollow space," Kafka wrote in his diary of December 16, 1911 (*Diaries 1910-1923*, 140; my emphasis) – the uncanny quality of Kafka's world stems from this sense of equilibration, everything on an equal footing and everything equally alienating-alienated.

[10] Recall that for Hegel, "particular" is the middle term between "universal" and "individual" (in the sense of "atomic" or "singular"). The universalizing tendency we may associate with myth, the individualizing tendency we may associate with technology.

[11] This formulation interestingly, if a bit problematically, structurally collocates "technology" and the "Law": the Law (Halakah) of course is not part of tradition (Haggadah); tradition is a commentary which attempts to fill in the gap left by the inaccessibility of the Law.

[12] Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphoses, The Penal Colony, and Other Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken, 1948), 159. Composed approximately two and a half years apart, the two parables – "Before the Law [*Vor dem Gesetz*]" (1914) and "An Imperial Message [*Eine kaiserliche Botschaft*]" (1917) – appeared together in *A Country Doctor* [*Ein Landarzt*] (1919) and separately in *The Trial* [*Der Prozeß*] (1925) and "The Great Wall of China [*Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer*]" (1917) respectively. In the Schocken edition of *The Complete Stories*, the two parables again appear together (3-5), though not in the sequence Kafka had intended (see Nahum Glatzner's editorial remarks on 473): one's overwhelming sense is of two emblematic fragments, of considerable personal importance to Kafka (see, for example, his uncharacteristically positive remarks regarding the composition of "Before the Law" in *Diaries* December 13, 1914), which never quite "lost sight" of each other and could possibly be taken as the recto and verso expression of Kafka's ethics. Furthermore, Jeanne Marie Gagnebin explicitly places "An Imperial Message" within the coordinates of an apophatics – a narration of the impossibility of narrating – derived from Benjamin: "*Cette belle histoire* ["An Imperial Message"] *nous introduit à ce que l'on pourrait appeler, en suivant Benjamin, la plus parfaite narration contemporaine de l'impossibilité de narrer.*" (*Histoire et narration chez Walter Benjamin* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), 100)

[13] Gilles Deleuze, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 24.

[14] Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 774, 778.

[15] If these two may be said to represent the two poles of historiography having the right political tendency – Zinn's revisionism and Darnton's sophisticated demotic. Consider, though: what might Benjamin have done with the material in *The Great Cat Massacre*?

[16] Even though White contends every history will be "emplotted" in some way (either comedically, tragically, romantically, or satirically) and that each mode of emplotment will necessarily correspond with some trope (metonymy, metaphor, synecdoche, and irony, respectively) and ideological outlook (conservative, radical, anarchist, and liberal, respectively), he has no mode of emplotment corresponding with allegory and its presumed ideological outlook (messianic?). Schematic as this example may be, it is clear enough how Benjaminian historiography differs from other historiographical modes, however politically progressive. It is as if it occupies a kind of scotoma in historical thought. See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), especially 29-38.

[17] Giorgio Agamben, "Language and History: Linguistic and Historical Categories in Benjamin's Thought" in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 48.

[18] A few years after publishing this essay, Agamben would take up the gauntlet thrown down by Benjamin: in *Idea of Prose* (Albany: SUNYP, 1995 [1985]), he attempts to deploy, in the name of philosophical thought, a montage of "humble" forms – aphorism, parable, etc. – examining, among other things, the poetics of history. A similar, though more uniform and compromised, structure is had in his recent book *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

[19] "Language and History," 51.

[20] See Paul de Man, "Walter Benjamin's 'Task of the Translator'" in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), especially 90-91, and Carol Jacobs, "The Monstrosity of Translation" first published in *MLN* 90 (1975), 755-766. Part of the gambit of this essay is to ask whether the "blurriness" of languages and histories which Deleuze and Guattari help us to see in Kafka informs Benjamin's concept of "natural history" which in turn seems propaedeutic to the articulation of messianic "universal history" described in "On the Concept of History."

[21] "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings Vol. 4*, 391, 396.

[22] "Language and History," 60 and 61.

[23] Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1 and 3.

[24] Negative because the Ruin is defined by absence; strictly speaking, the Ruin isn't the "remains" of a former structure so much as it is the parts of the former structure which no longer exist or are de-composed. "Ruin" doesn't name what is there so much as what is no longer. One wouldn't call a stack of bricks a "ruin" *prior* to construction; neither is a pile of bricks a "ruin" *after* destruction: "ruin" is the name for the *relation* the fallen brick has to the place it once occupied in the structure, a place now occupied by thickening vines or empty air. To underscore the point that "ruin" is a relational term of negativity, one might easily imagine a race of malingerers who never complete their construction projects or for that matter a race of decadents who prefer an aesthetic of decay and purposely cause the decomposition and subsidence of their structures: do such as these live in ruins? It may be objected that no ruin is a ruin that is lived in and that furthermore a ruin cannot be "made" as such but has to exist first as a complete structure which then undergoes neglect and dilapidation. For Benjamin, though, such objections already concede the point: that the ruin is itself a spatio-temporal relation; that this relation is negative insofar as it points to an unrecoverable place and time; and insofar as it is unrecoverable, that this relation is furthermore allegorical and multivalent, rather than symbolic or univocal.

[25] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 177-178.

[26] Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History*, 6.

[27] Ibid, 138. In her essay "Benjamin's Endgame," Rebecca Comay rehearses a similar litany of deformed and outcast figures – the hunchback chief among them – who are revealed in Kafka's work

and redeemed in Benjamin's. See *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience* (2nd ed.), eds. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (Manchester: Clinamen, 2000), 252-253.

[28] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 59.

[29] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 472. Hereafter *AP*.

[30] Ibid, 460. "Showing" of itself does not fall in the realm of the apophatic, but "showing" precisely that which evades the possibility of "saying" does. Benjamin's formulation seems to make more than a casual nod toward Wittgenstein, against whom any invocation of a showing-saying distinction must be read.

[31] Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 68.

[32] *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* 178.

[33] *Marxism and Form*, 68-69 and 71.

[34] Richard Wolin, "Experience and Materialism in Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*," in *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, ed. Gary Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 211.

[35] In fairness to Wolin, though he doesn't exactly come around to the idea that the *Arcades Project* as currently constituted had already assumed its intended form, he does acknowledge that "Benjamin himself significantly altered the methodological focus of the project several times," (Ibid.) thereby leaving open that possibility.

[36] *The Arcades Project*, xi. Margaret Cohen's position might be considered a middle-ground ("Benjamin's Phantasmagoria: the *Arcades Project*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)). While conceding the incompleteness of the text, she concludes that "the infernal dialectics of high capitalism have superseded modernity itself, making the *Arcades Project . . .* now our paramount cultural monument to modernity's ambitions and its power." (219) In other words, it is *by virtue* of its incompleteness that the text may be considered the consummate statement of modernist vision.

[37] Ibid, 60, 40, and 468.

[38] Henry Sussman, Review of the English translation of *The Arcades Project* in *MLN* 115.5 (2000): 1141

[39] Both Thérèse and Laurent feel the unrelenting violence and pressure of this gaze, which with increasing desperation they try to avoid or fend off: putting the distraught, staring Mme. Raquin to bed, Laurent murmurs, *"Va, va, regarde-moi bien . . . tes yeux ne me mangeront pas."* The irony of this denial is met in the final lines of the novel, which will be discussed in the body of the essay. Her gaze is the totality of her condemnation; only at one point does she nearly communicate it in language. The houseguests are gathered at dominoes, she begins to trace the murderer's names on the table only to collapse before she can finish the sentence. One of the assembled guests, Grivet, (mis)reading the *"phrase entière dans les yeux de madame,"* completes it for her: the intended message *"Thérèse et*

Laurent ont . . . [les meurtriers]" becomes "*Thérèse et Laurent ont bien soin de moi.*" And indeed, after this near-disclosure, they become increasingly attentive (*soin*) to Mme. Raquin!

[40] My translation. The original reads, "[*Mme Raquin, roide et muette, les contempla à ses pieds,*] *ne pouvant se rassasier les yeux, les écrasant de regards lourds*." The passage echoes an earlier scene wherein Laurent identifies Camille's body at the morgue from behind a glass-partition: "*Le meurtrier s'approcha lentement du vitrage, comme attiré, ne pouvant détacher ses regards de sa victime*." Not only is he strangely drawn [*attiré*] to the sight behind the glass, he cannot bring himself to take his eyes from it.

[41] See *Arcades Project*, 52-53, 58-60.

[42] For more on this tradition, see Eudo Mason's chapter on aphorism in *The Romantic Period in Germany: Essays by Members of the London University Institute of German Studies*, ed. Siegbert Prawer (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1970). The German tradition, it will be noted, is especially rich in aphorists.

[43] Benjamin, "Outline of a Psychophysical Problem," *Selected Writings Vol. 1*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 400. As with many of Benjamin's influences, the relation with Nietzsche was both admiring and fraught; for a discussion of how and why Benjamin and Nietzsche, all indications to the contrary, were never quite in synch, see Irving Wohlfarth, "Resentment Begins at Home: Nietzsche, Benjamin, and the University," in *On Walter Benjamin*.

[44] Beatrice Hanssen, "Philosophy at Its Origin: Walter Benjamin's Prologue to the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*," *MLN* 110.4 (1995): 823.

[45] See Momme Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin: A Biography*, trans. Malcolm R. Green and Ingrida Ligers, ed. Martina Dervis (London: Verso, 1996), 299n8.

[46] A pseudonym so desperate to appear common, as befitted the political temperament of the mid-1930s, as to be conspicuous. Is it camouflage or a joke aimed at Nazi prejudice? "Detlef" means *son or heritage of the people*, while "Holz" (*woods*), though not altogether "unsuspicious," avoids the more Jewish-sounding but similar-meaning "Wald."

[47] See Brodersen, 225-229.

[48] From the "Introduction," in *The Waste Books*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: NYRB, 2000), vii. There is an interesting tension between the clerical macro-form of *The Waste Books* (and *Arcades Project*) and their abstruse, aphoristic micro-form.

[49] Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 795.

[50] *Selected Writings Vol.1*, 459.

[51] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 87. The "artists of violence" are those who accept their "instinct for freedom," who harness it to shape and subdue pliant men, the one's shackled by "bad conscience" because they have stifled or suppressed their own instincts for freedom.

[52] *Selected Writings Vol. 4*, 164-165.

[53] From the "Preface" to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 23.

[54] Michael Jennings, "On the Banks of the New Lethe: Commodification and Experience in Benjamin's Baudelaire Book," *boundary 2* 30.1 (Spring 2003), 94. Jennings goes on to make a good case that "shock" is not the pivotal concept of the Baudelaire book – though it is thus far the most memorable – rather what is central to Benjamin's thinking on Baudelaire is the "complex model in which human experience is determined by the repetition and eversameness of the commodity form." (104)

[55] Howard Eiland , "Reception in Distraction," *boundary 2* 30.1 (Spring 2003): 53.

[56] Cf. Amit Pinchevski, *By Way of Interruption: Levinas and the Ethics of Communication* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005). Pinchevski maintains that interruption itself, as opposed to transmission, ought to be the benchmark of ethical communication.

[57] Irving Wohlfarth, "Smashing the Kaleidoscope: Walter Benjamin's Critique of Cultural History," in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, ed. Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 196.

[58] Michael Löwy, See *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History,"* trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2005), especially 23-29.

[59] It is unclear how many so-called "directors" the Turk had, but William Schlumberger was effectively its last. Schlumberger died in Cuba of yellow fever while touring with Maelzel and the Turk in 1838.

[60] Löwy, *Fire Alarm*, 25.

[61] Ibid, 26.

[62] Edith Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 20. The Shoah, of course, is the inevitable background of this text, which lends all of its pronouncements an especial poignance: once we engage with terms like "testimony" and "trauma," the vivifying force of theology within historical materialism acquires an awesome palpability.

[63] Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas, and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 1999), 155.

[64] From, respectively, a letter to Gershom Scholem dated June 12, 1938 – see *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932-1940* (New York: Schocken, 1989), 226 – and *Worstward Ho* – see *Nohow On* (New York: Grove, 1996), 89.

[65] From an unsent letter to Horkheimer; qtd. in Richard Wolin, "Experience and Materialism in Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*," *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, 225.

[66] Irving Wohlfarth, "On Some Jewish Motifs in Benjamin," in *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1989), 185.

[67] "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings Vol. 4*, 395.

[68] Ulrich Lehmann, *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 247.

[69] *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, 290.

[70] Edward Cutler, *Recovering the New: Transatlantic Roots of Modernism* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003), 31-32. The embedded quotation is from Benjamin's exposé of 1939; see *Arcades Project*, 22.

[71] *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 66.

[72] John Pizer, "History, Genre and 'Ursprung' in Benjamin's Early Aesthetics," *The German Quarterly* 60.1 (Winter 1987), 73.

[73] *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 45.

[74] Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 56-57.

[75] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge MIT Press, 1989), 56. It should be noted that Buck-Morss addresses the concept as deployed later in the *Arcades Project*.

[76] Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16, 17. For Santner, natural history is ultimately referable to the category of the "creaturely."

[77] *Walter Benjamin's Other History*, 104.

[78] *Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 30.

[79] Christopher Fynsk, *Language and Relation: . . . that there is language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 190.

[80] "Neither criticism nor the criteria of a terminology – the test of the philosophical theory of ideas in art – evolves in response to external comparison, but they take shape immanently, in a development of the formal language [*Formensprache*] of the work itself, which brings out its content at the expense of its effect." (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 44)

[81] Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research 1923-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 176, emphasis added.

[82] George Steiner, "Introduction," *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 21, 22. Steiner of course does not claim for these formal elements an ethical impetus.