# *Stadtwollen*: Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and the Problem of Method

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SCHOLARS STUDYING THE CITY HAVE PRODUCED A BODY OF TEXTS critiquing 1900 Vienna, Paris of the belle époque, and reconstructed Berlin as evidence of the cultural processes associated with the modern—industrialization, commodification, and the alienation of the subject.[1] As the flâneur walks through the urban landscapes of Europe around the turn of the century (in 1900 or in 2000, as poet or critic, respectively),[2] he (the flâneur is male) bears witness to his loss of agency against the forces of history and their ideologies in stone, to the monuments of public memory that draw and redraw older, ideologized memories of the historically overdetermined spaces of European history in the modern era of bourgeois capitalism.

The flâneur's city reveals itself as a staged assemblage of objects reifying the hegemonic ideologies of Western nation-states and imposing them on individual consciousnesses. Theories of the city have thus converged with Marxian (if not Marxist) critiques of capitalism and culture. In consequence, it is no surprise that one of the most anomalous and compelling of city texts, the great theory torso of Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (*Passagen-Werk*), is read as an opportunity missed—a cultural critique of urban capitalism, incomplete yet proximate to the Frankfurt school's critique of the Enlightenment and its modern legacy. The commercial arcades of the text's title are paradigmatic urban artifacts of the bourgeois-capitalist era, documentation of the growing gap between public and private spheres opened by the logic of capitalism and consumerism.

The present discussion will diverge significantly from this approach to Benjamin's work, taking it not as an *Ideologiekritik* of bourgeois Paris (or even as redemptive criticism)[3] but rather as an unacknowledged treatise on methodology: a hermeneutics of the

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https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2007.122.1.43 Published online by Cambridge University Press

modern city that aims to understand what I term a *Stadtwollen*, the human drive to create a city as a structure of meaning in a particular historical context. My coinage *Stadtwollen* alludes to an undervalued source for Benjamin: Alois Riegl's *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts* (1897–98), a foundational treatise for the modern discipline of art history as practiced by the Vienna school. In that (also unfinished) methodological essay and elsewhere, Riegl speaks of a *Kunstwollen*, a collective will to art and, instantiated in it, a drive leading a culture to create works of art as structured artifacts (strategically opposed to nature) that reveal an era's self-understanding in complicated ways.

In my reading, the two *Exposés* for the *Arcades Project,* written in exile (1931 and 1933), are a parallel treatise on method for the city: a discussion of a distinctive era's *Stadtwollen* and of the historical hermeneutics required to understand the cultural forms it produces. They offer the only consistent visions we have of the intent behind Benjamin's great torso. Instead of providing a straight-line historicized critique of European bourgeois capitalism and its imposition of consciousness through commodification, the *Exposés* for the *Arcades Project* summarize Benjamin's discourse on method for the modern era, a critical materialist phenomenology and hermeneutics of the new classes of human cultural artifacts generated by the technical-industrial age.

As Riegl grounded a new approach to art history, Benjamin's *Exposés* ground a new critical hermeneutics in a materialist-phenomenological mode. Anything but the project of a flâneur trying to reclaim his agency over a city that dehumanizes him, the *Exposés* exemplify instead how an interpreter can illuminate a culture's artifacts in their autopoesis, showing how forms, habits, innovations, and the like (not just the traditional economic base) instantiate and condition the way individuals grasp their worlds. Understanding a city as evidence of a *Stadtwollen* reveals it to be an intentional grid within which human consciousness is (re)produced (a historicized horizon of meaning). The Paris of the passages is not merely iconic or legible within a particular ideological framework of production but rather an epistemological entity of a different sort, a material archive of an era's various wills, which need to be approached with distinctive tools.

To make this case, I will first address Benjamin's review of Riegl's Vienna school, then turn to Riegl's treatise and its illumination of methodological statements from Convolute N of the *Arcades Project*. Against this background, the two *Exposés* lead back to conclusions about the city as an object of method and a historically conditioned understanding. I will conclude that Benjamin's late work is a materialist-phenomenological hermeneutics sensitive to the political critiques initiated by Marxism but far outdistancing the claims to epistemological critique belonging to his era's Marxisms.

## The Riegl Connection

Connecting Benjamin's and Riegl's projects as a shared disciplinary hermeneutics is not simply willful.[4] In his student years, Benjamin was already interested in Riegl, noting, for example, that "in the last four decades no art-historical book [had] had such a substantive and methodologically fruitful effect" on him as *Later Roman Art Industry* (qtd. in Riegl, *Historical Grammar* 437).[5] The mature Benjamin examined the Vienna school, of which Riegl was the most important member, in "The Rigorous Study of Art: On the First Volume of *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen,*" a review summarizing the Vienna school's training and methodology, written in 1931 but not published until 1933 in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (in revised form).

Benjamin's review first traces art history as a discipline, starting with the era's most famous German art historian, Heinrich Wölfflin, who argued that modern art history

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2007.122.1.43 Published online by Cambridge University Press

needed more than anecdotes and biography, more than the Vasari model, which reduces art to the lives of the artists. Instead, according to Wölfflin, modern art history has to speak about "the value and the essence of a work of art," including both history and aesthetics ("Wert und Wesen des Kunstwerks"; qtd. in Benjamin, "Rigorous Study" 439; "Strenge Kunstwissenschaft . . . (Erste Fassung)" 364). To Benjamin's mind, however, Wölfflin manages only a "flat, universalizing history of the art of 'all cultures and times'" ("[E]in[e] flach[e], universalhistorischen Geschichte der Kunst »aller Völker und Zeiten«"; 440; 364).

As Benjamin reads Hans Sedlmayr in the *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, the Vienna school's art history has a different goal in investigating individual artworks, seeing each as "a self-contained *small world* of its own" ("eine in sich ruhende *kleine Welt* eigener und besonderer Art"; 441; 365). This new history eschews universal claims about artworks or taste. Instead, this sort of work treats "the formal incorporation of the given world by the artist" ("die formale Aufnahme der gegebenen Welt durch den Künstler"; 441; 365). The Vienna school is thus historicist-materialist, but it is not like the monumental historicism associated with Leopold von Ranke and his positivism. Nor does it pretend to re-create how art "really existed" in prior eras. Finally, the artwork is not to be considered a Kantian object of pure "purposefulness without purpose"—it must always be seen as occupying a place of privilege in a specific time and place, transformed from a quotidian thing into a creation that is locally without purpose but nonetheless meaningful.

In consequence, this new art history implicates the artwork in history, where it is conditioned by and conditions human activity and existence. The artwork must be understood as *made*, as a "formal conquest":

> This approach only becomes possible through a frame of mind that recognizes that the realm of perception itself changes over time and in accordance with shifts in cultural and intellectual directions. Such a frame of mind, however, in no way presumes objects that are always present in an unvarying manner such that their formal makeup is merely determined by a changing "stylistic drive" within perceptual surroundings that remain constant.
>
> (Carl Linfert, qtd. on 441–42)

> Diese Auffassung wird nur durch eine Denkart möglich, für die der Anschauungsspielraum selbst mit der Zeit und gemäß den Wendungen seiner geistigen Lenkung veränderlich ist, für die aber keinesfalls so etwas wie stets gleichartig vorhandene Dinge anzunehmen sind, deren formale Ausprägung nur ein wechselnder »Stilldrang« bei gleich bleibenden Anschauungsumkreis bestimmt. (365)

The artwork is inextricably linked with particular historical moments; it is by definition not timeless but rather a product of a mind functioning in a specific cultural locus. The work's form does not emerge apart from its content, nor does it elicit truth from within the mind. Instead, each artwork must be seen as a constructed intervention into a historical moment, producing a distinct sort of knowledge. "And thus, because of the <focus on materiality> in such work, the precursor of this new type of art scholar is not Wölfflin, but Riegl" ("Und so ist, ihrer Materialbestimmtheit wegen, nicht Wölfflin Ahnherr dieses neuen Typs von Kunstgelehrten sondern Riegl"; 442; 366).

As Benjamin explains it, the Vienna school's art history casts itself as a materialist alternative to positivism that does not recover a truth adhering to objects but rather produces a systematic understanding of an intentional data field. Benjamin here takes up the turn-of-the-century debate about the *Kulturwissenschaften* (the sciences of culture, in Dilthey's sense), but with explicit attention to interpretive hermeneutics: "This is difficult, but is it necessary? Is it appropriate to place this new aspiration (*Wollen*) so assiduously under the patronage of phenomenology

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2007.122.1.43 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and Gestalt theory?" ("Schwierig. Aber auch nötig? Ist es angezeigt, dies neue Wollen so beflissen unter das Patronat der Phänomenologie und der Gestalttheorie zu stellen?"; 443; 367). The term *Wollen* is critical: it is the human will to understanding embodied in a particular materiality at a particular moment. To understand that materiality will illuminate its historical context's strategy for *knowing*, in the phenomenological sense. *Wollen* is a material-intentional appeal to human cognition in its historical forms of appearance.

The art history that results, in Benjamin's account, has a distinctive character, set of procedures, and goal:

> It is concerned with the correlation that gives rise to reciprocal illumination between, on the one hand, the historical process and radical change, and, on the other hand, the accidental, external, and even strange aspects of the work of art. (444)

> Sie hätte es mit der Bezogenheit zu tun, die zwischen dem historischem Prozeß und Umbruch auf der einen Seite und dem Zufälligen, Außerlichen, ja Kuriosen des Kunstwerks auf der andern die wechselseitige Erhellung stiftet. (367)

The English offers "illumination" as the equivalent of *Erhellung*. In today's terminology, following Derrida, we might say instead that each artifact of culture is engaged in a play of *différance*, in what Husserl would call a "meaning-sponsoring act of consciousness."

Benjamin's direction is clear: the artwork is the material evidence of an act of form giving, a moment of persistence in a stream of historical flux, engaging in a radical transformation of material into meaning. Yet the resulting work is also absolutely particular, a "small world" or "limit case" (*Grenzfall*) unto itself, whose *madeness* is revealing of its meaning in history (444; 367).

Critical here is Benjamin's example, a specific class of visual representations: architectural drawings. He outlines their distinctive material ontology of knowledge: they don't *reproduce* what architecture "knows"; they *produce* it:

> [A]rchitecture is not primarily "seen" but rather is imagined as an objective entity and is experienced by those who approach or even enter it as a surrounding space sui generis, that is, without the distancing effect of the frame of pictorial space. Thus, what is crucial in the consideration of architecture is not seeing but the apprehension of structures. The objective effect of buildings. . . . (445)

> [D]ie Architektur [wurde] gar nicht in erster Linie »gesehen« . . . , sondern als objektiver Bestand vorgestellt und von dem der Architektur sich Nähernden oder gar in sie Eintretenden als ein Umraum sui generis ohne den distanzierenden Rand des Bildraums gespürt wurde. Also kommt es bei der Architekturbetrachtung nicht auf das Sehen, sondern auf das Durchspüren von Strukturen an. Die objective Einwirkung der Bauten auf das vorstellungsmäßige Sein des Betrachters. . . . (368)

Architectural drawings, then, do not represent architecture; they create it by isolating a particular field of data within a distinctive strategy of knowledge, offering two-dimensional representations intended to be apprehended as three-dimensional experience.[6] That act of apprehension *intends*, is predicated on, the apprehender's experience of architecture as embodied in space—the "effect of buildings," grasped consciously. Architectural drawing joins a pictorial space and an individual's objective experience capturing data in consciousness. This is the *art* part of the knowledge in architectural drawing, a distinct deployment of experience as knowledge.

Benjamin does not, however, forget the history part of art history. Art forms are regional ontologies of meaning—little worlds—with limited scope; they develop and decay over time in ways that may not be immediately evident but that a historian can uncover as as-

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pects of their onto-epistemology (446; 369). Thus, art history re-creates not a "comprehensive context . . . but rather the capacity to be at home in marginal domains" ("umfassende Zusammenhänge . . . das Zuhausesein in Grenzgebieten"; 446; 369). That is, each work of art re-creates a historicized act of local and objective knowledge, living a cycle from birth to death—each work is both specific and part of art's general evolution (449; 371).

This art history also models the general sciences of culture, since culture's artifacts do not function apart from subjects of knowledge but rather disclose the local knowledge processes of the fields they occupy. Each artifact participates in a field of knowledge and practices, which it simultaneously instantiates, creates, and reveals. In consequence, any area of culture, like architecture, is differentiated by its specific will to knowledge, its *Kunstwollen*.

Benjamin's review of the Vienna school valorizes its method of art history, but the comparisons run deeper. Comparing Benjamin's theoretical utterances from Convolute N of the *Arcades Project* with Riegl's work will show what else is at stake in that disciplinary move, that historical hermeneutics of the cultural material.

## Riegl, Benjamin, and Hermeneutical Materialism

Never completed but known from two extensive drafts, Riegl's *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts* summarizes his approach to art history, redefining the elements of the artwork and recapturing art as a historically determined practice of knowledge. Riegl defined art history as a materialist discipline rather than an idealist one, thereby accounting for art's general epistemological premises and the historical-material conditions of works' meanings. While Benjamin does not cite Riegl in the *Arcades Project*, Riegl's hermeneutics parallel Benjamin's theory notes from Convolute N. Riegl's art history traces works of art as they concurrently instantiate and condition an era's worldview—its *Kunstwollen* or the intentionality of its knowledge and material formation. In Benjamin's work, which seeks to define the city's *Stadtwollen*, the city is a new class of historical artifact. Pursuing the two in tandem clarifies their respective contributions to a new hermeneutical materialism.

For Riegl, history is the artwork's first form of appearance, its first material condition; Europe's art falls into three periods, worldviews of long duration. These historical sites all produce art, defined both as a techne, a practice of production by "the human hand," and as a content area, as his "Introductory Remarks" outlines:

> All human art production (*Kunstschaffen*) is therefore at heart nothing other than a contest (*Wettschaffen*) with nature. The sense of delight with which a work of art fills us is commensurate with its human maker's capacity to bring to clear and convincing expression the respective formal laws of natural creation. (*Historical Grammar* 51)

> Alles bildende Kunstschaffen des Menschen ist dahre im letzten Grunde nichts anderes als Wettschaffen mir der Natur. Das Lustgefühl, das uns die an einem Werke von Menschenhand haftende Kunst einflößt, bemißt sich nach dem Grade, in dem es dem Menschen gelungen ist, an den betreffenden Werke die jeweilig entsprechenden Formgesetze des Naturschaffens zu klarem und überzeugendem Ausdruck zu bringen. (*Historische Grammatik* 21)

Here Riegl accommodates both philosophical aesthetics and methodology, echoing the traditional dictum that a work of art delights and educates, as well as Kant's (and Schiller's) insistence that art is made and bounded. Yet the work is not an idea but rather emerges according to construction conditions within a specific historical-material grid, on "the basic principle of crystallization" ("Grundsatz der Kristallisation"; 51; 21). That "principle

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of crystallization" is an image from science: crystalline structures form around an imperfection, a fleck centering the crystal's growth—an image expressing how a moment of history is limited (bounded), even as it intends or posits itself as open.

Throughout Convolute N, Benjamin uses the parallel image of a *constellation*, a moment that puts into play more than the differentiation between nature and culture, specified by Riegl. Instead, it initiates a dialectic between a perceived now and then as historical-phenomenal data emerge as an image understood as part of history:

> It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. . . . [T]he relation of what has been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. (*Arcades Project* N 2a, 3)[7]

> Nicht so ist es, daß das Vergangene sein Licht auf das Gegenwärtige oder das Gegenwärtige sein Licht auf das Vergangene wirft, sondern Bild ist dasjenige, worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt. Mit andern Worten: Bild ist die Dialektik im Stillstand. . . . [D]ie [Beziehung] des Gewesenen zum Jetzt [ist] dialektisch: ist nicht Verlauf, sondern Bild (,) sprunghaft.

For Benjamin, the "forms and mutations of the Paris arcades from their beginning to their decline" ("Gestaltungen und Veränderungen der pariser Passagen von ihren Anfang bis zu ihrem Untergang") are such images, evidence of a historical moment referencing its origin and logic to late-nineteenth-century bourgeois-capitalist economics (N 2a, 4).

Benjamin echoes Riegl's notion of crystallization by situating art as part of both human life and historically attested epochal forms, not as myth (N 1, 9). The arcades crystallize a *Stadtwollen* in a single set of images; they are the centers around which all other period understandings of that city are organized, within that era's economic rationales: "in their own individual development—'unfolding' might be a better term—they give rise to the whole series of the arcade's concrete historical forms, just as the leaf unfolds from itself all the riches of the empirical world of plants" ("indem sie in ihrer selbsteigenen Entwicklung—Auswicklung wäre besser gesagt—die Reihe der konkreten historischen Formen der Passagen aus sich hervorgehen lassen, wie das Blatt den ganzen Reichtum der empirischen Pflanzenwelt aus sich herausfaltert"; N 2a, 4). In such a process, "the entire past is brought into the present by a historical apocatastasis" ("bis die ganze Vergangenheit in einer historischen Apokatastasis in die Gegenwart eingebracht ist"; N 1a, 3), a term that refers to "a specific planetary constellation" (989). This metaphor from science again emphasizes how the city is understood materially-phenomenologically, when a concrete form actualizes a specific world understanding.

Riegl writes that arts are created to signify a purported break from nature, "demonstrat[ing] man's ability to conjure up a particular visual effect of nature" ("zu zeigen, wie auch der Mensch im Stande ist, einen bestimmten Erscheinungseffekt der Natur hervorzubringen"; *Historical Grammar* 52; *Historische Grammatik* 22). Thus art is neither a representation nor a deception (*Täuschung*) or counterfeit (*Fälschung*) but a made artifact (a result of craft), emerging from a particular material basis and producing an intended motif and so with determinable intentional properties. The artwork is historically particular, not neutral but a fashioned "understanding of man's relation to matter" ("Die Anschauungen des Menschen von seinem Verhältnis zur Materie"), especially economically (55; 23). That historical moment of "understanding" he designates as the era's *Wollen*, its will (a usage paralleling that of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche).

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Riegl specifies three major divisions in Europe's history: the Roman Empire, the medieval and Renaissance era, and a third period extending into his present, each developing through a predictable cycle, from emergence to peak to collapse (55; 23). Each period corresponds to an ontology of the artwork over and against nature—a posited or understood version of a human relation to nature, an attitude about the ontology of humanity, nature, and art.[8] They encompass what Deleuze might term the ideological striations that precondition the era's aesthetic discussions, schools, movements, and stylistic conventions (all terms that Riegl avoids because they are too simple parsings of art as intentional objects).

For similar reasons, Benjamin is at pains to avoid certain concepts naturalized by bourgeois capitalism, ideas like "progress" and "period of decline," since they characterize the arcades-era understanding of the relation between humankind and nature (*Arcades Project* N 2, 5). Such concepts run "counter to the critical theory of history" as "an uncritical hypostatization rather than a critical interrogation" ("im Zusammenhang einer unkritischen Hypostasierung statt in dem einer kritischen Darstellung"; N 13, 1). Thus, a proper account of the arcades era must demonstrate "a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress. . . . Its founding concept is not progress but actualization" ("einen historischen Materialismus . . . der die Idee des Fortschrittsin sich annihiliert hat. . . . Sein Grundbegriff ist nicht Fortschritt sondern Aktualisierung"; N 2, 2).

Riegl's art history, then, does not just question the collection and taxonomy of objects; it is a philosophical inquiry about what lies at the basis of their appearance (following Husserl, the artifact's eidos). Art history must ask new questions about certain "universal principles" ("allgemeine Gesetze") that underlie all forms of art (*Historical Grammar* 291; *Historische Grammatik* 209–10). All artworks conform to the minds forming them and to those minds' presentation strategies (such as conventions about how dimensionality is represented). An appropriate historical account of artworks and their worldviews thus attends to the following elements:

1) Purpose: *why?* Usually this is too narrowly defined as the practical, utilitarian function meant to satisfy the needs of our five senses.
2) Raw materials: *from what?*
3) Technique: *in what way?*
4) Motif: *what?*
5) Form and surface: *how?* (295)

1. Zweck: wozu? Darunter wird gewöhnlich allzu eng der praktische Gebrauchszweck verstanden, der die Bedürfnisse eines unserer fünf Sinne stillen soll.
2. Rohstoff: woraus?
3. Technik: womit?
4. das Motiv: was?
5. Form und Fläche: wie? (213)

These elements are the "historical grammar" of art's language, which grounds art history: "We will be dealing with (1) elements; (2) the developmental history thereof; (3) the factors that determined that development" ("Wir haben zu behandeln: 1. Elemente, 2. Entwicklungsgeschichte derselben, 3. Faktor, die die Entwicklung vorschreibt"; 293; 211). Taken together, they constitute the *Kunstwollen* of an era—its intentionality made material in art.

"Materials" and "techniques" are the focus of traditional art histories. "Purpose" includes the artwork's fundamental relation to human materiality, the function it fulfills for bodily and spiritual needs ("sharply distinguished from its artistic *habitus*") quite aside from its "aesthetic affects" (*Kunstabsicht*), which are "a pretext for its existence" ("einen bloßen Vorwand für die Existenz des Kunstwerks"; 109; 61). Some purposes may be conceptual, specific relations of the work to ideas ("Vorstellungszweck"); others include a reference to practical needs, like shelter (110;

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61). Each worldview, each era, has a different set of purposes at play.

The artwork's "motifs" (ch. 5) are the principles, such as symmetry or crystallinity, that the work embodies, taken from nature but espoused by art to oppose nature and to create a tension (123; 75). Certain patterns (symmetries) are preferred in certain disciplines or genres of art (138; 90). Decorative or practical motifs are inorganic; organic motifs are like motion, which damps out as the work is produced.

Riegl's chapter 6 addresses the "form" and "surface" of the artwork rather than its content, tracing how it projects itself into space or in history, transacting two- and three-dimensionality. As Riegl notes, we feel in three dimensions but see in two, and so the artwork must project for the viewer in only two dimensions sensations that originate in three. The viewer must use "previous tactile experiences" ("die Erfahrungen des Tastsinns") to recover what the artwork presents (187; 129). Riegl is not here expressing a naive preference for representational art but rather offering a careful description of the artwork's knowledge construction as based in sense data. Every artwork presents itself in history as a surface and form; each era expresses a different ideology about what constitutes a natural surface, expressed in the elements of the artwork's form, its objective surface (how it appears as object), and its subjective surface (the way it acts as an illusion for the visual faculties [189; 287]).

The second version of Riegl's treatise specifies his overall project as a phenomenology of classes of cultural artifacts. His artworks still preserve a degree of *artness*, the quality that Kant in his third *Critique* says marks sensuous objects to be judged in the modality of beauty. But Riegl reflects a hundred years' progress in aesthetic thought and moves closer to Husserl's phenomenology. Each artwork is an artifact positing a virtual nature-and-culture divide, appearing in the phenomenological evidence field of the transcendental unity of apperception—a divide that is epistemologically real, not necessarily ontologically so.

Benjamin's Convolutes collect and archive such surfaces as appearances of the arcades' bourgeois era, following methodological caveats like Riegl's:

> Bear in mind that commentary on a reality (for it is a question here of commentary, of interpretation in detail) calls for a method completely different from that required by commentary on a text. In the one case, the scientific mainstay is theology; in the other case, philology. (*Arcades Project* N 2, 1)
>
> Sich immer wieder klarmachen, wie der Kommentar zu einer Wirklichkeit (denn hier handelt es sich um den Kommentar, Ausdeutung in den Einzelheiten) eine ganz andere Methode verlangt als der zu einem Text. Im einen Fall ist Theologie, im anderen Philologie die Grundwissenschaft.

Here, as in Riegl, the historical field and its underlying ideology (its purposes, its *Wollen*) revise in each era the relations of elements and purposes assigned to art. Thus, antique anthropomorphic polytheism, Christian polytheism, and the natural-scientific worldviews characteristic of Riegl's three longer periods each redefine what art looks and feels like, intending alternate visions of what nature is and, in turn, of what needs to be transacted in the human contest between nature and art. Benjamin's "theology" points to a similar set of purposes instantiated in an era's art.

The body of evidence for this epistemological plane encompasses verbal and visual artifacts (*Arcades Project* N 2, 3); Benjamin will note, "Method of this project: literary montage" ("Methode dieser Arbeit: literarische Montage"; N 1a, 8). Where Riegl performs a phenomenology on his three eras' various privileged art forms, however, Benjamin's Convolutes collect a more general his-

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torical archive of cultural objects. Benjamin extends Riegl's project methodologically as he enacts a historical hermeneutics of the "legible" in ways far beyond the *Geistesgeschichte* of his day and closer to what will become the poststructuralist project:

> What distinguishes images from the "essences" of phenomenology is their historical index. . . . For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time. And, indeed, this acceding "to legibility" constitutes a specific critical point in the movement at their interior. Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each "now" is the now of a particular recognizability. . . . The image that is read—which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability—bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded. (N 3, 1)

> Was die Bilder von den »Wesenheiten« der Phänomenologie unterscheidet, das ist ihr historischer Index. . . . Der historische Index der Bilder sagt nämlich nicht nur, daß sie erst in einer bestimmten Zeit zur Lesbarkeit kommen. Und zwar ist dieses »zur Lesbarkeit« gelangen ein bestimmter kritischer Punkt der Bewegung in ihrem Innern. Jede Gegenwart ist durch diejenigen Bilder betimmt, die mit ihr synchronistisch sind: Jedes Jetzt ist das Jetzt einer bestimmten Erkennbarkeit. . . . Das gelesene Bild, will sagen das Bild im Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit trägt im höchsten Grade den Stempel des kritischen gefährlichen Moments, welcher allem Lesen zugrunde liegt.

This method alters the human sciences, stressing that each reading of the past functions dialectically to capture an understanding as a kind of "dream interpretation" of the historian's now (N 4, 1). For the nineteenth century, part of that dream interpretation includes the capture of technological forms of production responding to the economic forces of their social context.

Overall, Riegl's reformulation of art history is a critical move toward a historical hermeneutics not only accommodating historical change but also integrating the artwork into history as an agent or producer of knowledge. He specifies the artwork's general properties, its characteristic historical ontology, and how to understand it as a materiality with an origin and an intentional epistemological framework. The artwork, in consequence, illuminates those conditions and the historical context in which it arises, lives, and declines.

Benjamin expands these methodological criteria consciously, addressing not just a single class of objects but a more encompassing reality: "The expression 'the book of nature' indicates that one can read the real like a text. And that is how the reality of the nineteenth century will be treated here. We open the book of what happened" ("Die Rede vom Buch der Natur weist darauf hin, daß man das Wirkliche wie einen Text lesen kann. So soll es hier mit der Wirklichkeit des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts gehalten werden. Wir schlagen das Buch des Geschehenen auf"; N 4, 2). But "what happened" is not an unproblematic construct; it is a set of understandings that is constantly reinterpreted, understood in reference to a new present:

> [F]or every stage in the dialectical process (like every stage in the process of history itself), conditioned as it always is by every stage preceding, brings into play a fundamentally new tendency, which necessitates a fundamentally new treatment. . . . It is only from without that a work of art has one and *only* one form, that a dialectical treatise has one and *only* one method. (N 10, 1)

> [W]eil jede Etappe im Prozesse der Dialektik (gleich jeder in dem der Geschichte selbst) wie auch immer bedingt von jeder vorhergegangenen, eine gründlich neue Behandlung fordert. . . . Eine, nämlich *nur* eine Form hat ein Kunstwerk, eine, nämlich *nur* eine Methode hat eine dialektische Abhandlung nur von außen.

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2007.122.1.43 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The arcades are most visible among these new objects; the method is Benjamin's new historical materialism, a questioning of simpler "reconstructions" as one-dimensional (N 7, 6).

Benjamin's Paris is analyzed as a historical-material construction. The unique cultural artifacts of that bourgeois city are interpreted not simply as "other than nature" or as ideologically determining its occupants. These artifacts are images, "the caesura in the movement of thought . . . where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest. Hence, the object constructed in the materialist presentation of history is itself the dialectical image" ("die Zäsur in der Denkbewegung . . . wo die Spannung zwischen den dialektischen Gegensätzen am größten ist. De(m)nach ist der in der materialistischen Geschichtsdarstellung konstruierte Gegenstand selber das dialektische Bild"; N 10a, 3).

Benjamin approaches his city materially and epistemologically, as an artifact demonstrating a *Stadtwollen*. That artifact not only is produced by human consciousness but also is a *work* answering multiple purposes. Benjamin understands the city the way Riegl does an artwork, as a historically situated materiality that establishes a boundary between the knowledge marked as nature and those domains assigned to the human mind. Yet Benjamin also frames that materiality in full consciousness of the Marxist program. We have already seen his use of dialectics and his economic critiques of bourgeois society, but he moves beyond them to uphold a materiality of evidence much like Riegl's: "Marx lays bare the causal connection between economy and culture. For us, what matters is the thread of expression" ("Marx stellt den Kausalzusammenhang zwischen Wirtschaft und Kultur dar. Hier kommt es auf den Ausdruckszusammenhang an"; N 1a, 6). In fact, Marxism itself is marked as a historical product that will be factored into Benjamin's description, showing "in what respects Marxism, too, shares the expressive character of the material products contemporary with it" ("in welchen Zügen auch der Marxismus den Ausdruckscharakter der ihm gleichzeitigen materiellen Erzeugnisse teilt"; N 1a, 7).

Benjamin thus works in an extension of classical historical materialism, introducing a broader field of evidence and acknowledging a different set of ideas motivating expression. For him, this result is political and critical to the future of Marxism as a historical materialism, since that critique tends toward abstraction:

> Or: in what way is it possible to conjoin a heightened graphicness <*Anschaulichkeit*> to the realization of the Marxist method? The first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event. And, therefore, to break with vulgar historical naturalism. To grasp the construction of history as such. In the structure of commentary. (N 2, 6)
>
> Oder: auf welchem Wege es möglich ist, gesteigerte Anschaulichkeit mit der Durchführung der marxistischen Methode zu verbinden. Die erste Etappe dieses Webes wird sein, das Prinzip der Montage in die Geschichte zu übernehmen. Also die großen Konstruktionen aus kleinsten, scharf und schneidend konfektionierten Baugliedern zu errichten. Ja, in der Analyse des kleinen Einzelmoments den Kristall des Totalgeschehens zu entdecken. Also mit den historischen Vulgärnaturismus zu brechen. Die Konstruktion der Geschichte als solche zu erfassen. In Kommentarstruktur.

Like Riegl's artworks, then, any object of a city appears in its culture's historical-epistemological form, determining and being determined by humanity—providing evidence of the culture's *Wollen*, which needs a present-oriented interpretive hermeneutics to understand it.[9]

Such a hermeneutical act is by definition not only critical[10] but also political, "a force

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field in which the confrontation between its fore-history and after-history is played out . . . always anew, never in the same way" ("ein Kraftfeld, in dem die Auseinandersetzung zwischen seiner Vergangenheit und Nachgeschichte sich abspielt . . . immer von neuem, nie auf die gleiche Weise"; N 7a, 1):

> It is the inherent tendency of dialectical experience to dissipate the semblance of eternal sameness, and even of repetition, in history. Authentic political experience is absolutely free of this semblance. (N 9, 5)
>
> Es ist das Eigenste der dialektischen Erfahrung, den Schein des Immer-Gleichen, ja auch nur der Wiederholung in der Geschichte zu zerstreuen. Die echte politische Erfahrung ist von diesem Schein absolut frei.

Where Riegl stops at historical understanding, then, Benjamin's method aims at being both adaptive to and critical of the era's and the interpreter's purposes and ideologies—their *Wollen*, the intentional form their world understanding assumes at that time and place.

Let us now turn to the *Stadtwollen,* the purposes and knowledge that Benjamin uncovers in the constellation of the modern city. His *Exposés* exemplify how one knows a city as part of its culture and era.

## Illuminating Material History: Benjamin's Cultural Analysis

Benjamin's *Exposés* analyze Paris as a unique historical place and outline his new methodology for studying culture in the era of technology, a materialist epistemology more complex than that outlined in economic Marxism. The historical situation of the two *Exposés* is critical here: they were composed in Benjamin's exile, when he worked loosely with the so-called College of Sociology and its members' interdisciplinary, more materialist, and less dogmatically Marxist analyses of culture and individual identity.[11]

Recall that Riegl sees in a cultural artifact the instantiation of a worldview, more than just a culture's economic base. Yet a worldview is neither a logical formalism nor historically determined from above but rather a projection of experience as knowledge, a historical *Wollen*, an act that renders objective the era's epistemological map (for art, that map is predicated on the distinction between nature and culture). Where Riegl took artworks as evidence for such maps, Benjamin posits the city as the hallmark artifact of the nineteenth century, predicated on modern technology and economics. In Benjamin's two *Exposés*, then, the city implicates the capitalist subject of knowledge and the network in which it appears.

Benjamin structures his *Exposés* to attend to questions of hermeneutical method, as understood classically and in Riegl's extension of that project. The first *Exposé* dates from 1935, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" ("Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts"). Its sections each correlate a textual artifact (usually a canonical philosophy text) with a set of material facts. Together, they archive the city's elements and worldview, including, most notably, the new technologies that realign the materialities of the city and its attendant epistemological-materialist functions and thus inscribe into historical consciousness new ways of knowing.

The first section, "Fourier; or, The Passages" ("Fourier oder die Passagen"), talks about how the commercial passages (arcades) of Paris arose with the textile industry, entwined with its economic base: "art enters the service of the merchant" ("die Kunst [tritt] in den Dienst des Kaufmanns"; *Arcades Project* 3; "Paris, die Hauptstadt" 45). That is, art aligns with the production of luxury goods, obscuring for reasons of profit making the line between the public and private spheres. The second paragraph of this section turns to a second condition of the passages, the "beginning of iron construction" ("Anfänge des

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Eisenbaus"), discussing their architecture as implicating a new space of ideology and physical experience, a force that Napoleon misunderstood. Benjamin sketches the impact of this first artificial construction material: though building with iron was an old technology, the nineteenth century's use of iron initiated a new principle of knowledge.

> Just as Napoleon failed to understand the functional nature of the state as an instrument of domination by the bourgeois class, so the architects of the time failed to understand the functional nature of iron, with which the constructive principle begins its domination of architecture. . . . "Construction plays the role of the subconscious." (4)

> So wenig Napoleon die funktionelle Natur des Staates als Herrschaftsinstrument der Bürgerklasse erkannte, so wenig erkannten die Baumeister seiner Zeit die funktionelle Natur des Eisens, mit dem das konstruktive Prinzip seine Herrschaft in der Architektur antritt. . . . »Die Konstruktion nimmt die Rolle des Unterbewußtseins ein.« (46)

That "subconscious" is not a Freudian unconscious. Instead, it is a region of knowledge, produced by a meaning- and form-giving act that instantiates a human experience of reality. The artwork, according to Riegl, projects this experience as knowledge within the space of the materia. By analyzing building materials as parallel to art in producing knowledge, Benjamin generalizes Riegl's project, extending his archive of instantiated knowledge to include sociocultural products with artificial materials in the *Wollen* of the era.

Benjamin's account understands the city in its moment of emergence, when a technology produces new world knowledge—a role that Riegl had ascribed to religion in his three historical eras of art. In the Foucauldian sense, Benjamin recognizes that the Parisian arcades are evidence of a rupture in worldviews, of a nascent logic of transformation spurred by artificial construction materials. The *Stadtwollen* of his era, then, manifests a new epistemological base, not conditioned by the materia in the way Marx assumed:

> Corresponding to the form of the new means of production, which in the beginning is still ruled by the form of the old (Marx), are images in the collective unconscious in which the old and the new interpenetrate. These images are wish images; in them the collective seeks both to overcome and to transfigure the immaturity of the social product and the inadequacies in the social organization of production. (4)

> Die Form des neuen Produktionsmittels, die im Anfang von der des alten beherrscht wird (Marx), entsprechen im Kollektivbewußtsein Bilder, in denen das neue sich mit dem Alten durchdringt. Diese Bilder sind Wunschbilder und in ihnen sucht das Kollektiv die Unfertigkeit des gesellschaftlichen Produkts sowie die Mängel der gesellschaftlichen Produktionsordnung sowohl aufzuheben wie zu verklären. (46–47)

Note his use of the word *verklären*, which again points to the concept of an illumination, a transfiguration of understanding through the production and interpretation of appearances. Critically, the "collective unconscious" of his era is a product of materialities in a broader fashion. While Riegl posited that different religious concepts were the basis for different eras, Benjamin redefines the ideological ground of knowing in the era of technology as rooted in a distinct base that (re)produces images and forms, not just economic relations.

For Benjamin, the modern era's characteristic knowledge production predicates and is predicated on a strategic opposition not only between nature and art (Riegl's point) but also between "nature" and other made objects, including architectural forms. Thus, he can assert that Napoleon overlooked how the materiality of the state was implicated in the rise of the middle classes and their distinctive knowing and how a new material allowed the middle class to make new art(ifacts)

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2007.122.1.43 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that disclosed potential new forms of knowing, including a possible new state form. In the era of bourgeois capitalism, the pictures arising from the "collective unconscious" through such new artifacts can conjure utopian visions (*Wunschbilder*) of how the world could be structured (4; 47). Thus, Benjamin finds that Charles Fourier's utopia reveals the "amorality of the business world" ("Unmoral des Handelsgeschäfts"; 5; 47) and the false morality that is imaged to hold it in place, the "colorful idyll of Biedermeier" ("die farbige Idylle des Biedermeier"; 5; 47). Benjamin's methodology demonstrates how to archive new materialities of culture (new classes of art and artifacts), which create new ways of knowing for the new masses.

The second section, "Daguerre; or, The Panorama" ("Daguerre oder die Panorama"), absent in the French version, uncovers a parallel to Fourier's utopianism in art: "Just as architecture, with the first appearance of iron construction, begins to outgrow art, so does painting, in its turn, with the first appearance of the panorama" ("Wie die Architektur in der Eisenkonstruktion der Kunst zu entwachsen beginnt, so tut das die Malerei ihrerseits in den Panoramen"; 5; 48). The panorama is not just a "faithful" copy of nature, especially since it appears in the era when the city claims superiority over the land. In fact, Benjamin describes the panorama as an agent illuminating the seemingly natural landscape of the city (which, by definition, is no more natural than unsullied landscapes may be presumed to be, because all are part of the phenomenological field): "In panoramas, the city opens out to landscape—as it will do later, in subtler fashion for the flâneurs" ("Die Stadt weitet sich in den Panoramen aus wie sie es auf subtilere Art später für den Flanierenden tut"; 6; 48). The key to the city's role as a new onto-epistemology, a site of knowledge production with its own potential for illumination, is its ability to generate new visions in concrete forms like the passages.

In the remainder of the *Exposés*, Benjamin follows other technological transformations as material forms (including textual forms) that realign the nineteenth century's capacity for generating self-presentations. For example, the status of representation itself shifts in the era of technology, when photography kills portrait miniatures, economically and technically. Photography's technical potential turns pictures into commodities subject to fashionable techniques and commercial exploitation—to new forms of bourgeois self-representation. The third section, "Grandville; or, The World Exhibitions" ("Grandville oder die Weltaustellungen"), then takes up another new cultural form as a new practice of consciousness: exhibitions. Through them, the city of technology becomes a site of pilgrimage: "World exhibitions are places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish" ("Weltausstellungen sind die Wallfahrtsstätten zum Fetisch Ware"). The forms of world expositions reveal social purposes: they "glorify the exchange value of the commodity" ("verklären den Tauschwert der Waren"; 7; 50) and mask use value behind a "phantasmagoria" of entertainment (7). Thus, for instance, the "cult of the commodity" ("[d]er Kultus der Ware"; 8; 51) limits the bourgeois worldview by prostituting the conditions of life to the dead.

Such economic realignment brings with it a concomitant spiritual shift, revealing what Marx calls the "'theological niceties' of the commodity" ("theologisch[e] Mucken der Ware"; 7; 51).[12] Benjamin thus starts from the Marxist principle about consciousness and means of production but then posits that the artifacts of technological city culture create unique knowledge through its distinctive physical and ideological deformations of human experience.

In section 4, "Louis Philippe; or, The Interior" ("Louis-Philippe oder das Interieur"), Benjamin layers art, religion, and the city; together they determine the bourgeoisie's new knowledge of nature and politics, but under

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the appearance of private matters rather than public ones (8). The era's city is at the same time a place of new voters and parliamentary corruption, in which artificial spaces for life are built—where the lebensraum of the city becomes visibly plural and organic (and hence seemingly natural), as opposed to the workshop (*Arbeitsstätte*), which appears inorganic. In the fifth section, "Baudelaire; or, The Streets of Paris" ("Baudelaire oder die Straßen von Paris"), Benjamin factors in the city's characteristic subject, the flâneur, who embodies anything but a simple optic on the city and the crowd: "In the flâneur, the intelligentsia sets foot in the marketplace" ("Im Flaneur begibt sich die Intelligenz auf den Markt"; 10; 54).

That typical urban subject is implicated by capital. Entering the space of the capitalist city, he simultaneously finds a buyer for wares of consciousness, enters into that world's logic of production, and looks for the group's modern life form, as opposed to its *Urgeschichte*. Still, the danger of such a (utopian) world image is its tendency to be static, bringing progress to a standstill. This explains, in another way, the flâneur's characteristic dedication to art for art's sake: purportedly an opposition to the marketplace's deadening effects, such art actually embraces a static state of being in the same constellation.

The final section, "Haussmann; or, The Barricades" ("Haussmann oder die Barrikaden"), shows how art and technology, the city's characteristic epistemological forces, converge, ennobling "technological necessities through artistic ends" ("technische Notwendigkeiten durch künstlerische Zielsetzungen zu veredeln"), when barricades against rebellion are aestheticized (11; 56). As the historical Paris moves toward its destruction, Benjamin finds in it rebellion and decay. Benjamin's city thus conforms to Riegl's art cycle: it originates with Napoleon, reaches a high point in bourgeois culture and the arcades, and then enters its decline as a self-defending stasis rather than a live human artifact: "With the destabilizing of the market economy, we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled" ("Mit der Erschütterung der Warenwirtschaft beginnen wir, die Monumente der Bourgeoisie als Ruinen zu erkennen noch ehe sie zerfallen wird"; 13; 59).

The French version of the *Exposé* adds about five pages to the argument (two additional pages as preface and three at its end), pages that clarify the treatise as a text in methodology, not just a history. First, Benjamin describes how his approach to history intends to create vertigo (*vertige*; "Paris, capitale" 14; 60), destabilizing and recomposing the facts known about the city's material forms, "facts congealed in the forms of things" ("faits figés sous formes des choses").

It is again important that Benjamin defines such phenomena as specific historical instantiations of forces creating the city (its *Stadtwollen*): "These creations undergo this 'illumination' not only in a theoretical sense, by an ideological transposition, but also in the immediacy of their perceptible presence. They are manifest as phantasmagorias" ("Ces créations subissent cette »illumination« non pas seulement de manière théoretique, par une transposition idéologique, mais bien dans l'immédiateté de la présence sensible. Elles se manifestent en tant que fantasmagories"; 14; 60). Such phantasmagorias, in turn, provide utopian images of what could be. New "virtual [realities] of technology" can also predicate visions of a new social order originating in the city, which did not happen in Napoleon's Paris (26; 76).

Benjamin's *Exposés* thus exercise a new hermeneutics of the city as a site of knowledge production unique to the nineteenth century. He has incorporated a more materialist historiography into Marxist critique, aimed at a broader onto-epistemological understanding of human life and consciousness. His overall project suggests how a city is a specific human artifact revealing a *Stadtwollen*, how a

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new class of material products changes the phantasmagorias of a group consciousness and hence is evidence of a potential new order or worldview that needs to be understood in its historicity and as an understanding of the material state of affairs.

## Conclusion

The *Arcades Project* approaches the city methodologically as a distinct kind of artifact, adapting Riegl's method for understanding an artwork. Benjamin has folded a unique appeal to materiality into classic economic Marxism, understanding that the city is not just the product of a set of production relations but also produces consciousness and instantiates knowledge—it is a class of artifact implicated in revealing and producing (not just reproducing) human knowledge.

Most particularly, the artifacts of the city reveal new avenues through which images, especially utopian ones, can be produced to create tensions between privileged reference points like art and nature, between artifacts or representations that are clearly made and overtly ideologized and those that have been naturalized. These images, in turn, create spaces to be adopted by subjects as their worldview, often an artificial or phantasmagoric understanding of their world's basis—a false consciousness, but one necessary to orient oneself within the spaces of a particular culture.

Benjamin, then, has redefined the city as a creation parallel to Riegl's artworks. His *Exposés* outline a historical hermeneutics of the city as artifact, and the *Arcades Project* argues that the bourgeois city is in decline, a unique *Wollen* striating its inhabitants' understanding of their material and cognitive experience. Benjamin's city is an epistemological framework fundamentally different from other sites of capitalist production, since it has its unique material field—its own data of experience, in the material form of artifacts. These artifacts are indeed products of capitalism, but they reify knowledge in various nuanced ways relating to their contexts of origin.

This borrowing from Riegl's materialist approach is critical for understanding Benjamin's greater project: his analysis of art forms that emerge from the new materialities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as regional ontologies—"little worlds," or worldviews. For Benjamin, the arcades are products of a distinct worldview and of a technology that redefine the prevailing understandings of what is human and what is natural; the arcades are prototypical artifacts that change how the world is experienced, structured, and known. If Riegl cast theology as the master narrative that defined the human and natural for the three earlier eras of art history, then Benjamin argues that the eras' technologies—their capitalist rationales and rationalizations—produce artifacts that do the same.

Critically, Benjamin's city is a regional ontology different from other capitalist artifacts because it has a distinct space (the arcades) and capacity to produce phantasmagorias in ways not available in earlier eras—capitalism is not the only force for dehumanization in it. When capitalism achieves a maturity in producing artifacts as sophisticated as the passages, it creates new understandings of the human and the world (the organic and the inorganic), and it has the potential to reify worldviews in heretofore unknown patterns. From the other side, the parallels between Riegl and Benjamin put the question of reification itself into a different light: all cultural artifacts (artistic as well as technological) reify worldviews because they create strategic images of how nature and culture, the organic and the inorganic, seem to oppose each other naturally, as part of a culture's complicated self-presentation and understanding. Reification itself cannot be overcome; only its various historical forms can.

An assessment of Paris's modernity (a diagnosis of the emergence and development of the bourgeois-capitalist era), the *Exposés* argue the necessity of revising Marxism as a

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2007.122.1.43 Published online by Cambridge University Press

critique of ideology: as theorists in the wake of Michel Foucault would underscore, society's economic basis constitutes only one source of a group's consciousness. The same theorists know that Benjamin's *Arcades Project* torso is preserved in a series of convolutes. From today's perspective, these folders of materials constitute a kind of archaeological cross section, the materials for a critical, hermeneutical analysis in the materialist-phenomenological mode. In them, Benjamin archives materials documenting new patterns of knowing crystallized in the city around new classes of technological and commercial artifacts. Benjamin's city of arcades and passages is a distinct moment in its own historical evolution, a symptom of a particular decline—Napoleon's failure of imagination, leading him to avoid the formation of a new civic form.

From a theoretical point of view, Benjamin's work engages not in a generalized *Ideologiekritik* of the modern city but in a more particularized archaeology of the elements through which each site produces worldviews. He elucidates how Europe has moved beyond Riegl's three eras (worldviews based on religious images) and into one conditioned by capital relations, a straightforward result resembling that achievable by more traditional Marxist analysis. Yet Benjamin also argues how that "age of technological reproducibility" (to borrow another of his titles) has its own, unique production of meaning that can grow and decline; manufactured artifacts illuminate consciousness as much as they reify understandings. Thus, photography (or arcades, or fashion, or film, or the artwork itself) needs to be seen as instantiating (producing and revealing) a culture's unique potential for understanding and misunderstanding (*méconnaissance*) alike. That such a revelation through artifacts takes place in cities opens its meaning to praxis, experience, institutionalization, cultural capital, and ideology in various ways, not only as the automatic function of a single dominant false consciousness.

In this way, Benjamin's work sets itself apart from the Frankfurt school's postwar project in aligning understanding with experience and space as knowledge, not just with consciousness or agency. Benjamin's project is instead a critique extending more traditional Marxist paradigms of consciousness-raising through revolution by incorporating a more nuanced materialist analysis that accommodates the kinds of analyses of power, institutions, and agency attributed to poststructuralism.[13] Translating Riegl's *Kunstwollen* into a kind of *Stadtwollen* allows Benjamin to evolve a new materialist hermeneutics and critique of the city as a distinctive site of knowledge production, an analysis of symbolic forms and power in use by subjects whose rationalities and intentions are embodied in them.

## Notes

1. This essay is part of a project in progress on historical-materialist hermeneutics in Austro-Hungary. My thanks are due especially to Rolf J. Goebel and Rainer Rumold for their comments on an earlier draft.

2. While Paris and the flâneur have long been topics of scholarly discussion, the most recent wave of city studies seems to have begun with Roland Barthes and his *Eiffel Tower*, and then Carl Schorske's *Fin de Siècle Vienna*, the hallmark for many exhibitions on turn-of-the-century Vienna throughout the West in the early 1980s. More recently, texts like Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*, Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space* point up the ideological legibility of city spaces, inspired by texts; German studies has flocked especially to the reconstruction of Berlin in this context.

3. See Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*, for the popularization of the term in English. Jürgen Habermas, "Bewußtmachende oder rettende Kritik," does that work in German. Peter Bürger distinguishes "rettende Kritik" ("redemptive critique") from *Ideologiekritik* by noting that the former construes its object "als *Ausdruck* gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse"; "as an expression of social relations" (202–03).

4. The Riegl connection is reasonably well documented in Benjamin studies, but most critics do not differentiate him from contemporaries like Heinrich Wölfflin. The most definitive account of Benjamin's connection to art

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history is Wolfgang Kemp, "Fernbilder" (1978). Kemp does not, however, want to grant the historical hermeneutics of art the status of a materialist investigation, as I do here, and so he reads the significance of the borrowing differently, even while tracing copious echoes. The best current accounts are by Howard Caygill, in his *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (1998 [90–91]) and "Walter Benjamin's Concept of Cultural History" (2004), in which he explains Riegl's "artistic will" (82). Much recent work in this direction only alludes to the connections. Michael P. Steinberg, in "The Collector as Allegorist: Goods, Gods, and the Objects of History" (1996), speaks of externality rather than materialism as Riegl's methodological principle (108–10). Lutz Peter Koepnick, "Medusian Politics" (1994), makes the connection (355); his 1999 *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power* mentions Riegl and notes that Marleen Stroessel found a direct quotation from Riegl in Benjamin's discussion of the aura (137). John McCole, in *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (1993), adopts Riegl's idea of eras' signature styles as he discusses decadence, especially in the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (128). Beatrice Hanssen (2002) brings the *Arcades Project* into proximity with Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky. Bettine Menke (2002) also evokes art history next to Benjamin.

5. Benjamin cites the same text in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (239n2). His 1929 review of "Bücher, die lebendig geblieben sind" cites the text as "eine Revolution des Verfahrens," a methodological revolution ("Bücher" 170). He also uses the term "Kunstwollen" to characterize that era's new sense of space.

6. Benjamin's use of *durchspüren* (in one translation, "to apprehend") underscores his commitment to a phenomenological model of comprehension because it stresses how architectural structures need to be "through-intuited" to be understood as cognitive and experiential knowledge alike.

7. Quotations from the Convolutes are given by folder letter and number.

8. "First Period: Art as Improvement of Nature through Physical Beauty," when humanity considers itself "superior to nature"; "Second Period: Art as Improvement of Nature through Spiritual Beauty," in which art's sensual form is referred to an underlying, hegemonic ideal more important than its physical presence; and "Third Period: Art as Reproduction of Transitory Nature," focusing on matter for its own sake. Note that this is a set of strategic distinctions, which make no ontological claims.

9. Jürgen Habermas, in "Bewußtmachende oder rettende Kritik," indirectly draws attention to the proximity of Benjamin's project to hermeneutics when he says that Peter Szondi should have given the lecture celebrating Benjamin's publication (175).

10. "The materialist presentation of history leads the past to bring the present into a critical state" ("Die materialistische Geschichtsdarstellung führt die Vergangenheit dazu, die Gegenwart in eine kritische Lage zu bringen"; N 7a, 5).

11. The College of Sociology was one root site of poststructuralism. See Denis Hollier, *The College of Sociology* (1988), for an overview of the group's project and Benjamin's place in it. That volume offers several approaches to analyzing group consciousness arising from a common base and historical moment (usually fascism) but implicated in the affective domains of individuals. The college's texts thus combine a kind of Marxist-Freudian cultural analysis with work on social semiotics. On another front, Thomas Y. Levin offers a good short overview of the textual criticism of the *Passagen-Werk* in "Walter Benjamin and the Theory of Art History" (1988), echoed in Philip Rosen's "Introduction" (2003).

12. "Mucken" is a colloquial usage, perhaps better translated in this context as a "theological sticking point," "trickiness," or "quirk"; "niceties" may be too formal.

13. The Marxist connection I make here is contested. Richard Wolin generally situates Benjamin in a more straight-line context of Marxist historiography ("Critical Theory," "From Messianism," and *Walter Benjamin*); James Rolleston places him in the context of Marxism and theology (16); Bernd Witte nuances the Marxism link by reference to Lukács; Harro Müller discusses Benjamin's materialist approach to *Technik* ("Einige Anmerkungen" and "Materialismus"); Brewster and Buchner elucidate a Habermas-Benjamin link.

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https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2007.122.1.43 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2007.122.1.43 Published online by Cambridge University Press