Dwelling Among the Waves

Modernist Architecture, Walter Benjamin, and the Mythology of Modernity

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A thesis submitted for a Master of Arts in Religious Studies

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2011

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Acknowledgements

For my parents, who always support me in whatever I choose to do, no
matter how foolhardy.

I would also like to thank Mike Grimshaw for his endless patience and
belief in my abilities, which have proved invaluable to the completion
of this thesis.

Abstract

For Walter Benjamin, architecture is the clearest expression of the 'latent mythology' that underlies any historical epoch; by engaging with works of modernist architecture in continental Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, my project hopes to reveal the underlying tensions, mythologies, and contradictions that reveal modernity to be a construction both more open and unstable than might first be imagined. Using Benjamin's work as a background also allows for Surrealist practice to become the dialectical foil to an architecture that is still widely understood as clinical, functionalist and utopic, but whose own paradoxes and uncanny intrusions ultimately reject a teleological and hyper-rationalist modernity. The tension between the profane and the messianic, time and timelessness, is here played out through modernist architecture as the search for the form and nature of dwelling within secular space.

This culminates in a study of two of Benjamin's allegorical characters, *the collector* and *the brooder*, who between them embody different modes of response to the conditions of modernity: on the one hand, a redemptive practice centred around creative bricolage and the unmasking of modernity's ambiguity, on the other, the reactive and melancholic attitude of the brooder, whose private dreams of entering and rescuing the past negate the critical potential of romanticism – of the modernist architects and their project to build a meaningful world.

That is the longing: to dwell midst the waves

and to have no homeland in time.

—RAINER MARIA RILKE, *Die frühen Gedichte* (1922).

Introduction

Neoclassicism's fundamental lack is that it builds for the gods just passing through an architecture that disavows the essential terms of their establishing contact. (A bad, reactionary architecture.)

—WALTER BENJAMIN, *The Arcades Project.*[1]

Modernity is not the time for gods of place, only for the traces of those that are 'just passing through.' Accordingly, Walter Benjamin's critique of neo-classicist architecture is not based upon its style *per se*, but rather on the presumption of permanence – the idea that the divinities might yet accommodate themselves in a monumental form – which is here called out as ignorance, because in modernity *the gods are transitory*. This is to say that meaning is no longer sustained through a self-evident relationship between humanity and the divine, but as a moment of shock or frisson teased out of the profane world itself. It is this concept of 'shock' that for Baudelaire defined modern life, it is the hallmark of an inconstant environment, one in which changes occur so rapidly that it is difficult to assimilate them. In turn, the parameters of time, history, and memory are also transformed, so that 'modernity' does not simply describe different technologies and social structures but also encompasses the subjective relationship and responses to these objective conditions.

As a discipline, architecture always operates under certain constraints so that no architecture can be wholly representative of the flux and change of modernity without it losing its utility. It is a practice that requires order and control as well as imagination – and wherein finished works are ultimately given life by the everyday disorder of a lived-in building. Architecture is therefore always a discipline concerned with *dwelling*, both in its personal, private sense, and as a broader philosophical and existential concept. It is, after

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NB: The quotation on the previous page (Rilke, *Die frühen Gedichte* [1922], p.1) is taken from: W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland, ed. R. Tiedemann (Cambridge:MA, 1999), [S4a, 2], p.551.
The quotation on the end page is from: S. Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (New York, 1995), p.719.

[1] W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N1a,5], p.459; in Buck-Morss (her own translation), *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge:MA, 1989) p.256

all, part of the environment that we create for ourselves. Modernist architecture, in particular, is a form of response that attempts to express and rearticulate the relationship between modernity and humanity.

What unites the many movements and groups which are grouped under the title of 'modernisms' is that they are all concerned with the interpretation and creation of the culture of their times, which is to say, that they are the seeking to understand their own modernity – whether by exposing its mythic psyche (Surrealism), fetishising speed and technology (Futurism) or in creating the forms and accoutrements of the new age (the Bauhaus, De Stijl, CIAM, etc.). Nevertheless, it is difficult to provide any uncontested definition for modernity, let alone for what constitutes modernism or who a modernist might be. Perhaps this is because these terms reflect those same tensions and inconsistencies that they have been accorded to describe: 'modernity' appears all encompassing yet also vague and borderless, while the variety of modernisms (and therefore modernists) are as numerous as there are diverse cultural responses to the experience of modernity. The category of modernist architecture is itself somewhat ungraspable, but it is rich with instant associations, whether of particular materials (glass, steel, reinforced concrete), a particular aesthetic (anti-ornamental, whitewash, horizontality, volume over mass), or particular vices (arrogance, oppression, monotony, voyeurism).[2] Yet, once these generalisations are taken as fixed, or as the only reality, it obscures the possibilities latent within the practice.

My aim is to rethink modernity through its paradigmatic architectural expressions, which in turn reveal the dissonances and tensions within this apparently monumental concept, therefore destabilising it and allowing other possibilities of dwelling to surface. Modernist architecture is also refigured through this approach, and I want to emphasise that it is not a *style* whose potential is exhausted, but a way of exploring modernity itself. I wish to approach it as a collection of creative responses to the psychic and material conditions of modern life – moving away from an emphasis on teleological time and dehumanisation and instead elaborating on the possibilities for redemption, that sacramental gaze that renews meaning in human life and its constructions.

The work of Walter Benjamin is of major importance throughout this investigation, and his great insight remains in detecting the mythic within the supposedly secular realm of

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[2] For the sake of clarity I will use the term 'modernist architecture' – rather than 'modern' – to refer to the diverse architectural practice, which also helps to keep the general time period in mind.

modernity. Furthermore, he recognised that it was not an intruder or an anomaly, but as that which defines modernity itself. His theory of the messianic is a theory of revelation, a redemptive force which lifts the veil to expose the multitude of ways in which the material world and the mythic interweave. He reads works of architecture as threshold spaces that express the different aspects of modernity, continually bringing to light the contradictions within them. Although the architectural avant-garde fascinated him – particularly the work of Le Corbusier – he was also very much interested in Surrealist practices and their emphasis on exposing the mythological or dream figures within the everyday. He returned over and over to those continuously intersecting themes of myth and history, yet "he does not advocate the one-dimensional negation of mythic forms, but demands *critical redemption*."[3]

In order to uncover the mythology of modernity I am taking my cue from Benjamin's reading of the rag picker and the collector, both of whom approach things tangentially, interested less in linear models than kaleidoscopic juxtapositions. In this way, I want to explore the liminal spaces between interior and exterior, idealism and nihilism, between the creative act and the destructive impulse; I wish to pay special attention to how the boundaries between such concepts and categories dissolve, locating human experience and human creations – such as architecture – in a threshold space, where objectivity and subjectivity meet to reconcile the human with the world.

Considering that both modernity and modernist architecture are widely associated with schemes or spaces of domination and control, it is especially important to recover the contradictory moments within them so that they return to an ontological openness. The notion of a Janus-faced modernity is present throughout my study, in which the fundamental tensions between a taxonomic, ordering modernity are joined to a transitory aspect to create a larger code or discourse, one which is constituted by paradox and instability. These dialectical configurations rely upon a sense of the shadow, the traces of the other that denies a totalitarian system.[4] Therefore, I hope to maintain the difficult balance between acknowledging the existence and experience of each aspect while at the same time stressing their fundamental indivisibility:

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[3] G. Gilloch [my emphasis], *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: UK, 1996), pp.12-13

[4] Of course, language categorises, it breaks down and allows us to approach things from multiple angles so that we may talk about the objective and subjective as specific experiential fields, but linguistic separation should not become confused with actuality (thereby also making these concepts monolithic).

> Modernity, paradoxically, links a strong orientation toward the future with a certain melancholy, a pursuit of progress with a feeling for the ephemeral and the transitory. Modernity is therefore experienced in a fundamentally ambivalent way.[5]

This is undoubtedly an essay of theory and ideas, and it is a broad study that attempts to link many different images of the modern, but it ultimately focuses upon transforming our preconceptions of modernity and modernist architecture, in order to renew the concept of dwelling within modernity. I have necessarily limited my focus to Continental Europe, and taken as a guideline (although not strictly adhered to) the period spanning 1900-1945. As I have not been able to visit the works of architecture in question, I have focused less on their specific materiality than on the way in which they contribute to the various narratives of modernity, their images in the popular imagination, and the concepts and perspectives that surround and inform the modernist architectural practice. As a result of this, Le Corbusier's work is often under discussion, since it has become something of the archetypal image of modernist architecture – and it is precisely into this image which I want to inject some dissonance.

In Chapter One I will begin by challenging the linearity of temporal experience, and introducing subjectivity to modernist architecture via the destabilising presence of the ruin. In examining the way in which boundaries blur, both spatially and temporally, modernity and modernist architecture alike begin to shed their preconceptions and may instead be approached as flexible categories, never fully determined by either the objective or subjective, and thus retaining an openness or ambiguity. In this manner, modernist utopic dreaming is also salvaged and incorporated into a Romanticist modernity.

Whereas this first chapter looks back at modernist architecture from a self-consciously removed perspective, Chapter Two places the practice within a specific context via the life and work of Walter Benjamin. His personal experience and incisive accounts of the European city in the first half of the twentieth-century bring to light the accompanying dreams, phantoms, idiosyncrasies, and nightmares that shape modern experience. Like the collector, Benjamin is an interpreter of objects who is distinguished by his curiosity and hermeneutical engagement with the borderlands of modernity, the places where the

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[5] H. Heynen, 'Architecture between Modernity and Dwelling: Reflections on Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*,' *Assemblage*, no.17 (1992), p.80

garbage or *abfall* collects and mutely destabilises the core. The emphasis that he places upon dialectical elements is mirrored by "the tension in his thought between destruction and preservation, between the eschatological and the utopian, between the progressive and the traditional, between the materialist and the theological."[6] Consequently, engaging with his writing – especially with his unfinished magnum opus *The Arcades Project* [*das Passagenwerk*] – introduces some critical theory through which to approach modernist architecture and its relationship to modernity and dwelling.

Chapter Three reveals that although modernist architecture often sold itself on ideas of exteriority and universality, it is no less immune to enchantment than any other object, and just as much a product of dreams as a space *for* dreams. It focuses upon the mythological constructs within the built environment, and by examining Surrealist work and theories, it is possible to see how irrationality and dream-images are present in even the most functionalist architecture – and that they provide a critical force in overturning the domination of instrumental rationality.

Chapter Four focuses upon the nature of dwelling within modernity, and also on the exact nature of the 'revolutionary potential' which Benjamin saw in modernist architecture. This is an exploration of the tension between dwelling and wandering, in order to provide deeper insight into the way in which architecture can simultaneously reflect the search for a home and articulate the homelessness of the modern condition.

Finally, I will draw upon Benjamin's allegory of the practice of collecting and the nature of brooding. Although this will initially seem removed from architectural considerations, by crystallising facets of programmatic and transitory modernity into symbolic characters it makes these abstractions more approachable by bringing them into the realm of human experience. In this manner, the contradictions of the modern are exposed as the groundwork for a meaningful engagement with modernity.

As Rilke wrote in the lines of his poem, 'the longing is to dwell among the waves;' to exist within the flux and change of secular modernity without the certainty of rigid temporal structures and consequently, linear stories of meaning. Is it possible to have a homeland here, or is it always a dream? Perhaps we simply drift, caught up in the current, defined by the momentum and diffusion of modern life without having any control over it

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[6] M. Mack, 'Modernity as an Unfinished Project: Benjamin and Political Romanticism,' in A. Benjamin and C. Rice (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and the Architecture of Modernity* (Melbourne, 2009), p.65

– we float here and there, and only briefly touch the ground before being washed away once more.

Benjamin's view on neo-classical architecture addresses a context in which the monumentality, the permanence of the temple, is now anachronistic. It becomes either the sign of a misunderstanding or it is an attempt to evoke – or impose – certainty and stability. But here, among the waves, we find that the temples are empty, that meaning is not transcendent so much as it is collected and created from the flotsam and jetsam, that it comes to us not in a 'strong' form (neo-classical architecture) but in a 'weak' one – by which I mean that it is predicated on openness and arrives in fragment, rather than as an omnipresent master narrative.

Among the waves we are caught between groundlessness and liberation, anxiety and hope. Dwelling here is contingent on a level of uncertainty, but it is not nihilistic or without meaning. Instead, it entails a perennial act of questioning, always asking "where are we? What is dying or dead? What wants to be born?"[7]

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[7] Kostof, p.745

1. Ruin

The old forms are in ruins, the benumbed world is shaken up, the old human spirit is invalidated and in flux toward a new form. We float in space and cannot yet perceive the new order.

—WALTER GROPIUS.[8]

Many of the works of the Ancients have become fragments. Many works of the Moderns have become fragments the moment they come into being.

—FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL, *Schriften zur Literatur*.[9]

There is historical time only insofar as there is an excess of the unactualised, the unfinished, failed thwarted, which leaps beyond the particular Now and demands from another Now, its settlement, correction and fulfilment.

—WERNER HAMACHER.[10]

We forget that modernity is composed of fragments, that it is suspended between wreckage and construction because things are not set and time is only ever contingent. Perhaps the most direct example of the past as both presence and absence is the ruin, which also stands for the maxim that "architecture is either the prophecy of an unfinished society or the tomb of a finished one."[11] Ruins recall that element of destruction which defines nature and the profane world of death, but also remind us of the change in the relationship between building and time. Previously, community extended into the future, but in modernity projects are built in increasing haste followed by their equally rapid demolition – in part

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[8] Walter Gropius, in B.M. Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945* (1968), p.45; in Benson and Forgács (ed.), *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes* (Cambridge: MA, 2002), p.203

[9] F. Schlegel, *Schriften zur Literatur* (1972), ed. W. Rasch, p.32; in R. Sieburth, 'Benjamin the Scrivener,' *Assemblage*, no.6 (1988), p.21

[10] Werner Hamacher, in Mack, 'Modernity as Unfinished Project'; in Benjamin and Rice (eds.), p.60

[11] L. Mumford, 'Random Notes' (1934), in D.L. Miller (ed.), *The Lewis Mumford Reader* (Athens & London, 1995), introduction: section 2, p.43

due to the capitalist equation of time and money. One need only think of the lifetime's work – or several – that is the Gothic cathedral, to comprehend the extent to which modernity's architecture is transitory.[12] Yet even in its ruined state, a work of architecture creates a panorama of images, meanings, and emotions. It exists in a liminal zone, belonging neither wholly to nature or culture, a moment identified by Benjamin as history in its most authentic form, as it is only via subjection to temporal existence – deprived of glossy hyper-presence – that things reclaim their 'material inertia.'[13]

The ruin – if approached in both its materiality and as an idea – is able to inject some dissonance into the historical construct of Enlightenment modernity and its progressive temporality. To anchor the discussion in this chapter to an actual form, I will briefly examine the history of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, which then leads on to a more general study of the ruin. Although it is important to critically engage with the destabilising quality of modern time, it is also necessary to recognise the essential romanticism that lies at the heart of the modernist project, that redemptive critique which resists an inescapable present.

The Programmatic and the Transitory

The programmatic concept looks on modernity as a project: emphasis is placed on the pursuit of liberation and emancipation and a linear, purposive history. The transitory concept highlights the modern's "fugitive" reality and uncouples its continual change and variation from a purposive view of progress.

—HILDE HEYNEN, '*Architecture between Modernity and Dwelling.*'[14]

It is evident that modernity is a condition of rapid change and instability, and this is coupled with the sensation that the force of progress is sweeping away the old world to make room for the new, so that things become fluid rather than fixed. Such a context resists the accumulation of meaning and the process of cultural accretion that forms traditions, while in the same instance provoking designs for a transformed future. The

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[12] E. Farrelly, 'Why is Contemporary Architecture so Crap?', *Monument*, no.96 (2010), p.35
[13] See Gilloch, p.14
[14] Heynen, 'Architecture between Modernity and Dwelling,' p.80

programmatic and the transitory are two different temporal registers: in the former, time is oriented toward the future and as it moves in this linear fashion it usurps the previous time and discards it, while in the latter time also moves but without purpose, in an endless recycling of the new in different forms so that a sense of cyclical time prevails. As in the above quote, Hilde Heynen uses these definitions to refer to the fundamental dialectic that constitutes modernity and its attendant modes of experience, and I will be referring back to these concepts as they very succinctly express the tension between teleological and what Benjamin calls 'natural' history.

These aspects can also relate to the desire to transcend or exceed time, as well as the identification with the transient, the weathered, and all that which is *subject* to time. Heynen's formulation suggests that modernity is fluid rather than fixed, in that phenomenal space is constantly defined and redefined by the flux between programmatic and transitory elements; modernity is thus "constituted by contradictory moments: liberation and discipline, innovation and eternal return to the same, development and stagnation."[15] The tension between these experiential fields is magnified as a consequence of industrialisation, technological developments and increasingly mobile populations – amongst other things, and for the individual this translates to "an oscillation between the struggle for personal development and the nostalgia for what is irretrievably lost."[16]

In this manner the programmatic and transitory may also signify different interpretative approaches to modernity or alignments which take on the character of a political position (in the sense of a premise for action), for example, in the way that surrealism emphasises the mythic contingency of the transitory.[17] While Baudelaire explicitly identified modernity with the transitory, many present-day discussions rely upon a largely programmatic, 'ordering' conception of modernity as well as of modernist architecture. But the programmatic and the transitory should not be taken separately, rather, they exist in a state of what Benjamin would call *Durchdringung* – they act through one another and like the faces of Janus, both sides constitute the whole.[18] Therefore, just as modernity is characterised by instability, so too is modernist architecture.

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[15] Ibid, p.86

[16] Marshall Berman's idea, Ibid, p.13

[17] See Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.359

[18] E. Marder, *Dead Time: Temporal Disorders in the Wake of Modernity (Baudelaire and Flaubert)* (Stanford:CA, 2001), p.72

The act of creation is also always an act of *translation*, but one whose final meaning is never fixed. The act of building is inevitably connected to the transitory and the contingent because it involves the materialisation of plan and concept into a physical world, where it will then be subject to use and disuse, to additions, modifications, reconstruction and ultimately, inevitable *destruction* in the world of time. As the architectural object weathers, the nature of the architect's dream reveals itself, and we are confronted with the reality of its transmutation.

This is a particularly interesting dynamic in regards to modernism in architecture, because many of the architectural manifestos emphasise both time and space as platonic dimensions, from which it follows that any stains, erosion or weathering act as "signs of a deformation from an intended pure state."[19] Yet modernist architecture, like modernity, is just as much defined by language and historiography as it is by material forms; consequently, a building like the Villa Savoye owes much of its iconic status as a 'pure form' to Siegfried Giedion's 1941 book *Space, Time and Architecture*, which amalgamated modernism in architecture into a handful of ideological and aesthetic tenets. It is precisely this set of associations, or what might better be called 'the idea of modernist architecture' that is of interest to me. In examining the elements that make up this story – as well the way in which it intertwines with the story of modernity – it becomes clear that the material object always escapes the boundaries that are set for it, that even in those buildings which are considered the most rational, the most transparent, there are incongruities and unanticipated meanings. The liminal spaces at the level of architecture means that modernity also starts to reveal itself as a construction that weathers and decays, that can be rebuilt, extended, or reinterpreted. So what better place to begin than with the Villa Savoye in ruin?

The Villa Savoye

The dialectic of building and ruin – that central tension of architectural modernity in a century of creation and destruction – can here be understood through a consideration of the "last of the so-called purist villas" and one of the archetypal buildings of architectural

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[19] M. Mostafavi and D. Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time* (Cambridge:MA, 2005), p.103

modernism, Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, not in its restored state but in that state of disrepair which it fell into during the Second World War.[20] Both American and German soldiers occupied the Villa during the war, which remained in a badly deteriorated condition until its restoration which commenced in the late 1960s but was not completed until 1997. But this was almost certainly more to do with the role that it played in Le Corbusier's oeuvre – the way in which it demonstrated his 'Five Points of a New Architecture,' proposed in 1927 – than with its actual potential use; in fact, no one was quite sure what to use it for, and even prior to the war when it had been (briefly) inhabited by the Savoye family it did not function well as a dwelling, since its flat roof resulted in leaks and it quickly became damp and unliveable.[21] Modernist architecture's associations with functionalism make these failings all the more ironic, so that one might say of the Villa that "its only true function had been, and would continue to be, as a demonstration of the architect's aesthetic."[22]

This kind of assessment is easy to make from a position that looks back upon the buildings – and ruins – of the modernists. From this perspective, past objects and events tend to lose their nuances and idiosyncrasies once they are absorbed into the larger historical narrative, which in this case is the story of a modernity characterised by doomed utopian projects, in which the architects are primarily featured as the misguided harbingers of a blank capitalist landscape. But this allows for none of the complexities and contradictions within the practice, and ignores the necessarily experimental nature of many of these buildings as a result of the materials and technologies which had become available. It should also be noted that during the restoration of the Villa Savoye, Le Corbusier had to be dissuaded from his desire to redesign it and otherwise improve upon the existing form.[23] This is but one example of how the history of modernist architecture has literally constructed itself – another obvious one being the 1986 rebuilding of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion, of a structure originally built for the 1929 International Exposition and that was never intended to be permanent.

In 1965 the architect Bernard Tschumi visited the Villa Savoye, and recalled "the squalid walls of the small service rooms [. . .] stinking of urine [. . .] and covered in

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[20] D. Gans, *The Le Corbusier Guide* (New York, 2006),p.81

[21] K.D. Murphy, 'The Villa Savoye and the Modernist Historic Monument,' *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 61:1 (2002), p.75

[22] Ibid, p.74

[23] Ibid, p.78

obscene graffiti."[24] Yet it was meant to be a space that, in Le Corbusier's own words, would suspend its inhabitants in "a Virgilian dream."[25] It is clear, then, that it was never intended to adhere to any strict code of functionalism, but to express a poetic dimension. The bleached bones of classical architecture are here self-consciously referenced, and Le Corbusier's juxtaposition of the Parthenon with racing cars and American grain elevators in his 1923 text *Towards an Architecture* [*Vers une Architecture*] shows that he was well aware of reworking classical principles through modern technology.[26] The Villa Savoye is not a building which rejects or breaks from the past, but rather one that reinterprets its ruins. Already, this most modernist of buildings is subverting the standard narrative. Although it certainly encompasses a formalist reading, this is also less clear-cut than it first appears, because the combined effect of its horizontality, its raised living space on *pilotis* (stilts) and its long glass windows, is to engage the inhabitants with the outside world. It is "a platform for viewing," or even an "optical device for a vision of modernity."[27] It throws the gaze outward, it is less of a standardised object to be looked at than a frame that mediates between the self and the outside world. This is "the dream of the Romantics," the *panorama* that turns the vista into an object itself:

> The inhabitants [. . .] will contemplate [the landscape] maintained intact, from the height of their suspended garden or through the four sides of the long windows.[28]

By contrasting this rhetoric and intention with its period of decay we see the way in which the profane comes up against the dream, the programmatic against the transitory. When we think of what architecture does, it is easy to image a space that protects and encloses, but the ruin interrupts the normative idea of architecture because it is so obviously an indefinite space, persisting through time at the same moment as it is passing away. It makes visible the concept of time as a realm of in-between, and via its association with the

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[24] B. Tschumi, 'Architecture and Trangression,' in *Oppositions Reader: Selected Readings from a Journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture 1973-1984*, ed. K.M. Hays (New York, 1998), p.359

[25] Le Corbusier, *Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and City Planning* (Cambridge, 1991), p.139; in Gans, p.83

[26] *Vers Une Architecture* is commonly mistranslated and known in English as 'Towards a New Architecture.'

[27] Murphy, p.86; and S. Boym, 'Tatlin, or, Ruinophilia,' *Cabinet*, no,38 (2007/08), www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/28/boym2.php

[28] R. Barthes, 'The Eiffel Tower', *The Eiffel Tower and other Mythologies*, trans. R. Howard (1979), p.9; and Le Corbusier, in Gans, p.83.

transitory it implicitly critiques order and progress. Although the ruin of the Villa Savoye, is no longer visible except in photographs, its image waits beneath the paint and plaster, a kind of apocalyptic presence beneath the whitewash, underlying the building's surface history as one of the central achievements of modernist architecture.

Weathering & Nature

In nature, the new is mythic, because its potential is not yet realised; in consciousness, the old is mythic, because its desires were never fulfilled.

—SUSAN BUCK-MORSS, *The Dialectics of Seeing.*[29]

The ruin appears to us as a mediator between life and death, nature and culture. It draws attention to the inescapably arbitrary character of the boundaries that we create. The idea of architecture as something objective and self-contained is always a fiction then, but one that expresses the desire to achieve a sense of stability and control, to create meaning which endures through time rather than weathering. What is it about the visible passage of time on objects, especially the architectural object, which entails the exacerbation or reclamation of subjectivity? Perhaps it is the sense that, by degrees, the work is returning to a sensuous historical domain, defined by things unintended.

Tschumi noted that, for him, "the Villa Savoye was never so moving as when the plaster fell off its concrete blocks," but this also brings to mind the criticism of the Polish avant-garde poet Tadeusz Peiper, who in his 1922 manifesto lamented that "what emerged spontaneously, as an expression of life, evoked negative feelings in the residents and only when it was weathered by time, when it became a melancholy remembrance of the past, did it win people's hearts."[30]

The encounter with the ruin takes on a certain fetish quality in Tschumi's recollections, a pleasure at the way in which our creations disintegrate and are absorbed back into the natural horizon, into a primeval temporality of decay. The 'universality' of works of modernist architecture is exposed here as having less to do with a radical aesthetic than

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[29] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.116

[30] Tschumi, in Hays, p.360; Tadeusz Peiper, 'City. Mass. Machine,' originally published as 'Miasto. Masa. Maszyna.,' *Zwortnica*, no.2 (1922); in Benson and Forgács, p.267.

with their eventual dissolution within history, as with all things, in the profane arena of time and death. The association of modernist architecture with a policy of hygiene and whitewash, and the use of materials such as glass which do not readily reveal the traces of time, intensifies the perception of discord in this respect. The dreams of health, clean air and open space correspond with "the white interiors of asylums and hospitals" and "in this way modern architecture defined its life against the consciousness of death and decay."[31]

It should be remembered that the early part of the twentieth century was also the age of turberculosis and consequently there was very much a social and humane impulse in opening up the interior to the exterior and allowing the free circulation of air. The concern with cleanliness and health was therefore mutually reinforcing, as evidenced by the numerous designs for sanatoriums, perhaps best illustrated by the Dutch Zonnestraal complex (1925-31), itself undergoing a restoration from ruin.[32] The way in which ruins are talked about is revealing, as in this description of Zonnestraal's dilapidated buildings:

> The refined precision of their elementary geometry and purity of line was still discernible, even emphasised by ruin and the rampant vitality of invasive vegetation – but in ways that now seemed poignant, part of an already distant and seemingly irrecoverable past.[33]

This plays into a common metaphor for the industrial-era ruin, which stands in for the modern psyche situated within a barely repressed – and ultimately un-repressible – bed of (primeval, thus premodern) natural forces, finally overcome by that which it sought to keep out. Architecture thus becomes an act of Freudian repression, so that "in the modernist vision it is precisely the weight and world of materiality itself that constitutes the encroaching force, the exteriority that threatens to take over and disarrange interior order."[34] Yet this view is once again based on a dichotomy when, in reality, these concepts and spaces blur. The modernist emphasis on 'openness' provides a better frame for engaging with ruins because interior and exterior are rendered moot, and temporality becomes fluid. Through this reading, purity and impurity, sacred and profane, are not

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[31] A. Vidler (introduction to Tschumi), in Hays, p.355

[32] P. Overy, *Light, Air and Openness: Modern Architecture between the Wars* (London, 2007), p.6

[33] Ibid, p.8

[34] C. Cullens, 'Gimme Shelter: At Home with the Millennium,' *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 11:2 (1999), p.214

absolute distinctions but have an ambiguous relationship between their dialectical halves, just as the objective and subjective reveal themselves as different modes of perception that are in flux, never entirely one or the other.[35]

Time and the Ruin

The idea of the ruin seems caught between a nostalgic or romantic gaze, and a nihilistic one of death and uncertainty. It is not a neutral or stable ground, hence the long tradition of the ruin as a kind of in-between space, neither here nor there, through which uncanny spectres might drift. If we consider the architectural remains that dot the stark landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings, and that entire tradition of European – especially Germanic – romanticism, it is obvious that our engagement with the ruin is both as an aesthetic object and one that induces existential contemplation. The ruin calls to mind a consciousness that "one's sense of the past or of the future involves a reach out of the present into some time when it (one's present) was not yet, or some time when it will be no longer."[36] Thus, it creates the image of future ruins, the traces (or lack thereof) of one's own self and environment.

The significance of ruins is not to do with decay and incompletion possessing any objective value, but that they bring into question any final narrative or claim to 'the new;' "they reveal the lived environment as a historical process with an uncertain future."[37] At the same time, it is easy to reify the perpetual unfulfilment that they come to symbolise, as if decisive action must always accompany an imposition of the worst kind. We forget that this category only appears to us through a material object – that somewhere, somebody must first try their hand at breaking down the horizon between the world as it is and the world as it might be; therefore, unfulfilment in its most productive sense is not only the

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[35] Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow, p.109

[36] Ibid, pp.112-116

[37] S.L. Dawdy, 'Clockpunk Anthropology and the Ruins of Modernity,' *Current Anthropology*, 51:6 (2010) There has been a particular fascination in the last couple of decades with the 'modern' and/or industrial ruin: Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 film *Stalker* is incomparable here for its landscape of decaying factories and the remains of habitation and industry, but in particular for the way in which this environment retains both a brute materiality and a poetic sacramentality. It signals that neither subject or world can be redeemed *except* as a whole.

condition for action but a consequence of it (thus also redeeming ruins from complete melancholy).

When I seek to reject the new through the critique of the ruin, this does not mean that the alternative is a static time in which nothing can be done or in which nothing really changes. It is not the same as there being no hope or change, but of understanding the complex interweaving of myth and history – that 'the new' itself is a mythology which should be exposed as such. It is to reject that "chief oddity of the moderns" which is "the idea of a time that passes irreversibly and annuls the entire past in its wake."[38] It is also to question the standard story of modernity and architectural modernism, to be aware of other stories and different viewpoints, for as Benjamin cautions, the image of the past "threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognise itself as intended in that image."[39]

Whether remembered, imagined, or physically present, the ruin causes a disruption in a linear time scheme. Its uncanny quality is in part due to the sense of a past and present that coexist rather than displacing each other. Even the future is contained here, but as an alternate possibility, as the dormant dream of the past. This is precisely where the ruin displays a critical promise, because since the present is the space of action – hence of redemption – it is therefore the opening through which the past may speak and in which the past might be *re-imagined* (rather than recreated). This is not to erase past actions, only to say that that which has happened was not inevitable, and nor is that which is to come. In this sense, the past is the source of "hidden, non-realised potentials," and furthermore:

> The authentic future is the repetition/retrieval of *this* past, *not of the past as it was*, but of those elements in the past which the past itself, in its reality, betrayed, stifled, failed to realise."[40]

The ruin provides a literal example of the way in which modern time is neither exclusively new nor progressive but nevertheless defined by an openness, even as it fragments into pieces. Looking back, the promise of modernist architecture does not lie in any particular aesthetic, accessible through reconstruction or restoration, or in a particular historical context. Rather, it is in the critical perspective that this architecture can inform – the focus

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[38] B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), p.57; in Dawdy

[39] Benjamin, in C. Salzani, 'The City as Crime Scene: Walter Benjamin and the Traces of the Detective,' *New German Critique*, no. 100 (2007), p.185

[40] S. Žižek [my emphasis], *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London, 2009), p.141

of which is "not to redeem the past but to redeem the desire for utopia to which humanity has persistently given expression," and to constantly reinterpret the boundaries of this vision.[41] Consequently, the freedom and harmony of dwelling imagined as a 'Virgilian dream' may yet come to pass.

Nostalgia

The relationship to time and history has always found expression in various forms of utopic and dystopic architectural dreaming, in which emphasis falls onto a vision of being, becoming, returning, recreating, and so on. The first group of these tend to be seen as active, creative forms of romanticism, whereas the latter are usually equated with nostalgia or with a regressive philosophy. But, like the ruin, both forms circumvent the parameters of past, present, and future; each vision carries with it a utopia and a dystopia.

Modernity is also a space for dreaming and, if anything, the first half of the European twentieth century is distinguished by the volume and visibility of these temporally-attuned projects. It is important here to recognise the possibility of a critical utopianism, which would of necessity be "open, dynamic and [. . .] far from being compensatory, [would] aim to estrange the taken-for-granted, to interrupt space and time, and to open up perspectives on what might be."[42] This would be a mode of thought that relied upon transfiguration, for a utopia that stays in one place for too long can only ever become brittle and broken. There is a hermeneutical imperative here, "the fleet-footedness that advocates of idealist principles need to cultivate," which is "the ability to recognise what is admirable and what is absurd about their dreams."[43] Approaching romanticism and nostalgia critically revitalises their ability to comment upon modernity and recognises this pair as a fundamental part of the modern experience.

Nostalgia's origins are in the desire for home, it was a word that was constructed by a seventeenth century Swiss medical student, Johannes Hofer, who sought to describe the mental state of soldiers stationed abroad. Its etymological roots are in the Greek *nostos*

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[41] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.145

[42] D. Pinder, 'In Defence of Utopian Urbanism: Imagining Cities after 'the End of Utopia,'' *Geografiska Annaler*, 84:3/4 (2002), p.229

[43] D. Hall, 'Setting Fire to Paper Utopias: What Is the Role of Idealism in Political Thought?', Adam Art Gallery (2010), www.Adamartgallery.Org.Nz/Admin/up-Content/Uploads/2010/01/David-Hall.Pdf

(return home) and *algos* (pain).[44] At first glance, nostalgia appears to be "a diminished outlook, [. . .] based on *repetition* rather than novelty."[45] But to have this sense of time in the first place requires an awareness of the tension between the time that is, and the time that has gone. The nostalgic is already a critic, an interpreter, one who is also profoundly future oriented in their own way because they see the bad omens, they live under an apocalyptic shadow: the future has nothing to offer and the present is not what was meant to be, so they turn to that which has already passed, and this too is a utopic dream. Nostalgia, then, is an expression of doubt in both present and future. Yet another reading of it would be as a form of enclosing, and shell-like it then protects but also blinds those who seek refuge in it. But it is not that which opposes the modern so much as it is that which "completes the modern experience of time with its insistent perception of disaster and its empathy to strangers stranded in the present."[46] This feeling of estrangement, that one does not belong in a place or time and the subsequent longing for elsewhere might yet be harnessed into positive action in the present.

Nostalgia is also creative, it is not simply a form of memory and longing but also imagination, whereby the nostalgic is engaged in a redemptive act by engaging with the past not as it was but of how it might have been. The crucial point here is not to confuse the two, or to make the dream private or purely reactive: Fascist ideology often capitalises on the action inherent within the nostalgic, but in an exclusive manner so that it was not the past that would be redeemed but a particular community, whose history erases the history – the traces – of others. This shows how romanticism can limit – to nation, blood, soil – or it can level, producing empathetic ideal of the universal human spirit, which in turn instils the notion of universal forms and architecture.

The search for meaning in either the past or the future does not equate to regressive and progressive forms, just as the ruin is neither perverse nor heroic in and of itself, but is given these interpretations by the viewer.. Accordingly, it is reductive to situate a meaningful modernity in any practice that tries to outrun the past and to forge the future anew, just as the opposite would be true. Besides, utopia and dream are not bound by temporal divisions, so elements of each freely mix.

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[44] P. Fritzsche [my emphasis],'Spectres of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity,' *The American Historical* Review, 106:5 (2001), p.1591

[45] Ibid, p.1592

[46] Ibid, p.1591

Romanticism

To situate meaning in either an objective or subjective plane enforces a divisional modernity that draws a line between romanticism and the enlightenment. Again, the standard narrative identifies the latter as the underlying ideology of modernity, connecting it to technology, science, and secularity as well as with a cold and dehumanising instrumental rationality. Where then is the space for dreaming? Modernity understood as open to the messianic, the moment of grace, is not modernity as continuation of the Enlightenment but is the heritage of Romanticism. It is important to realise that *both* strands of thought and culture – the inheritance of Romanticism *and* the Enlightenment – are interwoven and are what constitute the ground of our experience in the modern world.

This is not romanticism as saccharine melancholia – as self-indulgence – but as the political potential, the fundamental *irrational* that modernist architecture, at its most humanitarian and 'religious', encompassed in the dream of a modernity in which people were equal, where it was understood that it not nationalities but classes that divided people, that everyone had the right to affordable and good quality housing; paradoxically, this was the site of the architects' greatest failures and most inhumane expressions – the inability to properly understand that universal rights does not translate to universal form. This is because people are embodied, they exist as bodies in space and individuals in culture, within existing fields of meaning that have been created and sustained – but also changed – throughout time. To ignore these narratives is destabilising not necessarily liberating.

Additionally, this romanticism spills over into ideologies about changing the world or creating a new world with the tools and systems of industrial society, which in their implementation erase the politically subversive romanticist notion of common humanity and become clinical programs based upon a mechanically-minded paradigm of inclusion and exclusion – abstracting and absorbing the human through bureaucracy. This is once again a tension within modernist architecture, which is often accused of brutal functionalism or eviscerating traditional dwelling at the expense of the human inhabitants. But overwhelmingly, the vision of the modernist architects entailed a liberation of humanity. So, in the words of Samuel Beckett:

> Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.[47]

I also want to direct attention to the most famous work of the Constructivist architect Vladimir Tatlin, to what was officially called the Monument to the Third International, but which is more widely known as 'Tatlin's Tower.' This weird iron behemoth only exists as a model in an old photo and as some drawings, but had it been constructed it would have been even higher than the Eiffel Tower, which it was intended to surpass in every way. Nevertheless:

> In its attempt to be the anti-Eiffel Tower, the tower started to resemble the Tower of Babel, which was itself an unfinished monument turned mythical ruin [. . .] The Tower of Babel, we recall, was built to ensure perfect communication with God. Its failure ensured the survival of art.[48]

This is a fairy-tale monument that dances between modernity and antiquity, possessing something of both the past and of the future to its name. Because it was never built, it exists in a state of temporal discontinuity, a subjective state caught between dream and ruin. Architecture is always about romanticism, about the totalising narrative that fails and fractures, creating the necessity of interpretation and the sublime force of creative expression, which might capture those traces of Babel. Consequently, "Tatlin's tower played a [. . .] role as an observatory for the palimpsest of revolutionary panoramas that included ruins and construction sites alike."[49]

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All works of architecture are far more than static forms because their existence as objects changes over time, whether through weathering, use, or simply the stories that we tell.[50] So what if modernity is approached in this light? Just as time has a fluidity and plasticity that linear models do not allow for, modernity is neither a fixed temporality nor an inescapable environment, which means that everywhere it is punctuated by spaces for dreaming and

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[47] S. Beckett, in D.A. Siedell, 'Art and Failure,' *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 40:2 (2006), p. 108
[48] Boym, www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/28/boym2.php
[49] Ibid.
[50] Murphy, p.69

the possibility of alternative modernities. In the ruin we see how the objective and the subjective, the programmatic and the transitory, all meet and shape our experience in the modern world. What the image of the ruin brings to this investigation is that its presence critiques a "utopianism of pure process without reference to material and spatial constructions" by drawing attention to "the dialectic between 'process' and 'thing.'"[51] Ruins both provoke a romanticist imagination and endure as the remnants of one, as the traces of building and dwelling within time.

Half ruined buildings once again take on
The look of buildings waiting to be finished

— BERTOLT BRECHT.[52]

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[51] D. Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996), p.436; in Pinder, p.239

[52] B. Brecht, *Poems Part Two* (1976), p.192; in O. Hatherly, *Militant Modernism* (Winchester:UK, 2008), p.46

2. Arcade

What time is it?[. . .] This question is inseparable from 'What am I called to be and do?'

—GRAHAM WARD, *Cities of God.*[53]

Ah! It must indeed be admitted, we're in bad, we're in terrible shape when it comes to time.

—ANDRÉ BRETON, *Manifesto of Surrealism.*[54]

Ever in progress, ever in preparation (or ruin), Benjamin's Arcade contains its eventual completion within itself as a faint principle of hope; but like the flâneur, gambler, or wandering Jew, his fate is, above all, to wait – a passenger in time, trusting that at any moment his destination might arrive.

—RICHARD SIEBURTH, 'Benjamin the Scrivener.'[55]

Modernity is a time of waiting, neither here nor there, but its promise lies in this same uncertainty, in the continuous tension between the messianic and the profane. For Walter Benjamin, the architectural form that best expressed these contradictory facets were the glass-covered walkways of Paris, from which the *The Arcades Project* takes its name. In this chapter, the arcades function as both material and theoretical passageways; they help to establish the wider context and history of twentieth-century modernist architecture, as well as providing an entry point to Benjamin's thinking in regards to time, history, architecture, and meaning.

To begin with, I want to examine the structure and content of *The Arcades Project*. This vast accumulation of writing and research exceeds all boundaries and categories, and Benjamin continued to add to it throughout his life. It introduces some of the central

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[53] G. Ward, *Cities of God* (London, 2000), p.2,3

[54] A. Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (Preface for a reprint of the Manifesto, 1929), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. R. Seaver and H.R. Lane (Ann Arbor, 1977), p.x

[55] Sieburth, p.16

themes of Benjamin's work and reinforces the idea of modernity as montage rather than totality. His particular approach, that of the historical materialist crossed with the theologian, is significant in that it takes as its starting point the physical object from which to seek redemptive and revelatory images, which is of particular importance to any consideration of architecture in secular time (not to be confused with a disenchanted time) because it grants meaning to human creations. Following on from this is a critical consideration of the arcades as quintessential interiors of modernity, part museum, house, and street. After this occurs an analysis of the changing nature of experience in modernity, and the capitalistic temporality that simultaneously appears to speed time up and also to lock it into repetitive motions.

Because they were already old-fashioned by the time that he wandered through them, the arcades bring into focus the way in which modernity and modernist architecture are conventionally defined against the past. This draws upon some of the discussion in the first chapter but takes this theory of past and present further whereby history is not only the space for reigniting past potential and articulating future possibility, but a construction whose narrativity disguises the fact that history does not move forward at all, and that the past constantly underlies the present.

The new century had instilled dreams of a better world and a higher quality of living, but this optimism was extinguished by the First World War and the growing shadow of the Second, and such utopic ideologies now appear hopelessly naive at best, horrific in their consequences at worst. Benjamin himself committed suicide after his thwarted attempt to escape from the Nazis in 1940, and it was not until after the war that a manuscript of *The Arcades Project* was discovered, hidden away in the *Bibliothéque Nationale*.[56] Yet, despite living in dark times, Benjamin's work is not centred upon despair but on revelation, bringing to light images of the "original, utopian potential of the modern [. . .] *and* its catastrophic and barbaric reality."[57]

There are apocalyptic connotations to the idea of revelation: apocalypse literally means 'lifting the veil,' and a central theme of modernity is the continual attempts to incarnate the vision of a world yet to come within the present, to create a utopia through technology and ideology. Benjamin's emphasis upon freedom and revelation is itself a form of utopianism,

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[56] J.M. Coetzee, *Inner Workings: Literary Essays 2000-2005* (Sydney, 2007), p.41

[57] Buck-Morss [my emphasis], *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.251

but he cautions that "there is also false liberation, whose sign is violence," in which "that law prevails by which the exertion brings about its opposite."[58]

Therefore, it is important in the final instance to return to the idea of a messianic force that emerges from within threshold spaces – from a hermeneutical engagement with the material world – not in the form of an apocalyptic event, but as a necessarily fleeting kind of illumination.

Passages

In Roman mythology, Janus is the god of thresholds, doorways, beginnings and endings, as well as time itself – and is therefore associated with all kinds of boundary spaces. For Benjamin, this mythological figure encompasses the ambiguity and paradoxes of modernity as well as the tensions within his own work, whether implicitly or explicitly – as when he describes as 'Janus-faced' the "theoretical oscillations in his later years between metaphysical and materialist points of view."[59] This dialectic is fundamental to *The Arcades Project*, in that it documents the mythic sprawl of modernity through a bricolage of objects, places and people, thus holding up the constructions and detritus of the modern world against millenarian and utopian visions, extracting flashes of revelation from the point at which they meet.

Like the oneiric spaces of the arcades and the two-faced gaze of Janus, Benjamin's method is reliant upon contingency. The contingent is that which escapes classification and regulation, it is the trace of something 'other' within the familiar, and when this complicity is exposed it releases energies that critique and upset the established order. The contingent event is "an *element of reality* impervious to full rationalisation," the key point being that it is a kind of revelation that surfaces through the attentiveness paid towards the profane and its objects, in a dialogue with the world rather than with a separate transcendent principle.[60] Therefore, the contingent event is not unlike a utopian dream, in which possibility and reality exist side by side. It would be easy to separate out these strands of

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[58] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* <h°, 3>, p.884

[59] R. Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York, 1982), fn.72 (ch.5), p.298

[60] G. di Giovanni [my emphasis], 'The Category of Contingency in Hegelian Logic,' in L.S. Stepelevich (ed.), *Selected Essays on G.W.F. Hegel* (1993), p.42; in J. Till, 'Architecture and Contingency,' *Field*, 1:1 (2007), p.130

Benjamin's thought, to focus on either the metaphysical or the materialist element and equate the former with his Judaism, the latter with his Marxism – but these influences ultimately rest on the same principle and reinforce Benjamin's central focus, which is the overturning of the status quo.[61]

Consequently, Benjamin was perceptive of any who dwelled on the edges of society – or to anything, especially architecture, through which implicit critiques of dominant forms and narratives might emerge. Those who still loitered in the arcades were the people excluded from the central modernist narrative – marginal figures whom Marx would have identified as the *lumpen*: gamblers, prostitutes, opium smokers and so on. Through Benjamin's writing they became allegorical and metaphorical, imbued with a power of their own. The *flâneur* – the observer in the crowd – is the most well-known of these archetypes, although all of them serve to remind us of Hilde Heynen's transitory concept, and that the programmatic architecture of the modern city always needs to be accompanied by the chaos of the crowd, by humanity in all of its diversity, so that it does not become totalitarian.[62] It is clear from *The Arcades Project* that Benjamin was preoccupied with the concept of 'awakening,' which can be equated with freedom – whether from myth, fascism, commodities, teleology, or anything else that might overpower the human.

Modernity – as concept, as temporality, and experience – is echoed in the shape of *The Arcades Project* itself, which comes to us in the form of "a massive fragment or monumental ruin."[63] Even though this was unintentional and Benjamin was not able to complete the work before his death, it is difficult to imagine that he would ever have been able to corral it into a final shape considering the sheer volume and breadth of the quotations, notes, and topics. In one sense, like the chaos of the modern city, it reminds us of the problematic of trying to totalise modernity by illustrating that modern existence is made up of idiosyncrasies, parallels, nuances, uncertainty and the constant presence of the past.[64]

In the English translation of *The Arcades Project*, the title clearly refers to a specific type of architecture, whereas the original German '*Passagenwerk*' retains the broader idea of the *passageway*, along with all that the word implies. The importance of Benjamin's

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[61] M. Ivancheva, 'On some Utopian Motives in the Philosophy of Walter Benjamin,' *Spaces of Utopia: An Electronic Journal*, no.3 (2006), p.86

[62] Dr. Mike Grimshaw, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Canterbury

[63] Sieburth, p.7

[64] Dr. Mike Grimshaw, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Canterbury

magnum opus is that it shows us a way of reading our existence in the modern world from the ground up, through architecture as well as all of the traces and ephemera of inhabitation. In the absence of a communal historical narrative in which beginning and end are clearly defined (a condition literalised in the form of the arcades), human creation and experimentation with modes of dwelling are held in a state of *becoming*, in a movement that continuously folds back onto itself, defining and redefining the future and its possibilities. Accordingly, modernity is a particular "configuration of experience" whose nature is that of "a connecting space – a passage."[65]

The Museum Gaze and the Interior World

They abandon stuffy museums and cemeteries of thought and they shake the dust off themselves. As the past is dead and history has stopped being a teacher, it is not necessary to refer to the past, to traditions and to history.

—KAREL TEIGE, 'Constructivism and The Liquidation of Art.'[66]

Architecture, as mediator between the public and the private, the collective and the individual, is one of the best expressions of the "latent mythology" of a particular culture or historical period: dust, dreams, capitalism, and technology are bound together in the *passagen*.[67] Although the arcades were close to a century old by Benjamin's time, it is at this point, precisely when a work of architecture becomes relegated to the past, that it also returns to a state of openness in which its function is no longer predetermined or obvious, where it begins to slip between the boundaries that were set for it and present other aspects, previously obscured or unnoticed. The arcades are the dream-houses of modernity and modernist architecture, divulging this role only on the point of decrepitude – a point of paradox at which mythology multiplies but when it is also at its most visible:

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[65] Sieburth, p.9

[66] Karel Teige, 'Constructivism and the Liquidation of Art,' originally published as 'Konstrucktivism a likvidace umění', *Disk*, no.2 (1925); in Benson and Forgács, p.584

[67] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, <D°,7>, p.834

[The arcades] radiated through the Paris of Empire like grottoes. [. . .] With the kindling of electric lights, the irreproachable glow was extinguished in these galleries, which suddenly became more difficult to find [. . .] *It was not decline but transformation.* All at once, they were the hollow mould from which the image of "modernity" was cast.[68]

The dialectics of openness and enclosure, transparency and confinement, played out underneath their glass roofs. Arcades are unique in that they encompass something of the street, the museum, and the domestic dwelling, as well as being eerily prescient of that great capitalist interior that is the shopping mall. Although these places are also communal, they still have a certain privacy – even the street had become a place to be lost in the crowd within the modern metropolis. The transformative quality of the arcades comes from this intermingling of the focal points of modern life; they trace out the "relation between the private dreaming self and the public space of production and history," in which interior and exterior lose their specificity and merge.[69]

    All of the aforementioned spaces, especially so the house and the museum, are linked with collections of objects, and it should not be forgotten that modernist architects were just as concerned with the items inside their buildings as they were with the work of architecture itself. The form of the building was often understood to demand a certain 'look' for the interior, and subsequently the everyday life and activities of the inhabitants were also imagined, to an extent. This kind of modernist architecture is one that is read through the hyperbole of the manifesto, constructed around platonic symbolic resonance. It is an architecture that shapes its inhabitants, socially and – ideally – morally, rather than the inverse in which subject dominates object and the interior becomes the projection of its owner, in turn exercising a certain morbid control in which the thought of parting with its collected objects becomes unbearable. Within the arcades the detritus of history implicitly critiques and informs these supposedly 'traceless' interiors of modernity, and draws attention to the way in which object-laden domestic space acquired its own mythology, being likened to a museum or mausoleum. As soon as the traditional house became figured as a museum, so too did the arcades blur into museum and house. But, in the same instant, they also revealed themselves to be embryonic forms of modernist architecture. This presents an unsettling circularity and ambiguity to time and history, reminding us also of

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[68] Ibid [my emphasis], <a°, 2>, p.874

[69] T. Gunning, 'The Exterior as Interieur : Benjamin's Optical Detective,' *Boundary 2*, 30:1 (2003), p.112

the irony that the museum is now a role to which modernist architecture is particularly well-suited.

It was not so much the idea of accumulated things in themselves that offended modernist sensibilities, but the overshadowing presence of *the decorative object*, symbolic of a certain nineteenth-century 'decadence.' The modern interior – light, open, and in favour of mobility – was held against the interiors of the previous century with all of their their shadows, endless coverings and casings, and velvet upholstery upon which the dust would accumulate. Such a space was overwhelmed with what Benjamin describes as "plush – [a] material in which traces are left especially easily."[70] He continues: "to live in these interiors was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider's web" as if possessing "an aversion to the open air."[71]

Because, within modernism, one eye is always set to the horizon – to the world yet to come, its adherents are prone to seeing the spectre of decadence in the present moment, seeing everywhere the signs of decay and adopting a prophetic stance.[72] Dust takes on an apocalyptic resonance in this context, as marker of impurity and imminent ruin which consequently requires an act of cleansing. To illustrate the equally baroque mythology of the modernist interior it is worth citing Theo van Doesberg's letter to his client, the artist Léonce Rosenberg, regarding his design for her house:

> Your atelier must be like a glass cover or like an empty crystal. It must have an absolute purity, a constant light, a clear atmosphere. It must also be white. The palette must be of glass. Your pencil sharp, rectangular and hard, always free of dust and as clean as an operating scalpel. One can certainly take a better lesson from doctor's laboratories than from patient's ateliers. The latter are cages that stink like sick apes. Your atelier must have the cold atmosphere of mountains 3,000 metres high; eternal snows must lie there. Cold kills the microbes.[73]

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[70] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [I7a, 1], p.226

[71] Ibid, [I2, 6], p.216

[72] See P. Osborne, *The Politics of Time* (London, 1995), p.19

[73] Theo van Doesberg, *De 8 en Opbouw 6* (1935), p.174, in N. Troy (trans.), *The De Stijl Environment* (1983), p.106; cited in D. Mertins, 'The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory: Walter Benjamin and the Utopia of Glass,' *Assemblage*, no.29 (1996), p.14

Here, in a space free of dust, the artist's mind is filled with clarity, as sharp as a scalpel. The hard surfaces free from plush result in both mental and physical hygiene, and everything has about it the quality of being new. Of course, such a statement is not to be taken literally, but it reveals something of the modernist imagination or dream-life. It shows how, despite all of the talk about pure form and functional objects, the architects were often obsessed by surfaces and attention to minutiae. Perhaps this intense focus upon generating a sensibility of the new, both formally and temporally, explains some of the hostility to the dusty surface. After all, dust is ultimately "a perpetual marker of presence rather than loss," revealing things in their *persistence* through time.[74] Rather than marking out and confirming the line between past and present which enables time to be read as a linear movement – and history as the story of that movement – it exposes the "circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone."[75]

Both memory and meaning are also transferrable onto objects, so in this sense interior space is easily equated with the life of the mind. Accordingly, "the significance of interior space and what fills it [is itself one of the] distinguishing factors of the discourse of modernity."[76] For Le Corbusier this was certainly a major consideration and plays into the modernist idea that organising space also organises time. For example, "observing that accretions do mark and preserve events from the past, Le Corbusier nevertheless recommended as more lively and accurate pure memory, which he understood to be recollection without the hindrance of intermediary dead objects."[77]

This idea of memory is theoretically held up against the sprawl of the arcades and their phantasmagoric corridors of outmoded objects, the cast-offs that had come to rest there via the numerous second hand shops which appeared once the elite boutiques and upper classes abandoned the space. The arcades had become archaeological, temples filled with relics through which Benjamin – the historical materialist – hoped to interpret the dormant dreams imbedded in early capitalist modernity. In the arcades modernity is read through the outcast, the unfashionable, the antiquated, and the obsolete; where memory is acknowledged as creation, and meaning arises out of juxtaposition and rogue associations rather than existing in platonic 'truths.' It is apt to consider here that *The Arcades Project* is also "composed entirely of an arrangement, through remembered vision, of things," thus

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[74] Carolyn Steedman's idea, in R. Guins, 'Kiss of Life,' *Cabinet*, no.35 (2009), p.82

[75] Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (2001), p.164; ibid.

[76] Cullens, p.212

[77] Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow, p.75

displaying the influence of Proust's masterpiece on memory, *In Search of Lost Time* [*À la recherche du temps perdu*].[78]

The "museal gaze" is a mode of viewing that is hyper-aware of the movement of objects through time, and is a feature of the same avant-garde that so maligned the museum and its contents.[79] This is most obvious in the activities of the surrealists, but also in the aforementioned obsession with objects and interiors, and in a self-identity largely constructed against the nineteenth-century and nostalgia for the past. Andreas Huyssen notes that the museum "enables the moderns to negotiate and to articulate a relationship to the past that is always also a relationship to the transitory and to death."[80] For Le Corbusier, the failure of the museum is in its fragmentation, that it can never tell the whole story. His own vision regarding the museum was both utopian and totalitarian, taking the form of a spiral. Ideally, this 'museum of infinite growth' would expand to contain everything and therefore become a monumental truth object, but realistically he thought that it should display those objects that represented modern life – not just the remains of times past – and his preference was for "a plain jacket, a bowler hat, a well-made shoe" alongside "an electric light bulb with bayonet fixing; a radiator."[81]

The museum became equated with the old-fashioned and enclosed interior, and with a subsequent state of mind that was prone to distraction and irrationality, yet Le Corbusier's vision is just as dream-like as the   *assage*. The oneiric objects of the arcades remind us that memory, meaning, and materiality are bound together, that our experience of the world and our engagement with architectural spaces is as an embodied consciousness, through a dialogue between subjective and objective, interior and exterior. We return to the idea of contingency then, because "in all these cases – domestic space, arcade, and museum – it is not their realised contemporaneity that attracts the gaze of the materialist historian, but rather their incomplete modernity."[82]

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[78] M. Pensky, 'Tactics of Remembrance: Proust, Surrealism, and the Origin of the *Passagenwerk*, in M.P. Steinberg (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History* (New York, 1996), pp.167-68

[79] A. Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York, 1995), pp.19-20

[80] Ibid, p.16

[81] Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today* (1987), p.17, in C. Storrie, *The Delirious Museum: A Journey from the Louvre to Las Vegas* (London, 2007), p.149

[82] T. Miller, 'Glass before its Time, Premature Iron: Architecture, Temporality, and Dream in Benjamin's Arcades Project', in B. Hanssen (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (London, 2006), p.247

The Experience of Modernity

We live in times when truths have a shorter life than men do. No truth has enough life even to reach the next generation and take root in its soul.

—TADEUSZ PEIPER, 'City. Mass. Machine.'[83]

Capitalism turns its abstractions concrete and the forms of material life abstract, thus it is possible at the same time to feel modernity as a crushing, stifling force – because its social arrangements create real mental effects – as well feeling that the physical environment and its objects take on the quality of facades and that they exist on the verge of melting away. This changing nature of experience naturally results in different forms of memory, in which events become intensely subjective and kaleidoscopic, no longer part of a shared linear story, and as ephemeral as the latest fashion. Once memory is affected then there is also a new understanding of time, as well as a new identity within that time, as illustrated in this extract from the Czech architectural critic, Karel Teige, regarding Soviet modernism:

> Our stoical time knows that every human action is provisional, that there are no definite states, that nothing lasts except that which is no longer alive. Eternity belongs to cosmic powers, and we need not and cannot worry about them. There is no truth but the occasional and the ephemeral. [. . .] Constructivism knows what the world looks like without any absolute values.[84]

For Benjamin the change in experience and consciousness is due to an increase in outside stimuli. His theory is that "the more particular experiences are recorded as *unmediated* impressions, the less they contribute to an enduring sense of experience."[85] This is the 'shock' effect of modern life, which also derives from the anxiety of simultaneously dealing with the sensation of constant change and also attempting to collate it in a

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[83] Peiper, 'City. Mass. Machine,' in Benson and Forgács, p.267
[84] Karel Teige, 'Constructivism and the Liquidation of Art,' in Benson and Forgács, p.584
[85] Marder, *Dead Time*, p.2

meaningful way.[86] The paradox is that the messianic is also refigured as shock, emerging out of the fleeting moment and the transitory world:

> What distinguishes the gods of this modern mythology is their susceptibility to time. They belong to the profane, noneternal world of human history, in which their powers are fleeting. [. . .] Indeed, transitoriness is the very basis of their power.[87]

However, perhaps it might be ventured that while the shock of the modern time is the brief moment in which things are new before amnesia sets in, the messianic shock – the movement towards awakening, towards freedom from this kind of time – is the shock of remembering, in the sense of being returned to oneself and the ground of being.

Forms of social experience which reflect modern temporality are "warfare in the age of technology, mechanised industrial labour, the jostling of the crowd in the great cities, fashion, inflation, and gambling."[88] With more leisure time than ever before, there is more *boredom* than ever before, boredom itself being a kind of repetitive time. Consequently, people search for distraction, but a capitalist social sphere inundates existence with distractions to the point of saturation, so that a 'dream-sleep' descends and the mythological, the reified abstraction, is mistaken for the thing in itself. As Benjamin reminds us, "we are bored when we do not know what we are waiting for."[89]

In the modern cities time becomes *presence*, whereby the rhythm of the metropolis generates a sense of quickening, in contrast to the rural village existence in which time seems to stop or move in cyclical, seasonal patterns. Modernist architecture is very much tied to the experience of city life, which can be seen in the multitude of plans for mass public housing, or in the proliferation of utopian designs that sought to re-imagine the city in its entirety. Some of this comes out a desire to order its chaos, and although this may extend too far, there is still an ethical concern here about the effects of industrialisation. The metropolis expresses itself "through its discontinuities, its provisionality and fugitiveness, its superfluousness."[90] It is a place in which a multitude of different

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[86] F. Maki, *Nurturing Dreams: Collected Essays on Architecture and the City*, ed. M. Mulligan (Cambridge: MA., 2008) p.58

[87] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*,p.259

[88] Osborne, pp.136-37

[89] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [D2, 7], p.105

[90] Mbembé, 'Aesthetics of Superfluity,' *Public Culture*, 16:3 (2004), p.404

narratives and different people come together, where meaning is created out of conversation and the exchange of ideas, not through imposition or solidification (because nothing stays the same for very long in the metropolis).

However, surrounded by distraction and information, these positive aspects of city life can be subsumed under a type of nihilism, what Georg Simmel called the "blasé attitude." This attitude is a form of defence, it acts as a protective skin – as a shell or enclosing, much like the architecture of the nineteenth century that hid its inhabitants away – but also results in a gradual homogeneity of perception resulting in "an indifference toward the distinctions between things," whether people or objects, so that, in essence, things become devalued.[91] This kind of vision also reduces other people to merely biological forms, akin to the process of standardisation in modernist housing projects which orders people in a way not dissimilar to objects – thus bringing the human into the sphere of the totalising museum.

The Dialectics of Modernity and Antiquity

When the train with its beautiful modern carriages stops at a station decorated with Grecian columns, the impression is that antiquity merges with the present, as if in a dream.

—KAREL TEIGE, [*Velkoměsto a podzemnǐ draha*] [92]

History is not teleological as much modernist thought would have it, rather it is a montage, where any moment may fuse with another as in the description above, where Teige describes his surreal experience of the Soviet metro. Modernity is a category that, along with the notion of a 'modern architecture,' arises out of a linear understanding of time in which each epoch contains the forward movement that leads to the next. Once each segment is ordered and categorised it is then simple to structure time through the division

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[91] G. Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903), *Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. D.N. Levine (Chicago, 1971), p.329

[92] Teige, 'Velkoměsto a podzemnǐ draha', *Světozor* (1937); in Dluhosh and Švácha (ed.), *Karel Teige 1900-1951*, p.132; cited by D. Sayer, 'The Unbearable Lightness of Building: A Cautionary Tale,' *Grey Room*, no.16 (2004), p.19

between past, present, and future, to mark progress and decline, and to locate historical truth in collective forms over and above the individual memory and imagination. This kind of temporal structure, in which history is driven by the abstract force of progress, was rejected by Benjamin who understood past and present to exist in a strange kind of simultaneity, so that 'history' takes on the quality of a dream. There is no Hegelian movement through time, the story is a fiction – it contains truths but is not a truth in itself.

The temporal framework for modernity is a theological one: a linear time structure and the idea of an endpoint to history are central to western religious thought.[93] In some ways, the notion of modernity provides western society with a narrative force once history became secular on a communal level, whereby the locus of meaning changes and humanity defines itself, rather than being communally *defined by* a transcendent concept. Historians often locate the beginning of modern time with the French revolution, which reinforces a sense of rupture as characteristic of modernity. Here, the transition to a new time was propelled through violence and the removal of the past and its objects: royal graves, castles and churches were destroyed, and a new calendar proposed.[94] But this only makes it more apparent that modernity is always defined by its tension with antiquity, which is a tension that plays out *within* the field of modern experience. It is apt to consider the double meaning of the word 'revolution' here, which implies both circularity – an endlessly recycled time – and the forward movement into a new time, although it was only in the seventeenth century that it took on this meaning of "a breakthrough, an unrepeatable event."[95] Nevertheless, this is just one example of how modernity is simultaneously constructed through an emphasis on the time that has passed, and a new time characterised by *difference*: difference in the experience of the world, and furthermore, the belief that the future might be different, that the difference of technology might free people.[96]

In Theses on the Philosophy of History, Benjamin notes that "the French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate" and that "to Robespierre, ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history."[97] Therefore, history does not so much move forward as it does *dialectically*, as a

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[93] Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. D. Ratmoko (Stanford:CA, 2009), p.xvi

[94] Fritzsche, p.1596

[95] Boym, www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/28/boym2.php

[96] Fritzsche, p.1596

[97] Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' in *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn (New York, 1968), xiv, p.261

constellation of tensions, so that time starts to refigure itself less as a movement than as a certain vibration to which one might attune oneself in order to sense the resonances of past constructions. Modernity, then, is never simply a separate or different time, but is always "the time of the dialectics of modernity and tradition as competing, yet intertwined, forms of historical consciousness."[98]

    The language of the modernists is everywhere reliant upon images of the past to define the present, such as in the desire "to see in shop windows a beauty that is equal to the beauty of cathedral chapels" (a naive, hopeful, dreamworld in which the glassy reflections of objects for consumption still held a utopian promise in the popular imagination).[99] Furthermore, insofar as there is an aesthetic associated with what we call modernist architecture, it is one in which the influence of the classical ruin is visible. Yet "there is no simple historical progression *from* antiquity *to* modernity; they are frozen together in the form of a kind of static repetition," so that "rather than appearing as the movement through which progress can be marked, this historical construction recalls the ossification of ruins."[100] This aligns with Benjamin's major argument that history is not progressing, that to the contrary, "history stands so still, it gathers dust."[101]

Eschatological Time

Benjamin's understanding of modern time is primarily nihilistic, which is not surprising considering the times in which he lived. His sense of history is necessarily shaped by World War I and his experience as a Jew during the rise of fascism and the beginning of World War II. Yet many of his concerns remain relevant, especially in regards to the danger of naturalising "the secularised eschatology of 'progress.'"[102] If architects fell into this trap, it was often through the great advances in technology – a process which seemed unstoppable once it had garnered momentum – which instilled the hope that each new discovery would lead only to more freedom for all classes of people. Of course, Benjamin's fear is that progressive time induces a sense of inevitability, in other words, it

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[98] Osborne, p.114

[99] Peiper, 'City. Mass. Machine,' in Benson and Forgács, p.268

[100] Marder, *Dead Time*, pp.76-77

[101] Buck-Morss,*The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.95

[102] Osborne, p.116

becomes a form of apathetic rationalization for such horrors as those which would come to light in the Holocaust. He recognised that any recourse to the 'demands of history' was dangerous because the language of sacrifice is implicit in the conception of a 'necessary event,' whether utopian vision or technological achievement.[103] The modernist dream of the *tabula rasa* has precisely this kind of violent undercurrent to it, the idea of a necessary cleansing or sweeping away of the unwanted in order to achieve total modernity. Most famously, Benjamin's negativity is expressed in part IX of his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in the allegory of the angel of history:

> Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage [. . .] The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise [. . .] This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[104]

Benjamin's angel presents us with a nihilistic vision, no less so than the Speaker who preceded him by more than one thousand years and who mourns the ruins of time in *Ecclesiastes*. There too, was the consciousness of time as pressure and spur to decision, the agonising over life's possibilities and the weight of its material possessions which reveal themselves empty and broken: the concerns of the past and the future meet in these perennial nihilists. The issues are not new in themselves – all of the conflicting discourses between the messianic and the profane, redemption and apocalypse, even interior life and exterior, are tensions which came into being with human existence itself. Yet, it is only in modernity that they play out in a highly technological, secular, nomadic, capitalist world. It is this volatile combination of social phenomena that opens up different possibilities for exploring these old tensions – whether for good or for ill – and which also contributes to the experience of modern time as *new*.

Secular time is characterised by instability and uncertainty, but not by any lack of teleological narratives. The hopes and dreams embodied in the practice of modernist architecture at its most utopian are fundamentally messianic, yet if this utopianism is brought to bear upon the plane of history it results in wreckage. The angel of history sees

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[103] D. Zuber, 'Flanerie at Ground Zero,' *American Quarterly*, 58:2 (2006), p.272

[104] Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' in Arendt (ed.), pp.257-58

only what has come in the place of the messianic, and despairs.[105] Its eschatological ruin-gaze makes it clear that:

> Authentic divine power can manifest itself *other than destructively* only in the world to come (the world of fulfilment). But where divine power enters into the secular world, it breathes destruction.[106]

To reiterate: modernity is a time of waiting. It places the individual in exile under the sign of apocalypse *and* redemption, both of which are forms of ending. The end of history is both the end of desire – because history is the conflict of desires (and utopia is desire's culmination) – and the end of interpretation.[107] But it is precisely because history has not ended that, like in a detective story, we must search for clues and interpret the signs. The value of the apocalyptic concept is because it exposes that "the profoundest antithesis to the world is not 'time' but 'the world to come.'"[108]

Redemption

> *'The messianic idea' is precisely the idea of redemption.*
>
> —GERSHOM SCHOLEM, *Reflections on Jewish Theology*.[109]

The philosophy of history, which is to say the ontological engagement with time, is for Osborne "an inherently theological genre"[110] insofar that it demands the working out of the relationship between a transcendent concept – whether conceived of through revolution, technological utopia, messianic or apocalyptic completion – and a material world which can only be known through a timely existence. But in modernity it can feel as though all that we have is the profane, so what then critiques its inequalities and structures? How

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[105] Dr. Mike Grimshaw, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Canterbury

[106] Benjamin, 'World and Time,' *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings 1913-1926* (London, 1996), ed. M. Bullock and M. Jennings, p.226

[107] Osborne, p.125

[108] Benjamin, 'World and Time,' in Bullock and Jennings (ed.), p.226

[109] Gershom Scholem, 'Reflections on Jewish Theology,' in Wolin, *Labyrinths: Explorations in the Critical History of Ideas* (Amherst, 1995), p.44

[110] Osborne, p.113

does the divine appear or act in a world in which it is no longer explicitly recognised? Benjamin's angel helps to provide the answer to these questions because, like Janus, it actually has two faces, and "whether it looks to the past or to the present, it sees the same things."[111] Accordingly, if the angel of history sees the same thing both ways, then revolutionary action and the messianic can only exist as a kind of rupture or interruption, not to be found in the objects of the past *per se*, but in that instant of critical understanding which reveals – by shattering – the equivalence, thus allowing for something new to inhabit that space.

History stands still because it repeats, and it repeats because people forget – hence Benjamin's concept of awakening, which is also a kind of remembering. The messianic shock is to be equated with awakening because it jolts time out of its complicity with any notions of fate, breaking the chain of thought in which (universal) history is determined by the victors. For Benjamin, "the Messianic world is the world of total and integral actuality" and "only in this world can a universal history exist."[112] Modernist universality rests on this same principle in which all people are brought under the banner of redemption and are united by a common humanity. However, while the theory is admirable, the application is often questionable. In particular, building an architecture upon this notion is problematic precisely because it essentialises people, as if they were free of all those signifiers and contexts that shape the individual. Hence, true universality must of necessity be held in exteriority, because as a political or worldly power the universal concept is productive only insofar as it is constantly renegotiated lest it becomes reliant upon the violence of inclusion and exclusion:

> Every attempt to bring about redemption on the level of history *without a transfiguration of the messianic idea* leads straight into the abyss.[113]

This transformative quality – the ability to transfigure and interiorise the messianic – is the great strength of human creation and imagination. It is because we are able to debate and challenge every notion of the messianic as it appears within the profane that also allows for brief moments of revelation or awakening to occur. Although the messianic is nominally

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[111] M. du Camp, *Paris*, vol.6, p.315; in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* [S1,1], p.543

[112] Benjamin [Gesammelte Schriften, 1:1238], in Sieburth, p.19

[113] Taubes [my emphasis], 'The Price of Messianism,' *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 33:1-2 (1972), p.600; in Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, p.xvii

that which transcends the profane, it is also dependent upon it for its existence and the conditions of its materialisation. As rupture, shock, or interruption, such messianic or apocalyptic force has power only *within* the world of time, and in this way the eternal joins hands with the continually passing away. Again, this reinforces the importance of understanding that conflicting categories – such as interior and exterior, home and homelessness, messianic and profane – can only come into being insofar as they are mutually dependent. The critical energy of the 'uncanny' or apocalyptic double – that which subverts and makes strange the familiar – is always present. For example, the white wall does not so much screen desire as draw attention to the absent ornament, thus infusing it with the sensuous power that the whitewash was ostensibly meant to defuse.

The messianic never materialises into language or crystallises into practice, it elides boundaries and normative assumptions, thus the messianic is never *doctrine*, and so finds no purchase in dogma or ideology *except* as a total (apocalyptic) negativity that can only be expressed in destruction and the negation of the profane. The messianic is then a sort of strangely negative current that underlies timely human existence, not in the sense of something unwholesome, but as an excess or limit through which the human and human existence is defined as meaningful in and of itself.

To some degree, works of architecture share a quality which Ernst Bloch attributed to the work of art in his *Geist der Utopie* (1918), potentially functioning as "anticipatory images or messianic promises of a utopian totality that they cannot in and of themselves embody but that they nevertheless indicate as still to come."[114] This firmly places the object in an intermediary role, where its fragmentary nature is exposed and acknowledged, but where it nevertheless retains the power to suggest another world. It is worth ending here upon a passage from *The Dialectics of Seeing*, the excellent study of Benjamin's work by Susan Buck-Morss:

> Utopian desire can and must be trusted as the motivation of political [profane] action (even as this action unavoidably mediates the desire) – can, because every experience of happiness or despair that was ours teaches us that the present course of events does not exhaust reality's potential.[115]

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[114] Sieburth on Ernst Bloch, p.16

[115] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*,p.243

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Benjamin's writings in *The Arcades Project* and elsewhere contribute to an analysis of modernity as a process, neither wholly determined by interior or exterior forces. This fundamental ambiguity of modernity is expressed by the arcades, the way in which they act as places to move through as well as in which to dwell. These nineteenth-century constructions, although dusty and outmoded by the twentieth, were nevertheless understood by Benjamin to be "the first international style of modern architecture."[116] Modernity is inscribed in these constructions of glass and steel, just like the *Shema Israel* was written on a kernel of wheat which impressed Benjamin so much in the *Museé Cluny*.[117] Like walking through the arcades, as long as the wanderer in time keeps moving and changing, interpreting their own condition, then modernity forms a passageway; it is only if we stop to be seduced by the objects of capitalism – or if we are brought to despair by the insistent pressure of time and dust, that it closes around us, as an interior world without exit.

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[116] Ibid, p.39
[117] Sieburth, p.9

3. Dream

Dreaming, like waiting, like boredom, is the prelude to great deeds.

—GRAEME GILLOCH, *Myth and Metropolis.*[118]

To encompass both Breton and Le Corbusier—that would mean drawing the spirit of contemporary France like a bow, with which knowledge shoots the moment in the heart.

—WALTER BENJAMIN, *The Arcades Project.*[119]

When Walter Benjamin juxtaposes André Breton with Le Corbusier he is revealing the dialectic that not only suffuses the intellectual and artistic ferment of his own contemporary Paris, but which is also constitutive of modernity itself. Here, the surrealist and the architect allegorically figure as the two inseparable faces of modern experience, the programmatic and the transitory, one of which involves reification and classification – an ordering impulse which emerges out of industrialisation and an increasingly bureaucratic society – while the other deals with the debris, the leftovers, that sense of flux which is reflected in the constant turnover of commodities. As we have seen, these two broader concepts are ways to talk about a myriad of other ostensibly oppositional elements – what Hermann Broch calls the "countless polar-dialectical undulations" that pervade Western historical thought.[120] Yet each aspect always carries within it the trace of its own critique and undoing. They are not static concepts; rather, their facets continually change and reflect, so that it is possible to see the subject within the object, the dream within reality (which is to say, the dream that is at the same time the reality – not because we

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[118] Benjamin's idea, Gilloch, p.109

[119] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N1a,5], p.459

[120] H. Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and his Time: The European Imagination, 1860-1920* (Chicago, 1984), p.35.
Such categories are further separated through value judgements, in accordance with Western Enlightenment ideals. These hierarchical conceptions of privilege are mutually reinforcing so that, for example, the 'honesty' of structure over and above the decorative also implicitly frames male and female roles, in turn reinforcing the Cartesian duality of mind over the body. But such broad categories break down once more, so that in this case it is not simply about 'mind over body' as it is about the ideal of what 'mind' should be, and *which* body is being talked about. Since it is the rational, scientific brain that is culturally privileged, instinct and creativity (traditionally associated with the feminine) are marginalised at the expense of discipline, training and control.

always misunderstand dream for reality, but because dream or illusion is integral to and part of what constitutes our reality.)

This chapter extends the notion of reading modernity through those things which it is defined against, an idea that was introduced in the second chapter via the arcades and their objects. It is a continuation of Benjamin's project of seeking out perspectives from which to challenge dominant histories and beliefs, including those which confer such a reductive character to works of modernist architecture. Accordingly, the value of engaging with Surrealism is that it opens up a critique against the conventional expression of modernity and its architecture as hyper-rational, organisational and purely functionalist.

For Benjamin, the critical insight of the Surrealists and a reason why their thought remains important, despite many shortcomings, is that they understood that the Western world had not exorcised its divinities in the factories and production-lines of industrial capitalism. Rather, these divinities had merely become as abstract as those self-same forces of capital, as ephemeral as the latest commodity. Therefore, in contrast to Max Weber's theory of disenchantment, the mythological and the modern are not contradictions but intersect at every point. Benjamin took this even further, so that it is precisely the *deepening* of enchantment that defines modernity.

Surrealist novels such as André Breton's *Nadja* (1928) and Louis Aragon's *A Paris Peasant* [*Le Paysan de Paris*, 1926] were a major influence upon Benjamin, especially upon the shape and content of *The Arcades Project*.[121] Le Corbusier was also aware of the Surrealists and their activities, as evidenced by his review in *Minotaure* (the magazine produced by the Surrealists) of the drawings of a man with a mental illness.[122] Although Le Corbusier's intentions for architecture and dwelling in modernity were quite different than those of the Surrealists, there are still unexpected moments of congruence and fusion that reconcile the "conflict between the "universally transparent exteriority" of Le Corbusier and the idiosyncratic translucent interiority of Breton."[123]

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[121] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.34

[122] A.Gorlin, 'The Ghost in the Machine: Surrealism in the Work of Le Corbusier,' *Perspecta*, vol.18 (1982), p.51

[123] A. Kalfopoulos, 'Maria Papadimitriou' (2008), www.postmedia.net/08/papadimitriou.htm

The Concept of Dream

And I love dreams because they are subversive.

—GEO BOGZA, *The Rehabilitation of the Dream.*[124]

When we think of dreams, we tend to think of the sleeping mind's strange and enigmatic perambulations, which is what initially provokes the consciousness of a divide between the tangible everyday reality and one which the subconscious mind has constructed. This is dream as subjectivity, as an interior world. However, I want to broaden the idea of dream beyond this definition, so that it encompasses the myriad of ways in which modern life is punctuated by possibility, paradox, fantasies, and other forms of 'irrational' experience.

Dream can entail a hope or vision for the future, whether purely on a personal scale or one which extends outwards to the entirety of humanity. In this instance it is also connected to a kind of desire or longing (romanticism and nostalgia as discussed in Chapter One can be equated with dream in this sense) through which the imagination projects itself into some other world in which fulfilment is achieved. This kind of utopian dreaming is fundamental to architecture and to the creative act. But beyond this the concept of dream becomes more nebulous in character: it might describe those moments when the world and its objects tilt from their everyday axis and become strange or wondrous, a quality associated with the uncanny and the Kantian sublime; or it can be applied to the equally symbolic worlds of mythology and capitalist enchantment, which interweave into a phantasmagoria.

Contrary to the Enlightenment narrative, dream-forms are central to the experience of modernity in a number of ways, not least of which is that they reflect a sense of fracture and instability; dream and modernity alike are characterised by montage (itself a notable avant-garde activity), which again incorporates this idea of collecting, of bringing a multitude of fragments together out of which new configurations might emerge. After all, "the basic units of dream can be regarded as elements of substitution" which can broadly be grouped into "the condensations that merge elements; the displacements that replace elements with alternative ones; the figurative or theatrical elements.[125] Thus, when

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[124] Geo Bogza, 'The Rehabilitation of the Dream,' *Unu* (1931); in Benson and Forgács, p.714

[125] J. Phillips, 'Dream Furniture,' *Journal of European Studies*, 38:4 (2008), p.396

Benjamin and the Surrealists consciously seek out the presence of dream – particularly within the industrial city, the commodity object, and the work of architecture – they are also fashioning new ways of looking at modernity. Theirs is a process of recognising and revealing the symbols, stories, and dreams of the modern and then displacing them, merging them, and presenting alternatives.

It is clear that dream thus comes to signify those moments when the edges of things begin to blur, where imagination and the tangible world meet. This moment of ambiguity was crucial to the Surrealist project, as outlined here by André Breton in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*:

> Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions. Now, search as one may one will never find any other motivating force in the activities of the Surrealists other than the hope of finding and fixing this point.[126]

It is not surprising, then, that the Surrealists took their cue from dreams – recording, discussing, and recreating their content – since the latent power of the oneiric is that it can break down categories, allowing things to take on new meanings. Dream-forms have always had the potential to comment upon and expand reality's possibilities. In the dream, "the absurd is presented as if it were self-evident, in order to strip the self-evident of its power."[127] This is the critical strength of dream, and this is why it is important to juxtapose the contingent modernity of the Surrealists with the instrumental modernity *symbolised* by (but not necessarily *synonymous* with) a high-modernist architecture, so as to find those instances in which they, too, 'cease to be perceived as contradictions.'

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[126] Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism' (1930), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, pp.123-124

[127] Adorno, 'Benjamin's 'Einbahnstrasse,'' *Über Walter Benjamin* (1970), p.54; in Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, p.127

Surrealist and Modernist

Surrealism was born in an arcade. And under the protection of what muses!

—WALTER BENJAMIN, The Arcades Project.[128]

It is little wonder that the Surrealists also found themselves at home in the arcades, amongst the dust, the shadows, and the detritus of capitalism. Like Benjamin, they explored these passageways and those of the Paris metro, recognising their oneiric qualities and that therein lay the other face of the modern. Naturally, Surrealism whole-heartedly embraced the absurdity and darkness of the metropolis and modern life, whereas modernist architecture often appears to be an attempt at cleansing away the 'unhealthy attachments' and projections of the psyche, bringing light into the mind as much as into the rooms of the dusty interior.

For at least since Plato, light has been associated with a cleansing of the vision and a clarity of understanding, something reflected in many a modernist manifesto and in the architects' conscious juxtaposition of their work against the dark, corridor-ridden nineteenth century households; theirs was not simply the literal illumination of the everyday dwelling, but entailed the figurative enlightening of its inhabitants in turn, the Western tradition having long equated the two (consider the project of the Enlightenment). Again, this is to be contrasted with the Surrealists and their preference for enclosed, organic forms and Freudian womb-like spaces, such as Tristan Tzara's ideal architecture which was to be "dark, tactile and soft" in a way that "imitated the self-constructed shelters of childhood."[129] There is a fantastic (although possibly apocryphal) story which illustrates the difference in taste between Surrealist and modernist, which the young Dali recalled in a 1933 article written for *Minotaure*:

When I was barely twenty-one years old, I happened to be having lunch one day [. . .] in the company of the masochistic and Protestant architect Le Corbusier who, as everyone knows, is the inventor of the architecture of self-punishment. Le Corbusier asked me if I had any ideas on the future of his art. Yes, I had. I have ideas on everything, as a matter

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[128] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MA, 1999) [C1,2], p.82

[129] A. Vidler, 'Fantasy, the Uncanny and Surrealist Theories of Architecture,' *Papers of Surrealism* , no.1 (2003), p.7

of fact. I answered him that architecture would become "soft and hairy." [. . .] In listening to me, Le Corbusier had the expression of one swallowing gall.[130]

Of course there is an element of deliberate provocation in this, but it challenges conventional notions of architecture and what is appropriate – and it is also simply *funny*. The Surrealists embody this concept of play, gleefully upsetting categories.

However, it is also important to remember that Surrealism was partly a response to the First World War and "the tyranny of reason" with which it was associated.[131] On this basis – despite sharing a similar concern with the experience of the individual within modernity – there was a noticeable hostility towards the modernist architects, whom the Surrealists saw as furthering an instrumental and functionalist program at the expense of mental life. Within such a framework it is easy to feel as if something is lost, as if the biological body and the material world is all that exists, so that form always follows function and desacralisation becomes *objectification*. The Surrealists were especially unenthused with the work of Le Corbusier, which Breton described as "a solidification of desire in a most violent and cruel automatism."[132] Consequently, the emphasis upon irrationality and "semi-organic" forms acts as a counter to "the implacable rationalism of purely technological modernism."[133]

The early twentieth-century also saw the birth of modern psychology and Freudian psychoanalysis, and with it the concept of the subconscious. This was something that did not conform to the modernist maxim of self-reflexivity, something that was ungraspable, unwatchable by the mind that watches itself, but nevertheless working and stirring behind the scenes – thus conveying a peculiar horror as well as a thrill. 'Civilisation' was now only a veneer for all kinds of barely-repressed forces that threatened to emerge at any point. In this manner, dreaming itself became scientific via Freud – becoming that which uncovers reality. Thus psychoanalysis might be considered as part of a rational modernity that seeks to capture the excess as its own, to understand – and so to make safe and classify

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[130] S. Dali, 'The Terrifying and Comestible Beauty of Modern Style Architecture,' *Minotaure* (1933); in *Dali on Modern Art: The Cuckolds of Antiquated Modern Art*, trans. H.M. Chevalier (New York, 1996), pp.29-31; in J. Hunt, 'Ingestion/The Shelf-Life of Liquefying Objects,' *Cabinet*, no.13 (2004), www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/13/hunt.php

[131] Phillips, p.397

[132] Breton, 'Crise de l'Objet' (1935), in A. Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: MA., 1992), p.150

[133] Vidler, 'Fantasy, the Uncanny and Surrealist Theories of Architecture,' p.6

– the unconscious mind. This ties into Foucault's view of modernity, which involves the creation of new means of order and control; the focus is on discipline – so that "the useful human body is the subjected human body."[134]

This brings to mind the eponymous heroine from Breton's *Nadja*, who is an enchanting and liberating figure, but also an escapee from a mad-house. There is an implicit commentary here on the urge to control and often brutally subject the irrational subject to science and reason, in a manner that produces its own pathologies. Whether a truly ethical impulse or a festishisation of a different kind, the Surrealists granted validity to people whose perceptions and experience of the world would otherwise be ignored or feared, similar to the way in which Benjamin acknowledged the arcade-dwellers. Here, the image of the psychiatric hospital sits uneasily alongside ideas that also surface in modernist architecture, in which the hygienic white space of healing and liberation (a force that Breton located in Nadja herself) is joined to a more sinister fantasy of control. Consider one of Le Corbusier's interior photographs in which he poses a woman reclining on a *chaise-lounge* so that she is turned away, her face right up against the white wall; one gets the feeling that the horizontal, outward gaze which is supposed "to produce the feeling of being lookouts dominating a world of order" is not intended for the 'irrational' female subject.[135] Yet this ambiguity multiplies even further, because Surrealist writings also betray a certain fetish for a humanity reduced to objects, which is part of a certain sadistic, if not outright misogynistic streak, in that it is overwhelmingly the female body that suffers mutation, distortion and dismemberment in the name of a revolutionary Surrealist aesthetic (see Hans Bellmer's *püppe*, for instance). Nadja's role in the story takes on quite different meanings if approached from this angle: it becomes clear that she is more of a symbol than a person, a kind of Jungian dream archetype who is important to André in terms of what she means *to him*. Thus, dream and order alike can dissolve the individual, or reduce them to an aesthetic.

The Surrealists were infatuated with a contingent interiorised modernity, and accordingly their interests might be summarised as: the transient, the ephemeral, the rotten, the ruined, the weathered, the repressed, and the psychological and mythological configurations of modern life. But these categories also find expression in even the most

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[134] R. Friedland and D. Boden (ed.), introduction, *NowHere: Space, Time, and Modernity* (Berkeley: CA, 1994) p.25

[135] Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (1925), p.186; in B. Colomina (ed.), 'The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism,' in *Sexuality and Space*, pp.104-07, p.112

'high-modernist' architecture, as we have seen in the romantic and ruined Villa Savoye. Furthermore, just as the transitory aspects of modernity are not oppositional to modernist architectural forms, so do programmatic aspects pervade the Surrealist project. Their work is not wholly anarchic (as much as they would have liked it to be) but also reflects a desire to understand and to interpret modernity, even if it was through those aspects of the modern that were the most fragmented, ungraspable, and liminal.

Surrealism, out of the varieties of avant-garde groups, also finds a particular affinity with architecture, not only because architecture is one of the best expressions of 'latent mythology,' but also because of its symbolic nature, its role in the construction of a 'home' (already an oneiric and mythological space, which in modernity entails heightened cultural narratives of the romantic, nostalgic and uncanny) and because architecture "manifests itself in that most ambiguous of all elements – space – within which psychic projection and introjections move freely and without fixed boundaries."[136] Benjamin reinforces this interrelation between dream and architecture, in that he "consistently located the unconscious in the material world itself, not outside, behind, above or below it, but within."[137] Consequently, the domains of modernist architecture and Surrealism intersect on many different levels. Consider this extract from *Nadja*:

> I myself shall continue living in my glass house where you can always see who comes to call; where everything hanging from the ceiling and on the walls stays where it is as if by magic, where I sleep nights in a glass bed, under glass sheets, where *who I am* will sooner or later appear etched by a diamond.[138]

This paragraph acts not so much as a critique than as an exposé: the revelation here is that the transparent glass house "did not represent that 'machine for living in' trumpeted by Le Corbusier, but [. . .] an oneiric machine, a machine for dreaming."[139] Even a house without walls, without enclosure, privacy, or space to collect objects, becomes part of an intensely private mythology and a source of fantasy. As Breton shows, the surrealists do not so much co-opt the spaces of modern architecture for their own purposes as expose their pre-

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[136] Vidler, 'Fantasy, the Uncanny and Surrealist Theories of Architecture,' p.3

[137] Mertins, 'Walter Benjamin and the Tectonic Unconscious: Using Architecture as an Optical Instrument', in *The Optic of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Alex Coles (London, 1999), p.207

[138] Breton, *Nadja* , trans. R. Howard (New York, 1960), p.18

[139] Vidler, 'Fantasy, the Uncanny and Surrealist Theories of Architecture,' p.4

existing relationship with the irrational manifestations of dream. In this way, Surrealism also reminds us that architects must also take into considerations the interior worlds that they are housing, the messy social and psychological complexities of its inhabitants.

The Surrealists paid close attention to the repressed or marginalised elements within the dominant modernist ideology. To this end, they purposefully challenged and subverted the same central domains with which many of the modernist architects were occupied, namely:

> The solid, load-bearing wall that afforded traditional protection and privacy; the bourgeois house and its kitsch-like trappings of 'home' or 'Heimat,' and the objects of everyday life, which [. . .] were still encumbered with ornament and encrusted with historical references.[140]

Both practices were thus intensely preoccupied with the theme of dwelling, and they shared mush of the same subject matter, although the way in which they articulate a relationship to these three domains listed above could radically differ as well as unexpectedly intersect. Both the Surrealists and the modernists – across disciplines – were concerned with a transformation of the mode of viewing modernity, of the individual within modernity, and of modernity itself.

Ultimately, one of the most valuable lessons of the Surrealist critique is that it is not necessary for everything to have a function in order to have a value; that value itself cannot be reduced to some definition of 'usefulness,' whether in human or architectural terms. Of course, architecture also has an ethical responsibility to be functional, but if it becomes *purely* about functionality it also and inevitably loses its humanity (paradoxically returning it to a state of non-functioning in terms of dwelling). Rationality always becomes oppressive if it is extended outward indefinitely – as does dream.

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[140] Ibid. p.3

The Enchanted Object

This double movement is a profound one: architecture is always dream and function, expression of a utopia and instrument of convenience.

—ROLAND BARTHES, *The Eiffel Tower and other Mythologies.*[141]

In 1923 Le Corbusier chose to end his influential modernist text, *Toward an Architecture*, with the image of a briar pipe.[142] This unassuming object has its origins in the nineteenth century but went on to become an icon of the early twentieth, conveying a clean-edged and masculine sensibility appropriate to the new *modernité*. In contrast, the clay or meerschaum pipes which had been popular in the preceding era now found themselves stamped with an air of bohemian apathy, imparting to the smoker the status of "a decadent subject."[143]

But why end with a briar pipe? Automobiles, ocean-liners, airplanes – these were the new divinities of the modern industrial era, evanescent idols of speed, power and utility. Certainly the high-modernist aesthetic, at its peak in Europe during the 1920s, drew from all of these sources. Yet the avant-garde – architectural and otherwise – also adopted less forceful, more ordinary objects as heralds of a new ethos. The briar pipe was in the company of pocket-watches, glass bottles, and interior fixtures and fittings (door handles and the like). Factory items like these – marked by that origin as utilitarian and unembellished – captured the feeling of a zeitgeist, transcending their own material specificity to acquire a new position as *objets-types*.[144] Thus, the pipe became culturally encoded, assuming a symbolic value. It was now "a distinctive object of and instrument for modern desires."[145] Jeffrey T. Schnapp, in his essay on the briar pipe as "modernist

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[141] Barthes, p.6

[142] Commonly mistranslated and known in English as 'Towards a New Architecture'.

[143] J.T. Schnapp [my emphasis], 'Art/Lit Combines; or when a Pipe is only a Pipe', *Profession* (1998), p.44 Benjamin was also interested in the opium smokers of the nineteenth century, but this is the same thing magnified: the opium addict retreats from worldly concerns and activity, becoming inert and content to muse upon their strange and private dreams. In the new century, the gentleman with the briar pipe surpasses the opium-addict; the active – masculine – figure trumps the languid, passive and feminised figure of the opium addict.

[144] Le Corbusier's term.

[145] Schnapp, p.48

signature object" – and to whom much of the surrounding discussion is indebted – is illuminating on this point:

> The briar pipe embodies an architecture capable of providing technical solutions to modern problems. The pipe's pure lines, its freedom from ornament, its functionalism all signify *an emancipatory rationalisation of life* and the democratisation of mass comfort, consumption, and thrills. But they also figure the architect himself, the demiurge whose once hopelessly fluttering pipe dreams are now threatening to reengineer the real.[146]

Like architecture, the pipe is an object which is dependent on *use*; furthermore, it gained its emblematic status through the new production techniques and materials used in its creation – such as the early plastic vulcanite – which resulted in something that had functional value but still retained an aesthetic dimension. As Schnapp points out, its purpose in *Toward an Architecture* is to act as a condensation of each object and argument present in the book.[147] It is a leitmotif of the essential principles of modernist design as well as a hallmark of modernity itself. Therefore, to Le Corbusier at least, it draws attention to the following questions: what does it mean to be modern? What objects, ideas, and styles are meant to embody modernity? In this context the pipe is the symbol of the progressive and utopian ideals embodied by the modern hero, "a figure at odds with his or her own epoch, yet addicted to the intoxication and romance of modernity itself."[148]

   But this choice of final image unwittingly invites a dialectic to open up with the Surrealists, who also played with these questions of meaning in modernity: engaging with Le Corbusier's work from a twenty-first century perspective, the modernist briar pipe of *Toward an Architecture* unconsciously summons its future twin – the subversive and playful pipe famously created by René Magritte. In this classic Surrealist painting, *The Treachery of Images* [*La Trahison des images*, 1928-29], the briar pipe not only declines the finality of Le Corbusier's parting image, but also any direct relation to the material object through the declaration: 'this is not a pipe' [*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*].[149] How are we

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[146] Ibid [my emphasis], p.46

[147] Ibid, p.44

[148] Gilloch, p.149

[149] It should be noted that Magritte only gave this title to the work approximately five or six years after its completion [see Schnapp, p.40]. Magritte often aimed to subvert and parody the briar pipe as modernist

to approach such an image? It is pre-emptive, it beats us to the play. We are the ones who have momentarily confused the signifier with the signified and are prompted into re-evaluating the relationship between ideas and material reality.

Although they reference the same object in the material world, these two pipes are transfigured according to the context and the politics of representation. Both Le Corbusier and Magritte acknowledge this act of transformation – the former implicitly through the status accorded to the briar pipe, the latter explicitly through the painting's subtitle. After all, "vision is not only what we see; it is a stance taken, an idea, a geometry – a point of view in both senses of the phrase."[150] One pipe is meant to be objective, not just a pipe but *the* pipe; the other is deeply subjective, flickering in and out of materiality. The image of the briar pipe in *Toward an Architecture* is intended to convey far more than the simple functionality of *bruyère* and vulcanite whereas Margritte's image plays off of and exposes the myth itself. Under this reading, 'this is not a pipe' is truthful to Le Corbusier's intentions, even while gently mocking them. Our perception of the world is reliant upon this mixing of subject and object, and through this we are able to impart meaning to our activities.

Thus architecture must also always reside at this intersection of objects and dreams. Although both the briar pipe and works of architecture are defined by their function, as Roland Barthes points out, "use never does anything but shelter meaning."[151] In his essay *The Eiffel Tower*, Barthes elucidates on the paradox which often manifests in those objects taken to be the most modern, the most functional, or as the epitome of *the new*, in that:

> The utilitarian excuses, however enobled they may be by the myth of Science, are nothing in comparison to the great imaginary function which enables men to be strictly human. Yet, as always, the gratuitous nature of the work is never avowed directly: it is rationalized under the rubric of use: Eiffel saw his Tower in the form of a serious

icon by making explicit and ludicrous the associations with heroic masculine virility – such as Magritte's numerous paintings in which the pipe-smoker's activity becomes a form of auto-fellatio, i.e. *The Philosophical Lamp*: 1936.

[150] Octavio Paz, *Duchamp* (1981), p.7; in R. Connah, *Writing Architecture: Fantômas Fragments Fictions* (Cambridge: MA, 1989), p.14

[151] Barthes, p.7

object, rational, useful; men return it to him in the form of a great baroque dream which quite naturally touches on the borders of the irrational.[152]

Similarly, this kind of subjective appropriation is also visible in the responses to Tatlin's Tower, which was intended to stand in revolutionary contrast to the Eiffel Tower's bourgeois aspirations – although it appears to us now as a bizarre skeletal dream object. Again, its *usefulness* was emphasised; its various revolving parts each corresponded to and tracked the hours of a day, a month, and a year. Yet even this singular object fails to escape the clutches of cultural dreams: El Lissitsky compared it to the "Sargon Pyramid;" Siegfried Giedion saw in it Borromini's Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza; and Victor Schlovsky – aware of the strange simultaneity of the future and the archaic – described it as bringing to mind "the age of construction cranes, beautiful like wise Martians" and "the iron age of Ovid."[153]

Barthes addresses how objects come to be signifiers, imbued with meaning – the nature and gravity of which is determined by what people draw from "their knowledge, their dreams, their history" – through the loop of "glance, object, symbol," which progresses and then repeats.[154] The icon is dependent on the (desiring) gaze to achieve and maintain this status and, in doing so, naturally becomes that which gazes back (the fetish). Yet is precisely at the level of the fetish that Benjamin located the central meeting point between Surrealist and modernist ideals. As we have seen in the example of the briar pipe, "Surrealism and Purism alike, indeed, fetishised precisely the same *types* of objects," so that while the Surrealists understood them as "vehicles of oneiric desire," for Le Corbusier they became "physical extensions of the body," functional things that extended and enhanced human activity.[155] Both of these understandings are reliant upon a level of mythology and desire:

Objects incorporate emotions as readily as people, providing the basis for what psychoanalysis was articulating during Breton's time as "object relation," or the infinite

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[152] Barthes [my emphasis], p.6

[153] Boym, www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/28/boym2.php

[154] Barthes, p.5

[155] Vidler, 'Fantasy, the Uncanny and Surrealist Theories of Architecture,' p.10

ability of human beings to make others – creatures or things – the vehicle of fantasies.[156]

Part of this enchantment is to do with the 'object-culture' of capitalist modernity, through which the fetishisation of the new inevitably produces more and more of the old. This was a domain that Breton was well-versed in, seeing how he frequently scoured the second-hand markets hoping to find new curios and oddities to add to his growing collection. But although the Surrealists primarily directed their energies towards the contingent, fetishising the broken or second-hand object, this "parallels the desire to develop and accumulate the newest of the new, to participate *objectively* in the creation of the new."[157]

Accordingly, it is important to take into account Karel Teige's caution that "a flat roof or steel furniture can never be regarded as the ultimate goal of modern architecture."[158] It is one thing to direct utopic energies into the act of creation, or to accept the subjectivity of any particular object or architectural work, but it is quite another to assume that things might be changed through aesthetic means alone. Then, the ethical force of architecture is lost because it becomes locked into the notion of *style*, and so conforms to the paradigm of time-as-fashion, in which desire is transferred onto objects.

Desire, Technology, Jugendstil

> *No collective effort has succeeded in creating a dream world as pure, and as disturbing, as these Jugendstil buildings.*
>
> —SALVADOR DALI, 'L' Ane pourri.'[159]

"How does modernism become Jugendstil?" asks Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*.[160] Jugendstil, otherwise known as Art Nouveau, spanned the last decade of the nineteenth

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[156] C. Olalquiaga, 'Object Lesson/Lost Object', *Cabinet*, no.26 (2007), www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/26/olalquiaga.php

[157] S. Gourgouris, 'The Dream Reality of the Ruin,' in Hanssen, p.221

[158] Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, trans. E. Dluhosch (2002), p.12; in Sayer, p.20

[159] Dali, 'L' Ane pourri', *Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution*, 1:1 (1930), p.12; in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [S2,5], p.547

[160] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [S11,2], p.560

century and the first decade of the twentieth, before its popularity waned. It is highly decorative, and emphasises organic, flowing forms and other motifs taken from the natural world. Examining its fantastical architectural forms, the most well-known of which are by Hector Guimard and Victor Horta, provides another interesting counterpoint to a functionalist modernism and an 'objective' modernity. But it should also be noted that Jugendstil was originally referred to as 'Modern Style' architecture, which reminds us that it represents another form of modernism, and that it posits an alternative modernity to the one whose future we are already in.

Jugendstil's particular character is one of a dream-image, and it might be ventured that it is one of the architectural concepts that treads closest to the notion that utopianism "can be a process of exploring desire itself."[161] For the Surrealists in particular, it crystallised the latent form of desire, bursting into the world with verdant force. It overwhelms, but not necessarily through domination so much as it dissolves the mental barriers between subject and object, inhabitant and architecture. By creating interiors and exteriors that take on the character of plants, it also plays with the distinction between the natural world outside and its architectural role as a shelter, upending traditional dwelling so that the outside is brought *in* and vice versa. It thus contains a certain fetish quality since, after all, the character of the fetish is defined by "confusions of identity between the mental and the physical, the organic and the inorganic."[162] The following extract from Dali's 1933 article, 'The Terrifying and Comestible Beauty of Modern Style Architecture,' connects these threads of desire, control, and the organic to the Jugendstil house:

> The nutritive and edible character of this kind of house is thus alluded to without any euphemism, these houses being nothing other than the first edible houses, the first and only erotizable buildings.[163]

Jugendstil was thus understood as 'feminine', mainly through the symbolic weight of ornament and the eroticised nature which it conveyed, all of which play off this idea of desire in that "the only means of satisfaction then is to incorporate fully the object of

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[161] Pinder, p.238

[162] Vidler, 'Fantasy, the Uncanny and Surrealist Theories of Architecture, p.1

[163] Dali, 'The Terrifying and Comestible Beauty of Modern Style Architecture' (1933), in Hunt, www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/13/hunt.php

desire, to fuse subject with object so that they are forever indistinguishable."[164] These observations are to be contrasted against the mythology of the 'strong' lines and 'culture' (versus nature) of the masculine modernist (the one who creates rather than being consumed). However, they are also to be juxtaposed against Karel Teige's functionalist vision for architecture, outlined in his book *The Minimum Dwelling* (1928). Here, he arrives at the same end-point but through different means, insinuating that "the more minimal the dwelling, the more extensive the sexual imagery."[165] In this case, it is the very *lack* of ornament that draws attention to ornament's metaphorical erotic excess. A similar thing happens with the psychological notion of 'whitewash' and the white wall that pervades modernist manifestoes. The sense of decoration as something gratuitous and over-stimulating is paralleled by the desire to cleanse the vision, and 'whiteness' takes on a specific role in this context:

> It is supposed to be the look that terminates the obsessive turnover of looks, acting as the stable surface behind the parade of ephemeral fashions, the neutral, or neutralising, ground with which a building can test itself and other buildings for unwanted fashion infections by making them appear as ornamental "stains."[166]

This is really a form of temporal dreaming that betrays a desire to start anew, or to exceed and escape the signs of time and history, such as dust, weathering, and the unfashionable. But it is also an attempt at control – moreover, it is about controlling *desire*, which is associated with a certain instability, a force that can overwhelm if it is not contained. But what Teige slyly hints at is that the absence of ornament creates an overcompensation in the imagination, so that the white wall provokes, rather than represses, desire. Paradoxically, despite its appearance of sensuous abandon, of a return of the organic, Jugendstil contains a narrative of control and replication of a different kind. It is less a return to nature than technology as *new* nature – as that which replaces and controls 'actual' nature. Here, modern materials and technologies are used to evoke the timelessness of nature (in the sense that it is a natural constant) as well as its transience

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[164] Hunt, www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/13/hunt.php

[165] Hatherly, p.78

[166] M. Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses* (Cambridge [Mass.], 1995), p.xxii

(plants wither and die), so that there is also a strange dislocation of time and space that underlies these constructions.[167]

Jugendstil's latticework of vines and iron leaves are then to be equated with the stereotypical white wall of modernist architecture because both have an association with control – and with liberation. On the one hand, Jugendstil acts to harmonise technological modernity with dwelling via an idealised nature with an idealised humanity; on the other, this act of repression could be read – by Benjamin in particular – as a form of self-denial, and as creating a fetish out of technology, without engaging technology's real potential to change social structures, and not just aesthetics.

Benjamin framed Jugendstil within the "attempt on the part of art to come to terms with technology" so that "its recourse to technological motifs arises from the effort to sterilise them ornamentally."[168] In other words, by stylising technological forms – taking them out of the context of industry and mechanisation – Jugendstil seeks to naturalise them, in order to control them (as a continuation of what Benjamin sees as the misguided notion that controlling technology is controlling nature itself). In this sense, Jugendstil can appear two-faced: it acknowledges the desire for technological domination over nature, but does not do so openly. It also raises disturbing implications that technology must be feminised in order to be dominated, which is not such a stretch of the imagination considering the prevalence of the sinuous and elongated female form as one of its design elements, along with the analogy of the feminine with nature and how readily Surrealist and modernist alike equated this architecture with erotic elements.

Nevertheless, as Benjamin himself has pointed out, Jugendstil was also a genuine engagement with modernity, even if it entailed a fictitious recourse to a paradisiacal state. It is, perhaps, an architecture of longing rather than one of acceptance, but this longing in and of itself is no less real; it contains that same covert utopian imagination that Benjamin wanted to excavate and then realise in a non-mythological form. Thus Jugendstil should not be thought of as an anomaly, but as one of many forms of modernism that were "not always critical of modernity, but rather adopted a "pastoral" attitude that aimed at

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[167] Dali's 'edible architecture' also sets up the tension between the transience of food – that which rots – and the idea of architecture, which is intended to last and to preserve. This profane sensuality can become tied into a fetish for the decaying parts of the timely world, that which rots, weathers, breaks, and so forth. The transitory then becomes fetishised, and thus loses its messianic charge once it takes its meaning *because* it is transitory.

[168] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [S8a, 1], p.557

smoothing out differences and conflicts."[169] However, Teige still considered this to be an ultimately disingenuous kind of architecture, for the reasons that he gives here:

> To dress up mechanical forms, whose beauty resides in precision and function, with external decoration and to relocate them on a canvas or on a building, as was done in *Jugendstil* and is done even now, is tantamount to false and unenlightened machine romanticism and is a fundamental error.[170]

Yet, as I have explored in the concept of 'the enchanted object,' Teige's idea of a mechanical beauty that 'resides in precision and function' is no less romantic or mythologised. The machine was a symbol and form of desire for many different strands of the modern avant-garde, who embraced its potential to liberate people from menial tasks and responsibilities. But this also entailed a relationship to surface properties over craftsmanship and the mode of construction.[171] Consequently, machines and industrial objects – such as the briar pipe – are not merely functional, but also aesthetic, shaped by the desiring gaze. When Bernard Tschumi, speaking about the Villa Savoye in ruin, remarked that "sensuality has been known to overcome even the most rational of buildings," and that "architecture is the ultimate erotic act," he sided with Dali and the Surrealists.[172] Remember Barthes, and his writing on the Eiffel Tower: those things which are most functional, most defined by their utility become those which contain the most excessive forms of desire within them (here paving the way for narratives of the cyborg, and the robot – an erotic fusion of man and machine). Teige also wrote the following, rather charming if also somewhat naive reflection on the matter:

> When two machines that serve the same purpose stand next to one another, and both have been assessed as equally perfect in their utility, and one of them is more ugly, there cannot be any doubt that the more beautiful functions better.[173]

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[169] Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique* (Cambridge: MA., 1999), p.5

[170] Teige, 'Constructivism and the Liquidation of Art,' in Benson and Forgács, p.587

[171] G. Hartoonian, *Crisis of the Object* (New York, 2006), p.2

[172] Tschumi, in Hays, p.363

[173] Teige, 'Constructivism and the Liquidation of Art,' in Benson and Forgács, p.588

Although Teige was self-aware enough to realise that the evaluation of beauty was always based upon fundamentally irrational and subjective principles, it is apparent that even the most hard-line functionalism, the *most* minimum dwelling, cannot exceed or annul human subjectivity. We should not forget that this idea of something as 'excessive' – a term used to describe decoration and the irrational, also constitutes the human and our experience.

Uncanny Alienation

> *The better oriented in his environment a person is, the less readily he will get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it.*

—SIGMUND FREUD, 'The 'Uncanny.''[174]

The angel of history's backward glance – the other face of Janus – is a ruin-gaze, it is that nihilistic strand that reveals the modern compulsion towards order as undercut with anxiety rather than the pure expression of rationality. Nietzsche describes nihilism as "this most uncanny of all guests" [*dieses unheimlichsten aller Gäste*], reinforcing its connection with anxiety and the slippage of normal boundaries.[175] It also implies alienation as a condition for its appearance, and the uncanny has always implicitly aligned itself with architecture through the root word *heimlich* or home. These nuances again play off the idea of dwelling as enclosure and a kind of restricted zone – in turn exposing modernist architecture's curtain glass walls and open spaces as uncanny disruptions, not so much negating dwelling as playing with its traditional language. But it should also be recognised that this word pertains to more than the domestic, that under Freud's definition the *heimlich* may also be that which is secretive or hidden, but which has come to light. It can then also be understood as a kind of revelation.

The uncanny is not an innate or pre-existing property, rather, it is best understood as "a representation of a mental state [. . .] that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the

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[174] Freud, 'The 'Uncanny'' (1919), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol.17 (1955), p.221; in G. Baker, 'Photography between Narrative and Stasis: August Sander, Degeneration and the Decay of the Portrait,' *October*, vol.76 (1996), p.98

[175] Nietzsche, 'Will to Power,' Outline, *Werke*, vol. XV, p.141; in S. Bernstein, 'It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny,' *MLN*, 118:5 (2003), p.1117

unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming."[176] It is well known that Le Corbusier carefully arranged objects in photographs of his buildings to give the appearance of everyday life or, more disconcertingly, as if someone has only just left the room or finished their activity. However, in looking at them, this artificiality – which is meant to evoke a certain intimacy, an identification with the house's unseen inhabitants – lends itself more to the surrealist than to the modernist dream home. In particular, the interior shot of the Villa Garches (1927) with a raw fish in the foreground, takes on a sense of disquiet. The fish looks more likely to have fallen from the sky than to have any role to play in a family meal. The whole tableau conjures up the fairytale of a knight on horseback who, losing his way, stumbles across a long-abandoned castle and is perplexed at finding the food still fresh and the table set. Of course, the consequence of his next action is dire; the act of consumption is an act of transgression. In translation, *do not eat the fish*. Yet one can imagine the pleasure that André Breton may have felt at such an image.[177]

The surrealists and other avant-gardes experiment with modern anxiety in such as way so that "the uncanny was renewed as an aesthetic category."[178] The uncanny now became a satirical tactic, a process of approaching the familiar in an unfamiliar way, hence also its close links to the interior of the building (and from there the interior of the mind). The experience of shock is therefore appropriated by avant-gardes themselves. However, does this result in the wresting of control back from the alienating aspects of modernity – no longer passively accepting, but actively engineering and using this experience as a tool of revelation – or is there something futile and perhaps misguided in such an effort? As Vidler points out, this tactic rests upon the paradox "that a world estranged and distanced from its own nature could only be recalled to itself by shock, by the effects of things deliberately "made strange.""[179] It is true that estrangement can be "an exercise of wonder, of thinking the world as a question, not as a staging of a grand answer," but estrangement should not be an end in itself.[180]

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[176] Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny,* p.11

[177] Furthermore, the act of consumption is what binds him to the place, thus in a way evoking Dali's obsession with edible architecture, in that ingestion is a form of possession and assimilation.

[178] Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny,* p.8

[179] Ibid.

[180] Boym, www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/28/boym2.php

To what degree do the avant-garde contribute to alienation or revel in it? To what degree is there a certain masochism to this, testing the limits of how humans can dwell – whether in fantasises of a primal womb architecture, or in the transparent glass house? The modernist architects and the Surrealists again find a unity here, in that to some degree both disrupt or challenge the traditional mode of dwelling, and for all their utopic imaginings and intentions, they run on an undercurrent of anxiety – just like the uncanny, which also reveals its connection here to the capitalist mechanics of fashion, desire, and consumption.

Certainly, "the formal and critical *expression* of alienation, as the first avant-gardes found to their chagrin, does not always correspond to the work of transforming or even ameliorating such conditions in practice."[181] There is a danger here of losing the ethical to the shock of the unfamiliar aesthetic, something usually identified as a 'postmodern' impulse: again, it is a different face and feature of modernity.

Awakening

In a fairy tale there is typically an enchanted object or ritual that breaks the spell. Or in the religious version of this story some manifestation of God – his word, his son, a prophet, or a miracle – disrupts the existing order and ushers in new ways of living.

—MARGARET KOHN, 'Dreamworlds of Deindustrialisation.'[182]

While Benjamin may expose the critical aspects of Surrealist thought and the way in which it illuminates facets of the modernist project, he also identified the shortcomings of their approach, namely "the nihilistic anarchism [. . .], the lack of a constructive, dictatorial, disciplined side to its thinking" which programmatic thinking brings.[183] Furthermore, in built form it tends to simply become kitsch, because pure dream or fantasy has little purchase.[184] Yet both Breton and Le Corbusier are united by the idea of awakening, which

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[181] Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny,* p.11

[182] M. Kohn [my emphasis], 'Dreamworlds of Deindustrialisation,' *Theory and Event*, 12:4 (2009)

[183] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.34

[184] Similarly, Surrealist art often relies too much upon an emotionally disturbing or shock effect. The Freudian psychological puns (everything being a stand-in for something else) wear thin after a while. I think that their best contributions are in literature, and especially in photography – through capturing and exposing those mythic elements that actually existed within the material world.

establishes that rational and critical thinking are not opposed but complementary to dreaming.

As we have seen, while dream can create new perspectives (its central feature is bricolage and montage), it can also veil the world, placing it in a kind of stasis. It is here that dream becomes enchantment, in which dreaming is to be equated solely with sleeping and the workings of the unconscious. This is a very specific kind of self-alienation, brought on by the dynamics of capitalism. Humanity is then also taken into this non-time, the 'dreamsleep' which capitalism induces, and which Benjamin sought to counter through his ideal of collective awakening. Reflecting his socialist leanings, Benjamin placed too much emphasis upon this idea of the collective, and of a communal utopic dream of a classless 'golden age.' Nevertheless, the theory of dreaming and awakening still has value for the individual, as a model for critical engagement with modern mythology.

Instead of a collective (in its way, equally mythical) event, awakening should be thought of as the moment of critique. It is the programmatic event that is necessary in order to critically process the transitory images of the dream. Awakening is "lodged in the dream as a secret, destructive element," out of which occurs "the revolutionary moment of recognition and liberation in which the contents of the dream are to be *refunctioned* and realised."[185] Therefore, awakening is not to do with re-creation but with transformation.

It was Benjamin's aim to unravel the utopic energies of modernity and, akin to the Surrealists, he understood this aspect of objects and architecture to be at its most visible once something was considered to be unfashionable or useless; once it was ruined, discarded, or broken. It is at this point that enchantment or mythology is most visible, whereby an element of irrationality creeps in and unravels the patina of 'the new' and the idea of 'the necessary.' It is precisely in this moment of ontological 'weakness' that objects – and concepts –become most open to interpretation or appropriation. Even the myths of modernity, which include those of teleology and capitalism, are expressions that might open up rather than constrict 'reality' if brought to critical consciousness as Benjamin intended. The following quote explains this distinction between myth that is accepted as immutable and 'real,' and myth that – while having a reality in itself – is also recognised as such:

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[185] Gilloch [my emphasis], p.176

While myth as a desire or nostalgic tendency toward 'pseudo myth' or dogma masks reality by idealising and naturalising it within already established rules, that is, on the grounds of an immutable metaphysical order, 'myth' as "le poetique" helps evoke reality by problematising, questioning such rules and order, and by actively participating in reality's *redefinition* as a historically mutable condition.[186]

Since modernity as a concept might be thought of both *as* a mythology and as *possessing* a mythology, it is vital to engage with the ideology and theatre that composes the mythic because this is also what shapes concrete social relations and experiences; in turn, these structures and elements become locked into a repetitive cycle once the mythology is taken as reality. But while dream may take the form of capitalist enchantment and of mythology, it *also* provides the critique and the consciousness of other possibilities, so that "the phantasmagoria of modernity consists of entities which paradoxically contain the promise of the overcoming of the mythic."[187] The paradox is that the kind of historical change that would overthrow myth and the phantasmagoric has never occurred in historical time, so it can only exist as a myth itself – as a wish-image or utopian dream.[188]

Just as there are many forms of dream, so there are many forms of modernity – there is no single *inevitable* paradigm. It is easy to focus only upon the idea of dream or irrationality as a mask, a falsehood that veils the eyes and the senses, but this plays into a notion of progressive and regressive elements, once more contributing to a teleological modernity. Paying attention to the subjective elements of dream, as well as to the experimentation and play of the Surrealists helps in understanding modernity as something more complex and multi-faceted because, as Benjamin notices:

It is very easy to establish oppositions, according to determinate points of view, within the various fields of any epoch, such that on one side lies the "productive," "forward-looking," "lively," "positive" part of the epoch, and on the other side the abortive, retrograde and obsolescent. It is therefore of decisive importance that a new partition be

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[186] B. Bognar, 'Toward an Architecture of Critical Inquiry,' *Journal of Architectural Education*, 43:1 (1989), pp.25-26

[187] Gilloch, p.105

[188] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.109

applied to this initially excluded, negative component so that [. . .] a positive element emerges anew in it too – something different from that previously signified. [189]

For example, consider the phantasmagoria of capitalist modernity, in which dreams are attached to objects in the form of a fetish, eliciting an emotional response and concealing the reality of the social structures within which they are produced; even though this landscape may obscure and anesthetise (its epigrammatic figure is the sleepwalker) it also contains "the frustrated or traumatised desire, the incomplete happiness" that can be radically re-appropriated in the service of subversion and critique.[190] Surrealism – as a mode of engaging with modernity via dreams – also prompts us to remember that there are "positive and utopian moments that may be contained within mimesis, play, intoxication and intuition."[191]

At its most radical, dream appears to occupy the same metaphysical space as the messianic, in that it is an excess, an uncontainable concept that sits outside of and yet acts through the realm of the material to which it is juxtaposed; in this manner it may also create an instance of revelation that overturns the accepted conditions or understanding of the material world. Benjamin's concept of 'profane illumination' adheres to this notion, and was heavily influenced by the enchanted metropolis described in *Nadja* and *A Paris Peasant*. Profane illumination, as its name suggests, is "a vision or insight which transcends the prosaic state of empirical reality; yet it produces this vision in an *immanent* manner, while remaining within the bounds of possible experience."[192]

It is also worth mentioning the concept of mimesis here, as formulated by Adorno: "a kind of affinity between things and persons, which exceeds the mere antithesis between object and subject and is not based on rational knowledge."[193] It is an *irrational* mode of attachment (like the collector's approach to objects), and it is important to reclaim this word from its associations, which are almost always negative as well as gendered – the 'irrational' subject being equated with the hysterical, emotional woman. Irrationality, in contrast to the cool neutrality or positive qualities assigned to 'rational' thought, is usually taken to be a sign of weakness. It is a displacement from the 'centred' and observational

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[189] Benjamin [my emphasis], *The Arcades Project*, [N1a,3], p.459

[190] M. Berdet, '8 Thesis on Phantasmagoria,'5.3, http://anthropologicalmaterialism. hypotheses.org/611

[191] Gilloch, p.12

[192] Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, p.132

[193] Heyen, 'Architecture between Modernity and Dwelling,' p.83

perspective of logic, to an expressive and active participation that seems to involve the subject taking in or being taken over. But once more, this association with 'weakness' reveals itself as a form of openness – an acceptance of the transformative relationship between the self and the world.

In his 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism* André Breton wrote that "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality,* if one may so speak."[194] In truth, these two spheres are always overlapping and indivisible – although (crucially) this does *not* mean that they are one and the same – but their presence as *entirely isolated* concepts already signals a framework in which our experience of modernity becomes separated out, partitioned, and turned into an either/or paradigm – a choice between the rational and the irrational, which is further reduced to one of clarity or madness. It is precisely this outcome to which Breton is opposed, because his statement is one that encourages "the attempt to reconcile subject and object" or "the self and the world, without overwhelming either one of those terms" – qualities which are also essential to the 'messianic idea' that underlies Benjamin's theory.[195]

This kind of critical utopian dreaming is important, and yet this moment of reconciliation must remain within the messianic idea:

> It is Benjamin's fear that if the very real creative energies of Surrealism are diverted for the sake of providing cheerful images of reconciled life in the here and now – a likelihood implicit in the concept of a *surreality* – then the movement will have essentially retreated into a private dream-world.[196]

Breton's wish for a resolution between dream and reality parallels the broader avant-garde program to merge art and life. But just as this dream is important and necessary, so it must always remain happily unobtainable, because it is only in that gap between the two that critique and self-knowledge is possible. Human alienation in its most elementary form, in the sense of a mind that watches itself acting rather than simply *acting*, is also the basis for language, imagination, architecture, and art itself. This space between the self and the

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[194] Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p.14

[195] G. Vahanian [my emphasis], *The Death of God: The Culture of our Post-Christian Era* (New York, 1966), p.165

[196] Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, p.134

world is productive, and cannot be closed without either relinquishing our humanity or destroying it in an aesthetic spectacle (as Benjamin cautions at the end of *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*). The importance of dreaming and of dream-images within modernity are as expressions of "a transformed relationship between human beings and their environment," but these utopian fragments must also remain suspended within the language of 'reality' and 'the real,' so that "both dream and reality [are] free to criticise one another."[197]

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If part of the normative understanding of modern time is that dreaming, mythology, and subjectivity have been replaced by rationality, clarity, and objectivity, then it is precisely by studying the former elements that the latter are subverted and made contingent rather than constricting. It is important not to bestow upon any group of concepts the innate quality of being progressive or regressive, as this removes a potential form of critique and ambiguity. It only crystallises the abstractions and makes it difficult to see the points at which they actually overlap and depend upon one another.

Benjamin understood that Surrealism's critical promise is in using the uncanny and the dream image to reveal and then to shatter the myths which envelop the modern world. But if this critical aspect is lost, another form of nihilism emerges – one that is based upon privilege of the aesthetic over the political. Focusing on "the fundamental timelessness of the unconscious" can also freeze the compulsion to action, the responsibilities that the awareness of time brings.[198] This is the danger that Benjamin recognised in the Surrealist practice, and in a preoccupation with the mythic – that dreams can also be a retreat, and that merely revelling in the oneiric juxtapositions of the material world does nothing to harness those energies to bring about change.

There is no architecture without dreams; but the tension in modernist architecture is also between an inclusive and ethical vision, and a private reverie of the avant-garde. *Whose* dream and for *whom* do they dream?

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[197] Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: MA., 2000), pp.64-65
[198] Osborne, p.111

4. Dwelling

The separation of the notions of house and home is at the root of modernity. The dialectics of alienation and belonging, and the difficulty or impossibility of homecoming, are central themes of modern existence.

—JUHANI PALLASMAA, *The Melnikov House*.[199]

The twentieth century, with its porosity and transparency, its tendency toward the well-lit and airy, has put an end to dwelling in the old sense. [. . .] Jugendstil unsettled the world of the shell in a radical way. Today this world has disappeared entirely, and dwelling has diminished: for the living, through hotel rooms; for the dead, through crematoriums.

—WALTER BENJAMIN, *The Arcades Project*.[200]

What do words like homecoming and dwelling now mean, when the living are more mobile than ever before – and like information and commodities are integrated into a network of movement and exchange; when even the dead are no longer located in space but dispersed into the atmosphere? And is this also not Marx's famous summary of modernity, whereby "all that is solid melts into air"?[201] In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin identified traditional dwelling with 'the shell.' But this is not the only way in which to conceive of dwelling. This concept of the shell rests upon a separation from the world, whereas the modernist architects presented visions of dwelling that radically opened up the self to the world, so that 'dwelling' might be construed as an event that takes place between the two.

Le Corbusier wrote that "a house will no longer be this solidly-built thing which sets out to defy time and decay," and so it takes on the transitory nature of its creators.[202] This sentiment expresses an awareness of the ephemeral character of modernity, but also a

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[199] J. Pallasmaa, 'The Icon House,' in Pallasmaa and A. Gozak, *The Melnikov House*, trans. Catherine Cooke (London, 1996), p.23

[200] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [I4,4], p.221

[201] Marx, in R.C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (1978), pp.475-476; in M. Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982), p.21

[202] Le Corbusier, in Kostof, p.702

nostalgia for a home in the world, for a place to which we might anchor ourselves. In secular modernity there is no *axis mundi* around which to revolve, and the longing to live in time is paralleled by a wish to transcend time itself, to escape the world of things, of nature and weathering and history. This will always be a futile dream, unresolved and excessive, but it also represents the capacity to imagine alternatives for dwelling beyond the known. It is a mark of the human desire for redemption, for a poetic unity of modernity and dwelling, and this irrational force underlies the expressive capacity of architecture.

Benjamin and 'The New Barbarism'

Le Corbusier's work stands at the terminus of the mythological figuration "house."

—WALTER BENJAMIN, *The Arcades Project*.[203]

In the arcades, Benjamin had detected the origins of modernist architecture, but his great interest in the latter stemmed not just from a shared architectural language of horizontality, expansion, flexibility, and openness; but also from the way in which the modernist architects had pushed all of these qualities to a kind of extremity, until they had produced spaces in which it was difficult for commodities and myths to accumulate, hence their 'revolutionary potential.' Thus it was possible to see in the arcades the nascent forms of those concepts, materials, and spaces that would later be refined in the works of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Eileen Gray, and Adolf Loos, among others.[204] The arcades effectively filled the time lag between the invention of a technology and the point at which its true potentials were uncovered, a process that was apparent in the history of iron, for example: first, iron was present only in industrial works, greenhouses, and the like; then, its architectural applications were revealed by the arcades; thirdly, this man-made material was employed in Jugendstil to mimic the natural; and finally its technological form and function were made visible in modernist architecture – which marked an ideological shift from "art to engineering, decorator to constructor,

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[203] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [L1a, 4], p.407
[204] Miller, 'Architecture, Temporality, and Dream in Benjamin's Passagenwerk,' Audio recording (2002)

representation to presentation."[205] For Benjamin, who essentially shared Loo's conception of modernity, this architecture achieved the closest possible parallel to modernity's fragmented realm of experience:

> Loos holds the view that modernity provokes an inevitable rupture with tradition that has as a consequence the disintegration of one's experience of life. This evolution, he thinks, obliges architecture to deploy a number of languages corresponding to a multitude of different experiences – private versus public, interior versus exterior, intimate versus public.[206]

Consequently, it is possible to understand how abstract forms, open spaces, and the liberal use of glass might correspond to the ambiguous nature of modernity, since modernist architectural practice removes the distinctions between traditionally opposed or segregated zones such as those mentioned by Loos in the quote above. This was an architecture that used technology to create technological forms, and therefore one which addressed the changing nature of experience, society, and the relationship between the self and the world in modernity. For Benjamin, Jugendstil did not succeed in articulating these complexities because it covered up the estranged nature of man to his environment, and therefore it presented an artificial image of reconciliation. In *The Arcades Project* he writes:

> Epitome of the false redemption: Jugendstil. It proves the law according to which effort brings about its opposite.[207]

As discussed in the preceding chapter, his issue with Jugendstil was not that it was ornamented *per se*, but that its organic forms implied a dominated and naturalised technology, one that was in the service of humanity. Accordingly, it hides the realities of the industrial world under a mythological shroud, much like the phantasmagoria generated by capitalism obscures the histories and origins of its objects. In failing to acknowledge these alienating conditions Jugendstil promotes a mythic reality, whereas "Benjamin's

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[205] See Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,' in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. P. Demetz (1978), p.180; in Mertins, 'The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory,' p.19

[206] Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, p.5

[207] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 'Materials for the Exposé of 1935,' Addenda, no.9, p.908

view [was that] modern architecture takes this crisis of experience into account, because it creates spaces with no fixed character, where light, air, and permeability are the dominant elements."[208] To clarify further:

> Without relinquishing hope for the return of experience, organicity, and aura, but also without pretence to depict it or create it, Benjamin adopted a radically antiorganic perspective aimed at working through the problematic of capitalism, industry and the technological environment that they were producing.[209]

He refused to deny or smooth over the contradictions of modernity, but in something of a paradoxical stance, Benjamin referred to modernist architecture as the 'new barbarism' – a term that conjures up something brutal, primal and rough; something that challenges the notion of modern civilisation. However, it could also be said that this was precisely his point, in that it is only through an architecture which radically over-turns age-old notions of home, dwelling, and experience, that all of these things have a chance to be rearticulated, to be critically examined rather than simply accepted – as is the danger of myth taken to be truth, which closes the realm of possibility. Therefore, 'the new barbarism' was to liberate people from their preconceptions about dwelling in order to renew dwelling within modernity. Just as Benjamin does not praise or denigrate ornament on its own terms, he values the 'poverty' of modernist interiors and technical lines more for their critical value than for an aesthetic one. His sympathies lie with what he sees as the existential necessity of articulating a freedom *within* modernity, and accordingly "the erasure of "experience" (*Erfahrung*) as something passed on had become necessary for the possibility of "experience" (*Erleibnis*) as *something lived* – the elimination of history for the openness of historicity."[210]

How well this kind of theory might function *in practice* is something altogether different, but what is vital is that it emerges out of and *through* modernity, in much the same way as the dream provides the force and content for the awakening. This is why an analysis of architecture is not a peripheral exercise, but one which is fundamentally grounded in the content of modernity itself.

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[208] Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, p.5
[209] Mertins, 'The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory,' p.18
[210] Ibid.

Benjamin's unease regarding expressionistic architecture – such as Jugendstil – is that it stands for the attempt to critique modernity from the *outside*, from a perspective that denies meaning to the diverse, everyday conditions of modern living because it seeks transcendental rather than material experience. Such a concern is well-founded because, as Hilde Heynen has pointed out, this kind of organicist stance can interweave into a notion of the mythical relationship between humanity and place, presenting it as 'natural' – out of which emerges the idea of what, and *who*, constitutes 'the unnatural'. Consequently, "rootedness and authenticity are presented as being superior to mobility and the experience of rootlessness," and she argues that it is "no coincidence [that] these words are part of the basic vocabulary of Nazi ideology."[211] Often these kinds of narratives reveal a fear or disgust towards the cosmopolitan city in which nothing can be idealised as 'pure' because the metropolis is always reliant upon communication and exchange, upon a mix of people, cultures, technology, and architecture. It exemplifies the destabilising forces of modernity, so it is not difficult to see how an ideology that uses terms such as 'the natural' and stresses the importance of the 'homeland' conflicted with the overwhelmingly urban, diasporic Jewish community which Benjamin was also a part of.

The turn towards a language of nature and belonging is in its own way a recognition of that same alienation which Benjamin wished to work through, rather than against. It is an *uncanny* sensation, insofar as it involves an anxiety that overlies a feeling of homelessness. It is a product of those moments when "one sees only the result of mechanical and economic processes controlling the form and feeling of a place, [so that] one feels estranged and excluded."[212] For Marx, alienation means that nature, others, and the individual themselves take on the quality of objects: "alienation is essentially experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively, as the subject separated from the object."[213] Again, this is not a wholly modern phenomenon, but one that was first culturally expressed in the Biblical notion of 'idolatry' through which the person becomes a thing themselves through the worship of objects; like Benjamin, "what Marx fights against are not the gods, but the idols."[214] The traditional house has itself become an idol, incorporated into a wider mythology in which it becomes a defining feature of the authentic human (as can be seen

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[211] Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, p.23

[212] Maki, p.358

[213] Marx's idea; in E. Fromm, 'Karl Marx's Theory of Alienation;' in Wrong and Gracey (ed.), *Readings in Introductory Sociology* (New York, 1967), p.220

[214] Ibid, pp.220-221; see FN.3

in Heidegger's philosophy which is coloured by a disturbing romanticism in this respect), and that which completes human experience.

For both Siegfried Giedion and Benjamin, the house is the most reductive and backward form of construction; however, unlike Giedion – who reads modernist architecture as a pure expression of utopianism, Benjamin also focuses upon its *nihilistic* rather than utopic potential.[215] Therefore, as Benjamin sees it and as I have attempted to explain earlier on, a part of its revolutionary power, derives from this negative energy – that rather than reconciling humanity and dwelling, modernist architecture stands for the eschatological destruction of the image of home altogether. But this 'destruction,' like the equally destructive moment of awakening, also stands for the act of critique. The spaces of modernist architecture were then reconceptualised as literal spaces for exploring the possibilities of being; spaces in which, for the first time, people might really *look* and think about their modernity, and also about what dwelling might be if the idea of a permanent house was discarded. The question then becomes one of working with and through secular space.[216]

It is up for debate, however, whether or not Benjamin accepted or advocated the loss of dwelling altogether — whether he truly believed that there was "never again the myth of home" – because his writings also expose an ambivalent and changing attitudes towards modernist architecture, extending from an ambivalence about modernity itself.[217] Although intrigued by the transparency that the new architecture, building techniques and materials offered, it is clear that Benjamin also maintained a fascination with – and something of an affectionate nostalgia for – the dust and clutter of the nineteenth century home, occupying himself just as readily with those "instances in which the house, in its traditional rigidity and resistance to public exposure, falls short of Corbusierian openness."[218]

Ernst Bloch, that other great messianic Jewish thinker, considered the fragmentation of life and experience to be a direct result of capitalism, but in opposition to Benjamin he understood modernist architecture itself to be a solidification of the capitalistic obsession with efficiency and organisation, immediacy, and streamlined production.[219] Yet, in saying this, he not only overlooks capitalism's contradictions – the fact that it produces its own

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[215] Miller, 'Architecture, Temporality, and Dream in Benjamin's Passagenwerk'

[216] Ibid.

[217] Ibid.

[218] Miller, in Hanssen, p.246

[219] Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, p.5

fantasies and ornaments – but also discounts the social concerns of the modernist architects, and the utopian images that might likewise sit latent within their forms. Bloch's own utopian philosophy was one attuned to "the momentary, fleeting experience of fulfilment dimly anticipatory of a reality that is 'not-yet.'"[220] Although this encompasses that fleeting jolt which characterises meaning and beauty in modernity – since divine grace and presence are no longer constant forces, but now equivalent with those objects and moments on the cusp of passing away – it also is a mode of thought, a dream, which cannot change the given in and of itself. But architecture, on the other hand, is a step closer towards action:

> Benjamin was reluctant to rest revolutionary hope directly on imagination's capacity to anticipate the not-yet-existing. Even as wish-image, utopian imagination needed to be interpreted through the material objects in which it found expression, for (as Bloch knew) it was upon the transforming mediation of matter that the hope of utopia ultimately depended: technology's capacity to create the not-yet-known.[221]

Dreams of a House

The gap between what we actually build and the utopian objective of dwelling forms a constituent element of modernity, and the recognition of its existence is essential to an architecture that wants to be modern.

—HILDE HEYNEN, 'Architecture Between Modernity and Dwelling.'[222]

For Adolf Loos, architecture was "a 'conservative' practice of cultural responsibility that was to be distinguished at all costs from the 'revolutionary' practice of art."[223] Art is often defined by its very 'uselessness' (a concept which is not to be confused with insignificance or worthlessness) in that it cannot be anything else, that it is excessive. It can abide by its own self-defined and often esoteric rules or parameters. Consequently, while theory and art history are often required to disseminate the play and opacity of the art world,

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[220] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.114
[221] Ibid. pp.114-115
[222] Heynen, 'Architecture between Modernity and Dwelling,' p.89
[223] See Loos, 'Architecture' (1909), in *Trotzdem* (1988), p.101; in Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow, p.140

architecture, on the other hand, is easier to judge: ultimately its success depends upon a degree of utility, and so its failures also sting greater. This is a characteristic which both places certain limits upon the discipline (in order to remain a self-evident discipline at all), and also demands a level of responsibility because unlike art, architecture must also be a shelter. A work of architecture must provide something which has as its limit the selfsame limits of the embodied human consciousness. Although it may cater to dreams and longings, articulate angst or joy, such experiences must be bounded by the practicalities and needs of the human body (eating, sleeping, working, playing and so on, in a certain degree of comfort and security.)

The celebrated architectural theorist Spiro Kostof, in his 1985 text *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, proposes that rather than speaking of architecture in terms of function, which can crystallise into a notion of dry formalism, "a better word would be *ritual*, for function tends to undermine and mechanize the concept of purpose;" therefore, "ritual may be said to the poetry of function."[224] For Le Corbusier, in his own words, a door was "merely a space through which man could enter," while for Eileen Gray even this simple act took on the nature of ritual, attuned as she was to the actions of everyday life, and to movement as a source of elemental joy – she wrote that it was akin to "the sensation of pleasure when one arrives with a boat in a harbour, the feeling of being enclosed but free to circulate."[225] One of Gray's most influential works is the house that she called E.1027, finished in 1929, and which Le Corbusier greatly admired.[226] Gray also staged photographs of the interiors of her home, but unlike Le Corbusier's unsettling play on absences and discontinuity (discussed in Chapter Three), Gray's images introduce the traces of everyday life. The clean lines of the modernist interior become the backdrop for:

> An open book, two cups of tea, a plate with an apple, a cigarette case, a hairbrush and combs – items she considered contributing to a feeling of well-being; small but significant gestures.[227]

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[224] Kostof, p.19

[225] Le Corbusier, Introduction to catalogue for the *Pavillion de L'Esprit Nouveau*, in P. Adam, *Eileen Gray: Architect/Designer* (London, 1987), p.217; taken from some of Eileen's notes, ibid.

[226] In fact, he bought a property close to the house when he was unable to attain it himself (and made paintings on some of the interior walls while the house sat unoccupied, much to Gray's disgust). In 1965, swimming in the sea directly in front of E.1027, Le Corbusier suffered a heart attack and died there.

[227] Adam, p.237

She recognises that architecture also represents a dream of *home*, somewhere that we would want to live and play out all of the minute experiences of our lives against. Thus, she deliberately introduces a human disorder into these spaces, which is of course, the disorder of life itself. Loos also made it very clear that purely formal abstraction is nothing more than "mere shape distortion," and that technical ability and capabilities must, at all times, be "*subordinate to the way people live their lives.*"[228] However, within the multitude of domestic visions created by the early twentieth-century avant-garde, it is obvious that there is something of an obsession with the image of the glass house; a space in which disorder does not easily intrude. The writer and critic Paul Scheerbart wrote about:

> A glass milieu that would [. . .] extend the psychological effects of Gothic stained glass and Babylonian glass ampullae to all realms of life, making homes into cathedrals.[229]

In some ways, glass is the ultimate modern material – it has a liminal quality to it, and combined with its reflective qualities, "the use of large transparent sheets of glass [. . .] "plays upon a tension between fear and delight, between feeling a sense of permanence, and evanescence."[230] If traditional dwelling was reliant upon enclosure and the sturdy solidity of brick and mortar, then glass was the representation of modern homelessness, expressing the tension of being caught between two different places at once, in the spatial and temporal dislocations of modernity. As Benjamin had recognised, it was a material upon which it was difficult to leave traces.

Yet, he also wrote that "*living* means leaving traces" – so then what does this mean for dwelling?[231] In 1920 the architectural theorist Adolf Behne wrote that glass would 'humanise' Europeans, and that although living in a glass house would be uncomfortable, it was also necessary – thus neatly dovetailing with Benjamin's belief that "living in a glass house would be a evolutionary virtue par excellence [. . .] an intoxication, a moral

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[228] Leatherbarrow, 'Interpretation and Abstraction in the Architecture of Adolf Loos,' *Journal of Architectural Education*, 40:4 (1987), p.9; p.8

[229] Mertins, 'The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory,' p.11

[230] M. Ziff, 'The Role of Glass in Interior Architecture: Aesthetics, Community, and Privacy,' *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 38:4 (2004), p.16

[231] Benjamin [my emphasis], *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. H. Zohn (1983), p.169; in Gilloch, p.6

exhibitionism, that we badly need."[232] For Behne, the bourgeois interior was characterised by *Gemütlichkeit*, which roughly translates to 'comfort' or describes a sense of coziness. "Away with *Gemütlichkeit!*" he exhorted.[233] This also brings to mind Benjamin's concept of the 'étui-man' (as one who encloses himself in ornamental shells, the étui being a case). In traditional forms of dwelling, "the interior is not just the universe of the private individual; it is also his étui," and this ever-increasing entrenchment reveals "a tendency to compensate for the *absence* of any traces of private life in the big city."[234] It seems that it is also modernity, not just glass, that obliterates our tracks. Hence, the creation of a shell is a defence-mechanism against alienation and abstraction, a partner to the mental shell of indifference that Simmel described in *The Metropolis and Mental Life*. Yet this isolation also alienates the individual in turn, so that when Behne writes that "the human being begins where *Gemütlichkeit* ends," the statement should not simply be taken at face-value – it is less likely to be an endorsement for a disturbing form of masochistic dwelling than it is an expression of concern for the human life surrounded – and needlessly defined – by inanimate *things*, especially if their purpose is to shut out the exterior world.[235] Ultimately, "the realisation of the self within the world implies a *confrontation*."[236] Such a confrontation is not based upon strength – otherwise its nature would also dissolve into brutal and nihilistic values – but upon openness, interpretation, and with engagement one's own modernity.

That being said, it also cannot be denied that Behne's statement, amongst others, has undertones of a fantasy of transformation through self-effacement. After all, if objects and ornaments serve to anchor memory and identity, than it is only by removing the traces of our familiar and internalised environments that our identity and humanity become malleable. This kind of dream is visible in Benjamin's concept of modernist architecture as well, the notion that stripping bare the walls and opening up the interior would correspond to "the difficult task of stalking an unachieved possibility of oneself."[237] The fallacy, of

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[232] Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,' in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. P. Demetz (1978), p.180; in Mertins, 'The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory,' p.11

[233] A. Behne, 'Die Wiederkehr der Kunst' (1920), in *Schriften zur Kunst* (Berlin, 1998), p.1998, p.57, 59; in D.B. McBride, 'Modernism and the Museum Revisited,' *New German Critique*, no.99 (2006), p.223

[234] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.20.

[235] Behne, p.57; in McBride, p.223

[236] Pallasmaa, 'The Icon House,' in Pallasmaa and Gozak, pp.23-24

[237] A. Kunin, 'Decoration, Modernism, Cruelty,' *Modernism/Modernity*, 17:1 (2010), p.102

course, is that such a concept of transformation does not recognise human being as always and already a *becoming*, and that collected objects can also express the changes in our own existence. Nevertheless:

> For Benjamin's revolutionary subjects, erasing one's traces could become a paradigmatic form of resisting the growing network of social controls and, at the same time, *playing at a modernity yet to come*, just as children playing a game will always begin again at the beginning as if for the first time.[238]

However, although modernist architecture is able to create transitory spaces that acknowledge the mobility of modern life, this should not be taken to an extreme in which memory and symbolic attachments are erased altogether. Modernism's own ill-fated 'monuments' – its mass housing projects (and in exported form, its American office buildings), remind us that the language of transformation can dissolve into blankness, in favour of the domination of the ideal. It is in the *individual* expressions that modernist architecture achieves, on the whole, a poetic language of openness that is part of a wider dream to renew dwelling on human terms.

Loos recalled that his childhood home had not been remarkable in any sense, but that everything in it told a story about his family and their history – and "as a result, the house was never finished."[239] It changed as the family changed. Transformation and different perspectives of thought are not bestowed upon inhabitants through any architectural style, and in the end, the glass house is no measure for self-reflexivity. As Gray commented in one of her interviews:

> Technique isn't everything. It is only the means. One must build for man, so that he may rediscover in the architectural construction the joy of feeling himself, as in a whole that extends him and completes him. [. . .] Normalization and rationalisation, excellent means of reducing cost price, will only, if we are not careful, give us constructions still

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[238] See Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. H. Zohn (1976), p.47; in Mertins [my emphasis], 'The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory,' p.18

[239] Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow, p.80

more destitute of soul and individuality than what we have seen so far. It is much more a *type* of architecture that is being sought than a true style.[240]

It is apt, then, to examine a house in which the idiosyncrasies of the architectural avant-garde find a truly empathetic expression. In 1927 Konstantin Melnikov designed a house based on the idea of two interlocking cylinders; in 1929 the Melnikov House was completed, and the architect lived there until his death in 1974. It is a utopic work of architecture, but also a strange and imperfect home, reflecting its creator's opposition to dust and obsession with the interior world of sleep. In 1929 Melnikov had also created the plan for a 'Laboratory of Sleep' – a retreat where tired workers from the city might find rest in dreams – which "collectivised sleep entirely;" however, it was also criticised as being anti-Soviet, in light of its implications that 'progress' might have consequences.[241] Reflecting his concern for sleep, the single large bedroom was shared by all the family, and was totally free of furniture except for the beds themselves. This was also, in part, to keep the room clean and free of dust.[242] The bedroom was coloured in gold, and elsewhere in the house shades of violet and pale yellow danced across the walls. Furthermore, out all of the furniture in the house, there was nothing 'modern' – they were all eighteenth or nineteenth century pieces.[243] Dream and function, past and present coexisted quite happily here, and Melnikov himself wrote that the house was "a solo personality [. . .] attuning itself with determined intensity to feel the pulse of the modern world."[244]

In an early photo of the house, in which the brickwork is yet to receive its coat of white stucco, it appears as if some kind of strange byzantine fortress is being built. During this construction period Melnikov tweaked some of his plans, and I wish to focus on one such alteration, which is small but speaks volumes. It is this: he cut an extra window into the living room, not only to let the light in, but also to perfectly frame the view of a small church. This octagonal window (all of the others in the house are hexagonal) is not functional so much as it is beautiful; it is an 'ornament,' if ornament is to retain its

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[240] E. Gray, 'From Eclecticism to Doubt,' interview with Jean Badovici, *L'Architecture Vivante* (1929); in Adam, p.236

[241] See Pallasmaa, The Icon House,' in Pallasmaa and Gozak, p.21; and Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, p.114

[242] A. Gozak, '10 Krivoarbatsky Lane, Moscow,' in *The Melnikov House*, p.48

[243] Ibid, p.50

[244] K. Melnikov, *The Architecture of My Life[Arkitektura moei zhizni]*, ed. A. Strigalev and I. Kokkinai (1985), pp.57-91;ibid, p.42

association with the 'superfluous,' excessive experience as opposed to unadorned functionality. The window lets both the light in and the gaze pass through, thus connecting the everyday life of the Melnikov family with 'the poetry of function.'

Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact, that that we shall not have time to achieve it. For a house that was final, on that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts – serious, sad thoughts – and not to dreams.

—GASTON BACHELARD, *The Poetics of Space.*[245]

Mobility, Modernity and Dwelling

Walls, walls, walls [. . .] we want: A system of tension in free space. A change of space into urbanism. No foundation, no walls. Detachment from the earth, suppression from the static axis. In creating new possibilities for living, a new society is created.

—FREDERICK KIESLER, *De Stijl*, no.VII.[246]

Instead of growing up in the family home within the rural village, it is now normal and expected, even, to live in several different homes during the course of a lifetime and to move from city to city. Modernity encourages a nomadic existence, and this is also a quality reproduced in works of modernist architecture through their abstract spaces, functional interiors, and resistance to the build-up of objects – they appear as "transitional spaces for a dweller in constant departure."[247] Just look at Le Corbusier's houses on *pilotis* – these thin-skinned buildings on stilts look as if they might wander off across the landscape, framed in this same language of freedom and mobility, as well as one of anti-monumentalism. It is important to remember, of course, that modernist architecture was often consciously intended to stand in opposition to the grand, neo-classical architecture of the empires of World War I (and that it later achieved popularity for the same reasons in

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[245] G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. M. Jolas (Boston: MA., 1994), p.61

[246] F. Kiesler, *De Stijl*, no.VII, in A. Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London, 2000), p.266

[247] Kalfopoulos, www.postmedia.net/08/papadimitriou.htm

regards to the fascist dictatorships of World War II). Classical architecture "project[s] order, stability, grandeur, enduringness."[248] Therefore it also easily appropriated in order to signify power and dominance. In contrast, Giedion writes:

> Yes, Corbusier's houses seem thin as paper. They remind us, if you will, of the fragile wall paintings of Pompeii. What they express in reality, however, coincides completely with the will expressed in all of abstract painting...in which things are seen in a floating transparency [. . .] [249]

This desire to be weightless, to get away from heavy, fixed buildings, is also expressed in the abstraction of the typical modernist interior, which lends itself to a diversity of activities and modes of living rather than having any prescriptive character – the emphasis is upon space and openness, which facilitate free movement and circulation. The house might then become a spatial playground, as demonstrated in the short film of Le Corbusier which shows him riding a bicycle around the Villa Savoye. In his work, all of the themes cited above are especially visible:

> He designs and builds houses as tents (Maison Domino), houses as cars (Maison Citrohan), houses as airplanes (Maison Voison), houses as promenades (Villa Stein, Villa Savoye), houses that nearly do not touch the ground (Pilotis). For Le Corbusier, the traditional view of the house as deeply founded on the earth, rooted in its place and territorialised is not the model of modern habitation.[250]

A sense of mobility and transportation permeates modernism in all of its forms. For instance, think of Tatlin's Tower and its rotating parts, or consider Aleksander Rodchenko's designs for "an aerially mobile populace."[251] Even the frenzied decoration of Jugendstil emulates the upward growth of plant-life, creating a sense of shifting walls and changing spaces. The dream of movement and freedom in space also finds more direct expressions, such as the *Letatlins* or flying machines that Tatlin designed (and which he

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[248] Kostof, p.717

[249] Siegfried Giedion, *Building in France: Building in Iron, Building in Concrete*, trans J.D. Berry (1995), p.169; cited in Mertins, 'The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory,' p.9

[250] Kalfopoulos, www.postmedia.net/08/papadimitriou.htm

[251] E. Bunge, 'Jealousy: Modern Architecture and Flight,' *Cabinet*, no.11 (2003), www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/11/bunge.php

named after himself), and which are coupled with a desire to transform modern experience itself.

There is something terribly poignant in the imagined world that they conjure up: the membranous steel towers from which the *Letatlins* would depart, each carrying a single dreamer in liberating flight. Tatlin wanted people to feel the air brushing past, to feel embodied and free in a quiet, clean environment above the ground – the literal perspective from which things might be seen 'in a floating transparency.' Here, the possibilities for movement in modernity "resonates with the earliest fantasies evoked by airplane travel, depicting technology as an enhancement of human sensory existence, an aesthetics of everyday life."[252]

In a similar manner, Benjamin's strong materialist perspective lets him recognise the potential of technology to create *difference*, to change the existing conditions and forms of dwelling. At this intersection of technology, secularity, and revolutionary dreams is a liminal space, in which technology might be used to create or destroy – or to do both. There will always be this tension in modernity between the quest to find a home, and the desire to obliterate the current language of dwelling. Even within Christianity and Judaism, building is an ambiguous activity – it is a practice that might equally result in the Tower of Babel, or the holy city of Jerusalem. Subsequently it is not a measure of stability or belonging. This is illustrated by the story of Cain, who is the founder of the first city, but is also condemned to be "a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."[253]

Then again, perhaps it is precisely by wandering – both physically and theoretically – that we find the traces of ourselves again. The shifting sands of the modern are only an impediment to dwelling if dwelling is constituted by stasis. There is also meaning to be found in mobility or in a condition of change, and so it could be said that some of the forerunners to Benjamin's *flâneur* – the self-reflexive metropolitan drifter – include Cain, Odysseus and the Wandering Jew. Mark Cousins discusses this connection of mobility with interpretation in his analysis of 'homecoming' within Homer's *Odyssey*:

> In direct opposition to Heidegger's association – via the Ancient Greeks – of Building, Dwelling and Thinking and his privileging of Settlement, Territoriality, Location, Place

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[252] Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, pp.122-23

[253] K. Harries, 'Building and the Terror of Time,' *Perspecta*, vol.19 (1982), p.69

and Fixity, Cousins [. . . asserts] that Thinking is not just linked with Building but mostly with Wandering. Wandering becomes a paradigm for thought.[254]

If wandering is linked to thought, then mobility can also be reconceptualised as *interpretation*. It becomes a form of mental movement, a hermeneutical approach to modernity precisely because monumental stories of meaning have collapsed. 'Dwelling' now begins to take on a different character, it need not imply a fixed position in space, but rather it can be a holistic term that describes the human relationship to the conditions of our existence. Because we no longer have a recourse to transcendent meaning, then this relationship must be renewed, and so dwelling becomes an action rather than a given situation – but it can also take on different forms for this very same reason. Accordingly, the task of architecture is "to make dwelling possible, not to define it."[255]

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The architectural object is always a signpost, it is not the endpoint of any historical progression of styles or concepts. The modernist architects do not have the last word and there is no fixed form for dwelling in modernity (if that were so, then there would only be the object and we would be subject to its tyranny, like Le Corbusier's monumental museum). Rather, modernist architecture is but one perspective on what it means to live in modernity.

It is important to recognise that architecture, whose most basic nature is of a shelter, is essentially "constituted by the desire to give shape to dwelling in the world, to give a shape that is primarily positive."[256] The dwelling shelters from the storm, and if the dwelling is good then it makes the storm good also; it means that secular time and the ambivalent plane of modernity are likewise transfigured.[257] The reason that modernist architecture is significant, is that the architects are commenting upon dwelling in modernity and presenting it not as anathema to the industrial capitalist world, but as a possibility *within* and *through* the very conditions that jeopardise our sense of dwelling in the first place.

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[254] Mark Cousins' idea, taken from his seminars at Columbia University, 2001-2002, in Kalfopoulos, www.postmedia.net/08/papadimitriou.htm

[255] Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, p.223; p.76

[256] Heynen, 'Architecture between Modernity and Dwelling,' p.88

[257] J.R. Stilgoe, foreword, in Bachelard, p.viii

5. Collecting/Brooding

History pertains to the living man in three respects: it pertains to him as a being who acts and strives, as a being who preserves and reveres, as a being who suffers and seeks deliverance.

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*.[258]

Perhaps the best way to describe the character of my study is as a collection, a gathering of people, objects, and ideas, at first glance a little haphazard, but all of which have been chosen with purpose for the quality and nature of the insights they bring. They are united by common themes – by the dreams of possible modernities and the ruins of those past, by the struggle to live in time – and it is these threads running back and forth, traceable by the mind's eye, that allow a kind of narrative to form (fractured, no doubt, but then again such is the format of both collections and dreams).

The idea of the collection – full of implicit conversations and unique relationships between its disparate parts – also finds comparison with the written fragments that make up *The Arcades Project.* Of course, any image of a collection sets the scene for the Collector themselves to emerge, who is also an important allegorical figure in Benjamin's writing alongside a cast of other characters that include the detective, the *flâneur*, the opium smoker, and the Brooder. It is with the latter – the *Grübler* – that the Collector holds a unique dialectical relationship, through which I articulate a form of praxis regarding the issue of a meaningful modernity. I will be reshaping these figures somewhat, mostly by broadening their symbolic parameters for my own purposes, but I remain indebted to Benjamin's analysis.

The Collector and the Brooder express parallel approaches: they are each simultaneously a reading, a response, and a reflection, vis-à-vis modernity. At first glance they appear to function as condensations of the messianic and the nihilistic principles respectively; however, like any double they do not exist in isolation but are different faces of the same whole. It would be wrong to deny any redemptive potential to the Brooder's

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[258] F. Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,' in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (1983), p.67; in T.H. Mäkelä, 'Modernity and the Historical Perspectivism of Nietzsche and Loos,' *Journal of Architectural Education*, 44:3 (1991), p.138

attempts at salvaging history, just as it has to be acknowledged that the universalising tendency of the Collector may retreat to a politics of exclusion or result in a totalising apocalyptic vision. To some extent, this duo also reflects and internalises all of those dialectical configurations which I have engaged with in the preceding chapters, whether interpreted as the programmatic and the transitory, the objective and the subjective, or even in the similarly paradoxical partnership of Juve and Fantômas. Between them they articulate the difficulty – yet also the necessity – of building and dreaming within the profane world.

How do we make sense of where we are, and how do we arrange our lives? Against what backdrop does this play out? These are the questions raised by this intertwined pair, but it is apparent that the modernist architects were engaged with these same concerns – that they were not merely seeking to represent modern time through technology but also to change this time itself, such as through the restorative space which Melnikov's laboratory of sleep would provide or in Eileen Gray's conception of an architecture in which "dream and action find equal support" and where "the machine isn't everything."[259] The Collector, in particular, brings a transfiguring approach to history and its objects, outlining a positive relationship with the things which we create and emphasising potential and possibility, as opposed to the alienation expressed in Marx's idols. This collective vision should always be tempered by the subjectivity of the Brooder, bringing in an ethical awareness of individual experience and struggle which rejects categorising people as objects. Together, they shape a kind of critical romanticist model, but a romanticism that retains its subversive energy, its ability to comment upon modernity, meaning, and dwelling.

The Collector and the Brooder

It is difficult to tell what a work of architecture will become in the world of time, outside of plan and paper: will it find itself inscribed with the dreams of an entire culture – the burden which the Parthenon and the Acropolis must bear? Or will it turn mute as it weathers, empty and choked with weeds, foregoing any romance to its decline – a signpost for a mistake? The Collector would approach the latter with no particular intent except to categorise, yet always keeping an eye open towards the possibility of transfiguration; thus

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[259] Gray, 'From Eclecticism to Doubt,' in Adam, p.236

their gaze is opposed to the melancholy aesthetic of the Brooder who would see in the failed experiments of modernist architecture only a ruinous landscape, just as Benjamin's angel of history does. In the latter viewpoint, time turns objects to rubble and wears away our ability to communicate until all that we see is a vast panorama of mute objects and dreams turned to dust. Accordingly, the Brooder could be taken as an anthropomorphic form of transitory modernity and its discontents: history washes away and stories are lost, thus the Brooder is typified by "a rootless, hence in principle unsatisfiable, memory."[260] Memory, of course, is intrinsically linked to meaning, and it is the ability to sustain memory (often located in ritual, traditions, and objects) which creates a meaningful temporality.

Because modernity is a fragmenting condition, the Brooder experiences the structures of meaning and ritual to be disintegrating so that the world and its objects take on the character of a *puzzle*, whereby, if only the right pieces could be assembled in the right order, one might yet construct a stable frame for existence. But the Brooder is touched by this same uncertainty, signified by the introspective turn towards the self in a world of transitory things, so that at every turn they are thwarted by their own subjectivity, unable to see or build a stable world.[261] In this way brooding can become a fatal condition, the melancholic creation of private – and therefore doomed – visions, through which the Brooder is unable to see the way towards real political action: they remain trapped in the gloom, surrounded by fragments.[262]

The Brooder gives themselves over to objects in the attempt to enter a time, history, and memory no longer immediately accessible (which is therefore perceived as puzzling and inscrutable), while the Collector renews the material traces of modern existence and is renewed in turn. This is to say that the Collector allows things to reveal themselves on their own terms, holding them up against one another and releasing the meaning and dream images from within them in the form of dialectical shocks. The Collector might also be aligned with the prototypical dream of the avant-garde to remove the boundaries between art and life, in that the relation to their collection is one in which subject and object

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[260] Pensky, in Steinberg, p.171

[261] Ibid.

[262] This melancholic aspect summons up Albrecht Dürer's engraving of the same name (*Melencolia I*), whose pensive angelic *genius* (the Roman concept of divine nature which is contained within specific people, places, events and objects) mimics the despondent Benjaminian angel. Yet both images display the entanglement of the messianic with the profane, so that despite their outward despair they do not deny meaning to historical life.

becomes tenuous but where neither subsumes the other, therefore signalling a future in which both are redeemed (not unlike the carnivalesque energy of constructivist architecture). So here we return to that Benjaminian/Marxist impulse to reconcile the self and the world. The nature of the Brooder and the Collector can essentially be summarised as follows:

> Whereas [the Brooder] approaches things in that intense, subjective rage which will insist on the imposition of subjective will, of meaning, collecting approached things innocently, with only an interest in their classification and juxtaposition. Like allegory, collecting finds its initial impetus in an affective reaction to the theological condition of fragment, loss, confusion.[263]

Consequently, although the Brooder stands in parallel to the Collector via their practice of bricolage and their common grounding in the experience of disharmony and fracture, it is only the Brooder (a possible fate of the Collector, it must be said) who suffers from an anxiety that becomes neurotic, no longer productively juxtaposing and constructing dialogues but instead compelled to "a restless raking together of everything that has ever existed" from a fear that history is moving too fast – the desire to protect and accumulate the memory of time which then absorbs and ultimately dissolves the Brooder under a veil of dust.[264]

It is clear that the Collector and the Brooder have the same starting point – after all, they inhabit the same modernity, and both begin out of an essentially humane desire to respond to a disorientating secular world. However, one concerns themselves with a project of taxonomy and montage, whereas the other approaches this history as a kind of tragedy and seeks the futile redemption of its ruins not in a renegotiated future but *within* the past itself. [265] The latter approach is a form of apocalyptic nostalgia, which "constitutes

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[263] Ibid, pp.185-186

[264] Nietzsche, p.75; in Mäkelä, p.138

[265] In contemporary literature we find a prototypical brooding figure in the title character of W.G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz*, who is an architectural historian who sees everywhere the persistence of the past, so that it is the present that comes to be defined by absence. On the one hand, Austerlitz illustrates the critical potential that arises from the struggle to escape the constraints of linearity – "I have always resisted the power of time" – but on the other, this is coupled with the desperate search to retrieve that which is lost. Herein lies the brooder's private angst, which for Austerlitz is "the hope [. . .] that time will not pass away, has not passed away, that I can turn back and go behind it, and there I shall find everything as it once was."

what it cannot possess and defines itself by its inability to approach its subject, a paradox that is the essence of nostalgia's melancholia."[266] The Brooder's act of imposition destroys the object: they do not let things speak for themselves, thus, the Brooder also blurs into the destructive character. In contrast, "the spirit of fulfilment knows that the shattered cannot ever again be relived; for this reason, it does not overcome it or subsume it but rather listens to it in its specific being-there."[267]

The danger that lies in the practice of collecting is that it can become too regulatory: what is included and what is excluded in this kind of classification? Likewise in architecture, who is the building for? Who is implicitly or explicitly excluded from this vision? An attentiveness to incompletion, which the Brooder suffers a surfeit of, is essential to the Collector's project lest it become totalitarian, for their innocent practice of juxtaposition is not always easy to maintain – value judgements occur, boundaries are drawn, and a taxonomy is created. The "totalising Collector" no longer gives a voice to other stories and forgotten things but exerts power and dominion, turning themselves into an idol; they are effectively 'playing God,' but this is "not the God who created the world, but the God who chose to obliterate his own creation."[268]

This is the point at which the programmatic tips over into discipline and control, the point at which the history of modernity becomes associated with trauma, for here the romanticist dream of homecoming and belonging was extended only to the chosen few, and technology was no longer that which might free people, but that which would destroy them. In the end, "absolute control is only realised at the pitch where it can actually extinguish that which is controlled," and in this way the Third Reich entailed "a monstrous parody of connoisseurship."[269]

[W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (London, 2002), p.144; See also: J. Brockmeier, 'Austerlitz's Memory,' *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 6:2 (2008), pp. 347-367]

[266] Fritzsche, p.1595

[267] M. Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, trans. S. Sartarelli (New Haven, 1993), p.210

[268] J. Elsner and R. Cardinal (ed.), *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge:MA, 1994), p.3

[269] Ibid, pp.3-4

The Concept of Modernity

It is clear that concepts can easily become monumental, in the sense that certain contours are defined, outlines ascribed, and so on. But concepts also have a history, a persistence through time. 'Modernity' does not just come into being, it is the history of those conditions which we understand to characterise the current world of technology, mobility, capitalism, and so on – not simply those conditions in and of themselves. At the same time, although such a history is constructed through material evidence, it also creates a language and a set of ideas that belong to that concept. The modernity that I have attempted to refute is the purely rational, reductive, teleological concept – the modernity in which the narrative is one of despair and anxiety, symbolised by the inhumanity of machine and man.

> What is at stake when we consider, as we seem to do ever more frequently, the whole history of the twentieth century under the sign of trauma [. . ,] and what if this assessment is then extended [. . .] to the whole history of enlightenment modernity: modernity as the trauma that victimises the world, that we cannot leave behind, that causes all of our symptoms?[270]

There is a risk here, of course, in overlooking the instances in which modern technology, modern understandings of the 'demands' of history and so on, *have* combined to produce reductive, fascistic narratives based upon a politics of exclusion, surveillance, and violence; but that is also why it is so important to elaborate an alternative to catastrophic time, to renew that essential optimism of modernist architecture which expresses that even in this time, in this space, that there is still the possibility for meaningful dwelling.

What we identify as *modernity* or *postmodernity* and so on, are "categories of historical consciousness which are constructed at the level of the apprehension of history as a whole."[271] If we forget that they are constructions then it is easy to reify them, as if they

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[270] Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsets and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: CA, 2003), p.9

[271] Osborne, preface, p.viii

Consequently, postmodernity can be seen as the transitory aspect of modernity which has been excised, corralled into a separate concept, in order to create a sense of forward movement through the mental manipulation of language (the *post-*). But in this division both modernity and postmodernity become totalitarian concepts; instead, it might be more productive to understand the programmatic as the continuous attempt to materialise the fragile utopian moments exhibited in the transitory, then failing in its

were monumental concepts crushing the human. At stake here is the confusion of taking "modernity's machine metaphor" in a literal sense, whereby the objective dominates the subjective.[272] Of course, this once again brings to mind Le Corbusier's infamous quote that 'the house is a machine for living in,' which is often associated with intentions for subjugating humanity in sterile interiors. This is not only a misunderstanding but also equates a certain rationality and geometry with inherently fascistic qualities, through a form of environmental determinism (therefore this logic *itself* denies human agency). Yet as we have seen, modernist interiors and architecture are constantly invaded by the subjective and defined by an awareness of the transitory, although it is equally important to stress that an emphasis on rationality and functionality does not automatically dehumanise or objectify.

If modernity is taken only as its material conditions, this plays into the dominant narrative of reduction and instrumentalism. In contrast, if it is approached as a discourse and a set of social relations the concept begins to look less constraining. In effect, the issue is less to do with what defines modernity, than whether we accept its *self-description* (which is really the story that we tell about modernity).[273] The problem with accepting modernity as a mechanistic system is precisely that it reduces the actors within that system to little more than utilitarian parts. It is one thing to be aware of the structuring mechanisms in modernity that may impoverish experience, but it is another to travel down that slippery slope and deduce that the system must then be composed of – or can only create – nihilistic personalities. Thus it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, one in which it is difficult to fathom any kind of change or discover any meaningful existential role – our vision is reduced until all that we can see is that 'the system is a machine, therefore it treats humans as machines, therefore it is a nihilistic system.'

In reality, the system is always existentially unstable because the system is composed up of individuals, so at its core is subjectivity.[274] Therefore, modernity is less of a reductive environment than one which is typified by the *tension* between humanity and

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political action by solidifying (and therefore sterilising) that vision, which in turn opens up the critique and necessity of the transitory. What stops this from becoming an inescapable cycle that naturalises historical suffering is the interruptive potential of the messianic – of a vision of redemption with the power to complete history, but which is always impending, never arriving, so that the conditions and nature of this event may always be renegotiated.

[272] See A. Scott, 'Modernity's Machine Metaphor,' *The British Journal of Sociology*, 48:4 (1997)

[273] Ibid, p.573

[274] Ibid, p.565

those configurations which are meant to order the human, so that modernity entails an amplified sense of dissonance between the domestic and the social, the human and the technological, the mythic and the secular, the rational and the sensuous. Again, these tensions are not exactly new, but it is their context (which in turn is created by the unique particulars of these tensions) that enables a historical understanding of this milieu as *modernity*.

Any analysis of modernity must then take into account the interrelation between the programmatic and the transitory, and recognise that both act upon and unite human experience within modern time. In the end, the modernist architects did not build for machines but for *people*, so "a more nuanced, and possibly more hopeful account of modernity" is one which rejects the totalitarian concept "by insisting that there is an 'irrational kernel' within the rational system."[275]

This irrational kernel is a reminder that all works are fragments of complete projects or ruins of incomplete ones, *that modernity is a space of waiting*. For Benjamin, human existence takes place in a 'fallen' realm, which is defined by its incompletion. This is the mid-ground in which history takes place, which is not a succession of eras but a state of being continuously played out in reference to the original utopic unity, fall, and redemption. Within this western religious context, the story of humanity's fall underlies the act of dwelling and poetically explains the impulse to create, in that it has always been "homelessness that lets man build."[276] In modernity, this paradigm is somewhat different because it exists not only as a history of *homelessness* but also as a *groundless* history – and given this condition of groundlessness, what do we choose to do? Moreover, what makes those choices important?

If read through the Collector and the Brooder, there are two fundamental choices regarding this framework, the first of which is to "describe this fall from the point of view of mourning, of a melancholy for what is lost and a concern to save as much as possible," hence brooding; the second is to seek out those moments of redemption that exist even in a world of death and suffering, the "revolutionary potential [that] should be recognised and exploited," hence the activity of the Collector.[277] Revolution as spoken of here is not to be understood as that which drives history forward, but rather as that which changes the

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[275] Ibid, p.571

[276] Harries, p.59

[277] Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, pp.102-03

perception of historical time itself, therefore allowing a form of theoretical 'reversal' –
what might better be described as a redemptive tangent.

What is fundamentally important is that "*every historical moment contains all three
moments in essence*: the origins, however faint they may have become, can still be seen
through all the evidence of the fall, just as redemption is also virtually present as a sort of
messianic splinter."[278] Therefore modern time is not hopeless, because history is also "the
domain of freedom on account of the inherent *negativity* of human activity, which alters
the world instead of accepting it as it is," and in turn, freedom is "the source of movement,
processes, conflicts, and internally experienced contradictions," which ensures that
modernity is not a destination but a threshold.[279] It is not a closed event or a fixed set of
circumstances because subjectivity interprets the world and dream transmutes its form.

> In Noah, the act of collecting up that which had been created and was doomed became
> inseparable from the creation of a new and better world. In the myth of Noah as ur-
> Collector resonate all the themes of collecting itself: desire and nostalgia, saving and
> loss, the urge to erect a permanent and complete system against the destructiveness of
> time.[280]

If Noah is analogous to the Collector, then the Speaker in Ecclesiastes might be considered
a form of the Brooder, and just as collecting may also have its nostalgic aspect, its focus on
that which slips outside the net and those things that it cannot save – so does the
Speaker/Brooder have the potential to find an acceptance of the timely world and the
finitude of people and things: there is 'a time to cast away stones', not only 'a time to
gather stones together' [Ecclesiastes 3:5]. It is important not to fall into the trap that
Benjamin foresaw in which things are reduced to a progressive or regressive category, for
the Collector and the Brooder come into being together, as pieces of a wider experience.
The Brooder is not bound to a condition of suffering just as the Collector's practice is not
purely redemptive. The former brings to our attention alternate possibilities of the romantic

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[278] Ibid [my emphasis], p.102

[279] See Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Berlin, 1991), pp.14-15, in J.R. Gold, 'Jacob Taubes:
'Apocalypse from Below,'' *Telos*, no.134 (2006), p.144; and Berdyayer, in Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*
(Stanford:CA, 2009), p.5

[280] Elsner and Cardinal (ed.), p.1

and nostalgic, the latter reveals the transforming power of play and the critical imagination.

So we return to the figure of Janus, then, and to those borderlands in which things exist not as positive and negative aspects, but as a unity that is a product of exchange, communication and discourse between different aspects. It is a space in which the messianic touches the profane and redeems modernity both as a project *and* as repetition and a space of dreaming.

Meaning and Transfiguration

We need to remember that because modernity is not only teleological but also secular, time as well as space are underscored by anxiety. In this kind of history, meaning is not a fixed story, but comes to us in fragments and its prerequisite is action. As a human and therefore finite activity, action continuously exhausts itself and so must be *renewed* – and therefore it will always present something different. Under this conception, "Being is an act rather than Form; it is an understanding of Things not as objects, but as events."[281] Dwelling is then not so much to do with a fixed place, nor does it require one to live in a glass house; rather, it is a continuous renegotiation with one's own time and the role that one takes up within it. It is not bounded by beginnings and endings or reliant upon a totalising narrative – all of which posits meaning as something conditional, flexible and open. This openness is not predicated upon a strong figure who can endure exile to create meaning, but upon any who is able to listen to things in their "specific being-there;" it is a state of being open to other possibilities, open to a moment in which time might freeze in a revolutionary-messianic flash that refocuses the lens of history, if only by the smallest of margins – a moment which bestows a quality of the sacramental to the human landscape. This interjection into history reaffirms that life moves dialectically between fleeting moments of grace and the material world, but that this encounter always takes place within the world of time.

Although there is no predetermined end point towards which history moves, this is not the same as saying that there is no meaning, but rather that meaning is contingent. This is, perhaps, a form of exile, a trade-off between a permanent home that denies the conditions

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[281] See R. Barthes, *Mythologies* (1972), pp.126-133, in Bognar, p.26

in which meaning now appears (the attempt to live in neo-classical architecture, perhaps) or a field of meaning that is always in a state of transformation – destabilising, restless, and yet always inclined towards something other than the given state of affairs. Therefore, temporal anxiety encourages a hermeneutical approach, a constant awareness of both time's possibilities and the apocalyptic shadow it casts. This is evident in the work of modernist architects and their "negotiations with modernization, the struggle to make a home in an alien and alienating world, constantly in motion, to become *subjects* rather than *objects* of this process."[282]

The response of the Collector to modernity is centred upon "the transfiguration of things," which is to say that they are interested in the possibility of things.[283] Another way to describe their activity is as a form of *play*: there is a "childlike element" to collecting in its magical sense of acquisition and the creation of different worlds through a constellation of objects, each one starting from the beginning. Benjamin recognised this revolutionary potential within children's play, because "rather than accepting the given meaning of things, children got to know objects by laying hold of them and using them creatively, releasing from them new possibilities of meaning."[284] In the collection, history is literally displayed as montage, but the images and meanings so released are reliant upon "reflective interaction, [. . .] creative participation, and so, interpretation," in other words, upon a form of "hermeneutical phenomenology."[285] Similarly, his own approach, that of the historical materialist, emphasised reading the nature of modernity through its material objects and environment, such as via works of architecture.

Both modernity and modernist architecture reveal themselves to be constituted by ambiguity so that they might each be considered as forms of "homogenous space – that is, space with no *a priori* meanings."[286] Here, "meaning can neither be the property of the object, nor the product of the human mind, or subject, alone;" instead, it is "evoked by both the subject and object through the mode of their mutual interaction in the realm of in-

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[282] W. Graham [my emphasis], 'Notes on a Native Son: Henry James's New York', *American Literary History*, 21:2 (2009), p.261

[283] Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in M.W. Jennings et al. (ed.), *The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility and other Writings on Media*, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: 2008), p.104

[284] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p.264

[285] Bognar, p.17

[286] Maki, p.128

between."[287] These homogenous spaces are not prescriptive, and therefore they are adaptable and open, which is both dangerous and hopeful. Therein lies the tension between utopia and dystopia, between dreams and ruins, and yet these do not cancel each other out, for it is not a case of one or the other but of their tragic, somnambulant, potentially emancipatory intermingling. So perhaps the question is less one of critiquing homogenous space, but one that asks to what purpose will we put these spaces? Again, that responsibility is ours; their ambiguous, amnesiac nature creates an opening, a space for dreaming, but of what?

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What we might take from the Collector and the Brooder here is that "perhaps not the object but its critical interpretation is avant-garde."[288] Why do we still engage with works of modernist architecture? What still resonates across time to reach us here, in between our moments of collecting and brooding? Perhaps we return to the work of modernist architecture – whether physically or mentally, with our own bodies or through books and images – because it is part of a wider meditation on living and dwelling, in order "to participate in a dream of which it is (and this is its originality) much more the crystalliser than the true object."[289]

Modernist architecture is an expression of that self-reflexivity that constitutes the modern itself. In architecture, as in modernity, there is always a space for both collecting and brooding, and one hopes that neither will engulf the other; rather, that the dialectic between these practices will continue to encourage an architecture that seeks to express and overcome the conditions of its modernity, that aims to free the human, not by controlling or diminishing it but through opening the horizon of human possibility:

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[287] Bognar, p.17

[288] Buck-Morss, *Dreamworlds*, p.63

[289] Barthes, p.7

<u>Conclusion</u>

At the centre of human memory and identity, at the centre of our ultimate concerns, we do not find an effort to encode, count, or account for our existence in a chronological or sequential order, but an effort to make sense of and give meaning to our being in the world.

—JENS BROCKMEIER, 'Austerlitz's Memory.'[290]

Even now, we retain a very modernist and modernising drive towards teleology, so that things might become as understandable, as readable, and as dominated by our overarching vision, as the panorama afforded by the Villa Savoye. It is easy and useful to box things into movements, to bracket them with a beginning and an ending, but lived experience will always blur our categories and destabilize our expectations. Benjamin's conception of history, like an object turned in the hand, is not of something that is powered by its own locomotion but of a thing *that is moved by us*, presenting different faces each time.

The great difficulty in the wholly modern perspective of temporality is that it remakes history as fate and valorises science and technology for its own sake. The difficulty of the ahistorical or mythological – some would now say 'postmodern' – gaze is that it can no longer distinguish between changes, it relinquishes the ability to truly argue for any one thing over the other so that it is the aesthetic, not the content, that denotes a particular historical era. Benjamin's work reveals how both of these strands interact within architecture, along with variants of the programmatic and transitory concepts, so that there is a continuous and necessary wrestling between time as pure fate and time as pure change, the linear against the circular – both of which might be thrown open by a moment of messianic shock.

Although the rhetoric of modernism was revolutionary, the material forms themselves both complicate and subvert the intentions of their architects. They may projects fragments of a possible utopia when the structure itself is in ruins, or a pristine restoration might remove the traces of a less than spotless history. But as architectural objects, their nature is never truly fixed; history is a montage, and similarly, modernist architecture is not so

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[290] Brockmeier, p.365

much a legible panorama as a continual back-and-forth between what was, what is, and *what can be*.

As we have seen, what most defined modernist architecture was not a single feature, an ideology, or even stylistic coherency, but the architects' negotiation with modernity and what it means to dwell in the here-and-now. Consequently, there is no sense in replicating the *look* of any such work in our present – that removes its utopic charge altogether, confusing aesthetic with content. Rather, the negotiation with dwelling, with time and history, should continue on our own terms. Instead of recreating modernist architecture, the project now is to extend that critical engagement with the meaning of one's own modernity – an engagement that need not be rooted to any one place or identity, but through which we can traverse the breadth of modern experience; wandering through the configurations of mythology, past the architecture of the city, out towards the rolling sea, and at last amongst the waves – with a homeland in time, if nowhere else.

I want to end by thinking of towers for a moment (the architect Fumihiko Maki once remarked that Western culture is a culture of towers): of Babel, of the nineteenth-century Eiffel tower, and of the twentieth-century tower designed by Vladimir Tatlin – one tower in ruin, one still standing, and one existing only in dreams. In each case their creators surely insisted on their necessity, or perhaps felt that their work reflected the search for truth, that it would stand as a sign of destiny, or as a harbinger of rationality, a monument to control over time and history. And yet, their creations live on in one form or another, oscillating between the dream and the profane, between antiquity and modernity, and not always in the manner intended by their makers. But they each resonate through time – as do many of the works of modernism examined throughout the previous chapters – as a part of the human search for meaning. And so we remember, once again, that their significance is not merely in their symbolic forms, but also in the views which they afforded, in the perspectives that they made new.

What we are, in the end, is not all that we have been or want to be.

—SPIRO KOSTOF, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals.*

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