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Goethe in Palermo

Urphänomen *and Analogical Reasoning in Simmel and Benjamin*

NIGEL DODD London School of Economics, UK

ABSTRACT This paper considers substantive and methodological issues that are raised by the deployment of Goethe's notion of the *Urphänomen* in the work of Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin. The paper is exploratory. I employ Goethe's idea, and his approach to empirical observation and theory more generally, to examine affinities and contrasts between the methodology of Simmel and Benjamin. Like Goethe, both Simmel and Benjamin make imaginative use of *analogical reasoning*, and their approaches resist conventional sociological classification as particular kinds of 'theory'. Simmel and Benjamin are thinkers who seek to present their arguments in a mode which cannot be divorced from their substance. By comparing their approaches in relation to Goethe's idea, we can illuminate new aspects of Benjamin's historiography and Simmel's approach to societal and historical form.

KEYWORDS analogy, *Arcades Project*, Benjamin, Goethe, money, Simmel, *Urphänomen*

Simply slumber'd the force in the seed; a germ of the future,
Peacefully lock'd in itself, 'neath the integument lay, Leaf and root, and
bud, still void of colour, and shapeless;
Thus doth the kernel, while dry, cover that motionless life.
Upward then strives it to swell, in gentle moisture confiding,
And, from the night where it dwelt, straightway ascendeth to light. Yet still
simple remaineth its figure, when first it appeareth;
And 'tis a token like this, points out the child 'mid the plants.
Soon a shoot, succeeding it, riseth on high, and reneweth,
Piling-up node upon node, ever the primitive form; Yet not ever alike: for the
following leaf, as thou seest, Ever produceth itself, fashioned in manifold ways.
(Goethe, 1883 [1997]: 258, extract from *The Metamorphosis of Plants*)

Goethe first sought out the *Urpflanze* ('primal plant') in Palermo during his visit there on 17 April 1787. Here in the public gardens, so he recalls thirty years later in *Italienische Reise*, 'instead of being grown in pots or under glass as they are with us, plants are allowed to grow freely in the open fresh air and fulfil their natural destiny' (1962: 258). The plants became 'more intelligible' to him by virtue of this arrangement, recalling an idea from his earlier botanical studies: 'Among this multitude might I not discover the primal plant? There certainly must be one. Otherwise, how could I recognize that this or that form was a plant if all were not built upon the same basic model?' (1962: 258–9). According to this recollection, Goethe's interpretation of the primal plant (Interpretation 1) appears to have been that its discovery would contribute to our understanding of creation.¹ This would be a non-Darwinian account of genesis: 'I am on the way to establishing important new relations and discovering the way in which Nature, with incomparable power, develops the greatest complexity from the simple' (1962: 174). The primal plant would express a 'fundamental principle of metamorphosis' (1962: 368). It would be central to a new 'botanical system' (1962: 389).

The theme of metamorphosis runs through two of Goethe's poems, *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen* and *Die Metamorphose der Tiere*.² Its inclusion in the latter echoes Goethe's claim that the 'law' uncovered by his discovery of the primal plant 'will be applicable to all other living organisms' (1962: 311). That idea is taken up in his later scientific writings, where the metaphysical status of the primal plant becomes more complex. Goethe increasingly comes to conceive of the primal plant not as an *object* but as a Kantian *regulative ideal*,³ that is, he proceeds *as if* it were real. The primal plant now resides on the edge of experience, between what *is* known and what in principle *cannot* be known.⁴ It is 'going to be the strangest creature in the world, which Nature herself shall envy me' (1962: 310–11). This interpretation of the primal plant (Interpretation 2) gains support from other thinkers. Vaihinger, for example, argues that the primal plant is a 'type fiction', a kind of fiction (or 'as if') which he contrasts with an hypothesis (1924: 267).⁵

Goethe also suggests that plants derived from the primal plant would not be 'the shadowy phantoms of a vain imagination, but possess an inner necessity and truth' (1962: 310–11). This points to another, equally important, sense in which the primal plant is not arbitrary: as a *mode of analogical presentation* (Interpretation 3). In his later writings, the primal plant is incorporated within a tightly integrated arrangement of formal relations that constitute what Goethe calls a morphology.⁶ Whereas the notion of metamorphosis is a tool for grasping change, morphology is a form of analogical presentation which enables Goethe to encapsulate diversity:

Everything that is alive is not singular but is a multiplicity: even in so far as it appears to us as individual, it still remains an assemblage of living independent creatures, which are the same with regard to idea and constitution, but *can become identical or similar or dissimilar or different with*

regard to appearance. These creatures are partly connected from the outset and partly find each other and unite. They separate and search for each other again and thus give rise to an endless production of all kinds and in all directions.

(1948–1964: 57, trans. Susanne Weber, my italics)

Goethe specifically advocates ‘thinking by analogy’ because it ‘has the advantage of not closing doors or in fact aiming at any ultimate solution’ (1998: §532).⁷ Potentially, this clashes with a Kantian interpretation of the primal plant. If not an ‘ultimate solution’, the Kantian reading of the primal plant might well achieve the kind of closure which analogical reasoning and presentation appear to resist.

There are thus tensions within Goethe’s approach to botany. These tensions partly derive from the possibilities and constraints of what can be known through experience, and of what can be deduced from our reasoning. Goethe works out these possibilities and constraints to some degree in his later development of the idea of the *Urphänomen*. He first broached the idea of the *Urphänomenon* in an untitled essay written in 1798 and alternatively known as ‘Experience and Science’ and ‘The Pure Phenomenon’. Here in this essay, *Urphänomen* is rendered as ‘pure phenomenon’ and distinguished by Goethe from both *das wissenschaftliche Phänomen* (‘scientific phenomenon’, or a phenomenon uncovered through experimentation) and *das empirische Phänomen* (‘empirical phenomenon’, or a phenomenon as it appears to everyday common sense). The terms *Urpflanze* and the *Urphänomen* (‘primal phenomenon’) should not be conflated.⁸ *Urphänomen*, with its more explicitly Kantian strain, is in some respects a less ambiguous term than *Urpflanze*.⁹ Nevertheless, there are striking affinities between the two ideas,¹⁰ particularly regarding the questions each raises about the promises and limitations of human reasoning.

Goethe was undoubtedly preoccupied by such questions, particularly with regard to what we can *see* or *experience*.¹¹ For example, in *Maximen und Reflexionen* he distinguishes between ‘ordinary viewing’ (of which we are all capable) and ‘pure viewing’ (which is very rare):

The former finds expression in practical ways, in immediate action; the latter is symbolic and expressed chiefly in mathematics, numbers and formulas, in discourse, as something wholly original, in tropes, as the poetry of genius, as proverbial utterance of human reason.

(1998: §534)

In one sense, such distinctions emerge from a suspicion towards systematic theory, not least for its implicit striving for ‘ultimate solutions’. But Goethe’s use of analogy, while sometimes resembling the type fictions that Vaihinger interpreted them as, often comes close to suggesting that Goethe is striving for a complete system in his scientific work: ‘My basic hypothesis remains the same, *but to work*

everything out would take a lifetime. One day, perhaps, I shall be capable of giving a general outline' (1962: 204, my italics).

I explore such tensions in relation to the work of two thinkers who were partly inspired by Goethe's writing: Simmel and Benjamin. The basis for making such a comparison can be precisely located. It lies in *The Arcades Project* [AP] (1999f: N2a, 4), where Benjamin states that Simmel's (1923) book on Goethe led Benjamin to 'see very clearly that my concept of origin in the *Trauerspiel* book is a rigorous and decisive transposition of this basic Goethean concept from the domain of nature to that of history', and to plan AP along similar lines.¹² In the book that Benjamin cites, Simmel explores Goethe's idea at some length, and even conceives of Goethe *himself* as an *Urphänomen* 'which hardly manifests itself in some singular ray but rather is broken a hundred-fold in all his contradictory, implicit, manifold and dispersed statements and intentions' (1923: v, trans. Susanne Weber). This is not the only text in which Simmel employs Goethe's term. For example, he refers to *Urphänomen* three times in *The Philosophy of Money* [PM], most suggestively when he states:

If we accept the existence of a value, then the process of its realisation, its evolution, can be comprehended rationally, because in general it follows the structure of the contents of reality. That there is a value at all, however, is a primary phenomenon [*Urphänomen*].

(2004 [1907]: 62).¹³

Benjamin uses the term less frequently than does Simmel, but he describes the dialectical image as an *Urphänomen*, and AP itself as a 'primal history' of modernity. It is plausible that the concept of *Urgeschichte* (or primal history) as it is used in that project derives at least partly from a connection to Goethe's work.¹⁴ There are other affinities between Goethe and these later thinkers. Both Simmel and Benjamin think through and present their ideas in an arrangement that resembles morphology as I have defined it (see note 6). PM contains many instances of Simmel's treatment of analogy; indeed money itself appears to be an ideal vehicle for analogical reasoning.¹⁵ Finally, both thinkers are preoccupied by the limitations of what can be empirically known of history and society – and by the precarious role of human reasoning in scrutinizing those limitations.

The work of Simmel and Benjamin is intriguing because it is impossible to grasp what they are saying without paying heed to the manner in which their insights and ideas are *presented*, to the way in which their modes of presentation interact with the substance of their arguments. This issue brings the discussion closer to Interpretation 3 of the primal plant. More specifically, it brings us to the other treatment of morphology implied by Interpretation 3: as an arrangement, and not just a way of 'thinking through' analogies. Benjamin is the most explicit as far as issues of presentation are concerned: he originally conceived of AP as a 'montage', as I discuss below. But Simmel's writing also possesses an implicit sense that

his ideas are being 'shown' rather than 'said'. As much as his critics complain that *PM* lacks structure – and the unconventional style of the text cannot be denied¹⁶ – it is difficult to regard this as merely a matter of questionable technique.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Simmel and Benjamin as thinkers who seek to employ analogical reasoning in sociology and social history, and present their arguments in a mode which cannot be divorced from their substance. Goethe's ideas offer a special illumination of these sociological thinkers: Goethe's botanical work makes a contribution to our understanding of projects undertaken by Simmel and Benjamin by highlighting aspects of them that remain insufficiently explored in the extant secondary literature. Where the following discussion refers to Goethe, it does so only insofar as it is legitimate to wonder what Simmel and Benjamin might have made of the idea of the *Urpflanzen*, and how the various interpretations of the *Urpflanze* put forward here might resonate with their work.

Closure

Goethe advocates analogical thinking because to do so resists the notion that there might be an ultimate solution.¹⁷ By working out analogies, and arranging them morphologically, we can attain a clear but not closed view of our subject-matter: morphology ought to produce *clarity* without *closure*.¹⁸ What might these criteria mean in relation to Benjamin's historiography and Simmel's concept of societal and historical form?

Both Benjamin and Simmel attempt to avoid various forms of closure. Benjamin rejects the form of closure which, he alleges, results from classical (that is, chronological or narrative) historiography. This rejection contains two strands. First, Benjamin resists its underlying notions of progress and decline (1999f: N2, 5).¹⁹ And this is part of a second, broader, problem with classical historiography, namely, its preoccupation with continuity. The reason that Benjamin cites to support this objection concerns not the 'unfolding' of history itself – not its passage through time – but rather the relationship that we *in the present* have with historical events.²⁰ Notions of historical continuity act narcotically because they smooth out and neutralize – or *seal off* – our relationship with the past:

... since the different epochs of the past are not all touched in the same degree by the present day of the historian (and often the recent past is not touched at all; the present fails to 'do it justice'), continuity in the presentation of history is unattainable.

(1999f: N7a, 2)²¹

Such a presentation of history could never be arranged morphologically.

What closure might mean in Simmel's writing is less evident, because aversion to closure surfaces in his arguments in multiple ways. But one of several

possibilities is suggested by the analogy he draws between sociology and the study of anatomy. Simmel warns us not to concentrate singularly on major institutions, for this would resemble ‘the older science of anatomy with its limitation to the major, definitely circumscribed organs such as heart, liver, lungs, and stomach, and with its neglect of the innumerable, popularly unnamed or unknown tissues’ (1964 [1950]: 9). This constitutes a form of closure – it misses that which is apparently inessential. But the inessential is, Simmel claims, actually essential to the maintenance of social life: ‘... without these, the more obvious organs could never constitute a living organism’ (1964 [1950]: 9).²² The reference to more *obvious* institutions is suggestive – Simmel might have said more *important*. That he does not do so underlines the way that he prioritizes *distance* when dealing with questions of scale in sociology. This implies that, instead of using dichotomies such as ‘structure’ and ‘agent’, ‘macro’ and ‘micro’, or ‘top’ or ‘bottom’, we should distinguish between what can be seen *up close* as opposed to seen *from afar*.²³ This connects with other visual metaphors in Simmel’s work – implying that ‘closure’ occurs because aspects of an object are *hidden from view* due to limits in our perspective.

Thus we can draw out several types of closure from the work of Benjamin and Simmel: the imposition of homogeneous time on history; the stifling of historical perspective through empathy with the past which buries the present; an overlooking of the seemingly inessential; and a loss of clarity when some aspects of an object are hidden from view. But what of *clarity*?

Clarity

The question of clarity stands out in relation to Benjamin and Simmel because each is often criticized for *lacking* clarity in the substance and presentation of his writings. Simmel’s critics tend to define clarity in terms of narrowness of focus, specialism, and even completeness. Weber is not atypical, and provides a useful agenda of themes against which specific features of Simmel’s work emerge. He argues that Simmel’s methodology is ‘ultimately not tenable’ and that his mode of exposition is ‘strange’ and ‘uncongenial’. Weber’s reading of Simmel is especially interesting because he focuses specifically on Simmel’s frequent recourse to analogical thinking. According to Weber, while this approach can be fruitful on a general level, that is, for addressing ‘totally heterogeneous subject matters’, it is not helpful to more specialist work, say, in economics. Analogical thinking can be suggestive regarding the meaning of phenomena. But such thinking has nothing to offer in terms of the *facticity* of those phenomena. Analogy is ‘playful’ (Weber, 1981: 79), and if Simmel will make any technical contribution to philosophy, it will only be as a coincidental by-product of his style rather than a consequence of his intellectual methodology (1981: 80).

Weber also criticizes Simmel’s concepts for their abstractness. The idea of ‘sociation’ becomes, in both the physical and social world, too *extensive* a concept

(Weber, 1981: 80–1). Ironically, Simmel's reason for making 'sociation' a core concept is to characterize sociology in its narrowest sense – to establish its 'scientific' status (1964 [1950]: 21–2), which he also calls 'pure' as opposed to 'general' sociology (1964 [1950]: 22). According to Simmel, societal forms 'are conceived of as constituting society (and societies) out of the mere sum of living men' (1964 [1950]: 22).²⁴ The study of such forms 'abstracts the mere element of sociation' and thereby 'isolates [sociation] inductively and psychologically from the heterogeneity of its contents and purposes which, in themselves, are not societal' (1964 [1950]: 22). The study of form 'proceeds like grammar, which isolates the pure forms of language from their contents through which these forms, nevertheless, come to life' (1964 [1950]: 22). Simmel does indeed regard sociation as the common feature of all social life (1964 [1950]: 14–15). As a conceptual device in sociology, sociation lacks the extensiveness attributed to it by Weber. Instead, it is marked by *formalism* (as suggested by Simmel's own analogy with grammar).²⁵

One way of explaining this discrepancy could be to say that sociation is akin to a 'primal' form in Simmel's sociology and that, by utilizing it, he aims for a specific kind of clarity in his sociology. He says that sociology is 'all-embracing' in its relations with the other social sciences. The reasoning is intriguing because it suggests how Simmel might have regarded sociation as a 'primal phenomenon' in social life: 'All subject matters of these [social] sciences are nothing more than particular channels, as it were, in which social life, *the only bearer of all energy and of all significance*, flows' (1964 [1950]: 12, my italics).²⁶ However, Simmel also states that a form 'is always a synthesis' – 'something added by a synthesizing subject' (1964 [1950]: 7) – implying that forms cannot be regarded as primal in themselves.²⁷ At the same time, the sense that forms cannot be primal, and yet sociation *could* be, sits comfortably with the fact that sociation works in a different way from other forms in Simmel's argument. This suggests it would be intriguing to explore connections between *metamorphosis* and *sociation*, on the one hand, and *morphology* and *form*, on the other.

Simmel rejects the idea that there is a fundamental level to which all social life can be reduced: it is 'perfectly arbitrary', he writes, to stop at the level of the individual. According to this view, cognition is not about a level but rather about the *distance* between 'a complex of phenomena and the human mind' – 'We obtain different pictures of an object when we see it at a distance of two, or of five, or ten yards. At each distance, however, the picture is "correct" in its particular way and only in this way' (1964 [1950]: 7). Simmel's rejection of reductionism suggests that a characterization of sociation in terms of Interpretation 2 of Goethe's primal plant is plausible. Simmel's preference for *distance* as opposed to *hierarchy* as a means of defining the problem of perspective in sociology suggests that, contra Weber, there may be a connection between the notion of sociation and conceptual clarity.

Benjamin's rejection of both positivist and idealist historiography suggests why he is drawn to the notion of primal phenomena. He embraces the 'messianic'

potential of Marxism, but not the *telos* contained therein. Benjamin's historiography is focused on our *present* relationship with history – on the significance of history *for* the present. According to Benjamin, such a relationship can be articulated only by seeking out 'places where tradition breaks off – hence its peaks and crags, which offer footing to one who would cross over them' (1999a: N9a, 5). Benjamin's approach to historiography centres on the concept of remembrance. Indeed, remembrance provides the platform for the specific variant of Marxism that Benjamin proposes. Benjamin distinguishes between an event as it is experienced and as it is remembered: 'For an experienced event is finite – at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is merely a key to everything that happened before and after it,' he writes in 'On the Image of Proust' (1999b [1929]: 238).

Yet Benjamin's conception of historiography only partly explains his fascination with primal phenomena. His interest in redemption cannot be divorced from the issue of *optical* clarity. Benjamin argues that technology had broken up the perceptual worlds bound by the church and family in the nineteenth century. In *AP*, he states that primal history sets up a different, opposing perceptual world (1999f: N2a, 2), and 'groups itself anew in images appropriate to that century' (1999f: N3a, 2). This explains Benjamin's choice to juxtapose citations in *AP*, but not the use of citation *per se*, or the specific method of juxtaposition in *AP*. There is conceptual confusion here. In places, Benjamin refers to the mode of presentation employed in *AP* as 'montage'.²⁸ This can mean 'flash-back' in chronological montage; a sequence of images cut or blended together to form a consecutive whole in cinema; or a composite constituted by separate pictorial elements in a picture (all *OED*). Each of these possibilities captures some aspect of what Benjamin is seeking to achieve in his presentation of the nineteenth century – the sense of 'flash-back', the texture of discontinuity, and the cutting-together of fragments.²⁹ What he avoids, above all, is *epic* form:³⁰ Benjamin's history must be shown, not said.

Visuality

In *AP*, Benjamin characterizes his method as follows: 'I needn't *say* anything. Merely show ... the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them' (1999f: N1a, 8). The notion of historical fragments being allowed to 'come into their own' carries an implicit sense of history being 'shown' or 'demonstrated' and not of being 'explained' or 'theorized'. Benjamin makes this explicit in the 'First Sketches' for *AP*: 'Formula: construction out of facts. Construction with the complete elimination of theory. What only Goethe in his morphological writings has attempted' (1999f: O°, 73). But do the fragments that make up Benjamin's historical montage consist solely of facts? Note the precise wording of the last quotation: construction *out of* facts. And the phrasing of the preceding quotation: Benjamin seeks to enable

the rags of history to come into their own *by making use of them*. To understand what use, and what is being constructed, we need to understand why he opts for citation and what the citations in *AP* are intended to show.

For historical sources, Benjamin relies almost entirely on texts.³¹ Newspapers, for example: ‘With the rise of the mass-circulation press, the sources become innumerable’ (1999f: N4a, 6). In citing such texts, he aims to re-constitute them as *images*. This interrelationship between text and image is implicit in his citation of Monglond – ‘The past has left images of itself in literary texts, images comparable to those which are imprinted by light on a photosensitive plate’ (1999f: N15a, 1) – and in his remark that ‘one can read the real like a text. ... We open the book of what happened’ (1999f: N4, 2). Citations therefore *show*, correctly arranged. This is made explicit in Benjamin’s comment that

... the events surrounding the historian, and in which he himself takes part, will underlie his presentation in the form of a text written in invisible ink. The history which he lays before the reader comprises, as it were, the citations occurring in this text, and it is only these citations that occur in a manner legible to all.

(1999f: N11, 3)

What does Benjamin mean by ‘legibility’? If we put the term alongside his description of citations as being ‘like wayside robbers who leap out, armed, and relieve the idle stroller of his conviction’ (1996d [1928]: 481), then a conventional sense of ‘visibility’ cannot be what he has in mind. Benjamin suggests that Karl Krauss was the exemplar of the ‘modern’ function of quotations, discovering in citation ‘not the power to preserve but to purify, to tear from context, to destroy’ (1999c [1931]: 455). ‘Citation’ carries broader connotations in Benjamin’s work, not least in relation to *judgement*. In Thesis III of ‘On the Concept of History’, he writes that

... only a redeemed mankind is granted the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l’ordre du jour*. And that day is judgement day.

(2003c [1940]: 390)

It is the coincidence of the terms ‘citation’ and ‘judgement’ in this passage that catches the eye. By history becoming ‘citable in all of its moments’, Benjamin does not appear to mean that history is ‘ripe’ for judgement. Rather, history is judged. To cite is to judge.³² Implicitly, Benjamin underlines the capacity of citation to both save and punish: ‘It summons the word by its name, wrenches it destructively from its context, but precisely thereby calls it back to its origin’ (1999c [1931]: 454).

Benjamin's manipulation of citations can be characterized as a form of de-contextualization,³³ but this does not explain what he is seeking to *construct* through citations, that is, the shape and the status of his arrangement of them. He wants his reader to *see the images which are conveyed by the relations between citations*³⁴ and, simultaneously, for the reader to be jolted out of his or her complacency. Thus it is the idea of a *surrealist historiography* that characterizes Benjamin's approach – a montage of images designed to shock: to *awaken*. It awakens the reader to 'a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been', which will in turn achieve 'the dissolution of "mythology" into the space of history' (1999f: N1, 9). The idea of 'awakening' can be enriched with reference both to surrealism and to a Proustian notion of remembrance which runs through *AP*. Where surrealism is concerned, Benjamin is receptive to (but also critical of) the arguments of Louis Aragon. In *Le Paysan de Paris*, Aragon describes surrealism as a 'vice' consisting of the 'immoderate and impassioned use of the stupefying *image*' (1994 [1926]: 66).³⁵ In one sense, then, the narcotic image appears arbitrary, an 'uncontrolled provocation'. Yet at the same time Aragon sees it as *singular*: '... for each man there awaits discovery a particular image capable of annihilating the entire Universe' (1994 [1926]: 66). Benjamin wants to hold on to this sense of reversal while letting go of a connection with something narcotizing or dream-like: '... whereas Aragon persists within the realm of the dream, here [in *AP*] the concern is to find the constellation of awakening' (1999f: N1, 9).³⁶ This can be achieved only through discovery: the constellation of awakening must be *found*. In 'A Berlin Chronicle', Benjamin frequently uses orientational analogies: maps, diagrams, labyrinths, arcades, vistas and panoramas. He states that he would have liked to present his autobiography as a map:

First I envisaged an ordinary map, but now I would incline to a general staff's map of a city centre, if such a thing existed... I have evolved a system of signs, and on the grey background of such maps they would make a colourful show.

(1999d [1932]: 596)³⁷

When he writes of memory, he does so in terms not only of methodical excavation but also of the 'cautious probing of the spade in the dark loam. ... Fruitless searching is as much part of this as succeeding' (1999d [1932]: 611; cf. Benjamin, 1999e [1932]). If we are to reconcile ourselves with the past, it will not be through a conscious act of memory, or a gathering of facts. If we are to overcome the profound disenchantment that is inherent in our experience of the present, a distinctive – and radicalized – relationship with the past is required. 'Historical materialism conceives historical understanding as an afterlife of that which has been understood and whose pulse can be felt in the present,' Benjamin writes in the Fuchs essay (2002b [1937]: 262). He characterizes this 'pulse' in terms of a highly specific conception of *remembrance*: it is the difference

between *recognizing the past 'the way it really was'* and *'appropriating a memory as it flashes up'* (see 2003c [1940]: 391). So what are Benjamin's criteria for *discovery* here?

Benjamin wants the nineteenth century to be 'legible' to his own time in the form of a constellation of dialectical *images*. Simmel, too, makes striking use of images. These help to capture the role of distance in his sociology – '... a view gained at any distance whatsoever has its own justification' (1964 [1950]: 7) – and his notion of the 'contents of life': '... reality ... is given to us as a complex of images, as a surface of contiguous phenomena' (1964 [1950]: 8). In his remarks on the objectivity of those contents, Simmel introduces the idea of *presenting things in themselves*. 'No human practice can take arbitrary steps, jump arbitrary distances, perform arbitrary syntheses. They must follow the intrinsic logic of things' (1964 [1950]: 17). This can be instructively contrasted with Benjamin's notion of montage. In the history of art, Simmel suggests, one could present works of art in themselves by presenting them 'anonymously, in their temporal sequence and stylistic evolution'. In the study of law, such a presentation would consist of 'the sequence of particular institutions and laws'; and in science, 'as the mere series, historical or systematic, of its results' (1964 [1950]: 17). Simmel suggests that such sequential presentations *ignore social life*. Yet even sequential presentation

... involves abstraction, since no objective content is realized by its own logic alone but only through the cooperation of historical and psychological forces. Cognition cannot grasp reality in its total immediacy. *What we call objective content is something conceived under a specific category.* (1964 [1950]: 17, my italics)

There is an unmistakable Kantian strain in this reasoning. Simmel's key Kantian text is the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Oakes cites a letter from Simmel to Keyserling that provides a clue as to what Simmel found in Kant's first critique, and also to what he missed there. Simmel states that he is looking for a 'third category' located beyond the dichotomy between subject and object: 'When will the genius appear who will emancipate us from the spell of the subject in the same way that Kant liberated us from the constraint of the object? And what will this third category be?' (in Oakes, 1980: 4). In one sense, the location of Simmel's work on the boundaries between psychology, sociology, philosophy and history is a function of his aim to extend Kant's enquiry beyond nature and towards the psychological, social and historical world. According to Oakes, Simmel anticipates the following conclusion: '... in the same sense that the facts of the natural sciences are not pure sense impressions, so historical facts are not reproductions of immediate experience' (1980: 5).

But there is also an important difference to Kant's philosophy. Simmel spells this out in 'How is Society Possible?' He argues that, whereas for Kant the unity of nature 'emerges in the observing subject exclusively', the unity of society – its

character as a ‘totality’ – results from the interaction of its component parts, that is, individuals. In short, ‘*the unity of society needs no observer*’ (1971 [1910]: 7, my italics). Simmel also notes that ‘it is quite possible for an observing outsider to perform an additional synthesis of the persons making up the society [which] is based only upon the person himself’ (1971 [1910]: 7). What is this ‘additional’ synthesis, and how is it ‘based’ on the individual who performs it? Presumably the ‘outsider’ could be any observer. But if it is a sociologist seeking to identify social forms – a question Simmel addresses in ‘The Problem of Sociology’ – he lays down two ‘factual’ constraints which imply that, whatever else it might be, the additional synthesis can neither be arbitrary nor wilful in its relationship to the components of society itself (1971 [1910]: 26). First, the form the sociologist has identified must be observable in relation to dissimilar contents. Second, it must be shown that the specific content in question ‘is realized in using quite dissimilar forms of sociation as its medium or vehicle’. Simmel’s remarks on sociological observation and synthesis are concerned with *generalization* and *comparison*.³⁸ Yet there is more at stake than this, particularly if one asks not only how societal forms themselves are derived in society, but how they are ‘discovered’ or ‘found’ by the synthesizing sociologist. In order to address this question, we need to consider Simmel’s discussion of *standpoint*, and its relevance to the arguments of Benjamin.

Standpoint

There seems to be an important relationship between the empirical investigations of Benjamin and Simmel and their conceptual explorations. This raises questions about presentation and standpoint. Interpretation 3 of the primal plant suggests that the primal plant enables comparison but need not yield completeness (that is, an exhaustive classificatory schema). It is an invention standing on the margins of experience, between what can and cannot be known.

The ‘categories of the understanding’ Simmel refers to in his reading of sociological method relate to the significance that ‘contents of life’ have for us *from a particular standpoint*. They, too, occupy that uneasy terrain between what can be known from experience and what can or cannot be deduced from reason. A similar idea arises in Simmel’s discussion of the ‘threshold’ of historical consciousness. In part, this threshold is subjective, a function of the status of historical events as ‘objects of mental acts’ (Oakes, 1980: 56). An historical event takes on significance for us if two criteria are fulfilled. First, it must be capable of being located within particular temporal co-ordinates, or ‘defined in time’. Simmel characterizes this as an *existential* interest for us, defining both the facticity and historicity of the event. Second, we must have an interest in the content of an event, specifically in its consequences. Quite unlike the appraisal of moral, logical or aesthetic significance, historical significance lies in consequentiality (see Oakes, 1980: 51), which begs the question as to what standpoint historical events are appraised from.

A partial sense of Simmel's notion of standpoint emerges from his remarks about the sociological frame of reference. He suggests that the 'contents of life' arise for us as a 'complex of images'. One way in which we deal with this is to reduce 'its simple matter-of-factness to single elements that are designed to catch it, as if they were its nodal points' (1964 [1950]: 8). Simmel continues: '... *we* inject into reality, an *ex-post-facto* intellectual *transformation* of the immediate given reality' (1964 [1950]: 8). This transformation is habitual, to the extent that we regard its outcome as the 'natural order of things' (1964 [1950]: 8). Note the reference to '*we*' in the above quotation. Although Simmel's argument can be applied to the individual synthesizing subject, he refers explicitly to both the individual and the collective: 'Only the particular purpose of cognition determines whether reality, as it emerges or is experienced in its immediacy, is to be investigated in a personal or in a collective frame of reference. *Both frames of reference, equally, are "standpoints"*' (1964 [1950]: 8, my italics).³⁹

Benjamin's approach to historiography hinges on the contention, *contra* historical materialism, that history has no 'final goal'. This is underwritten by his notion of remembrance, particularly its connection with the status of the dialectical images he aims to construct in *AP*. Benjamin discovers in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* a confirmation of the capacity of remembrance both to unsettle – 'The true reader of Proust is constantly jarred by small frights' (1999b [1929]: 242) – and to disrupt the continuity of time.⁴⁰ For Benjamin, remembrance in Proust's hands does not preserve, so much as it modifies. History, Benjamin argues in *AP*, is not only science but remembrance, and what 'science has "determined" remembrance can modify' (1999f: N8, 1). This is a modification of the past *in order to* bring about a modification of the present. He aims to expose the nineteenth century to the *light* of the present day (1999f: N1a, 2), and thus achieve the goal he associates with historical materialism: namely, of exploding 'the homogeneity of the epoch [and] interspersing it with ruins – that is, with the present' (1999f: N9a, 6). The 'present' consists of the historical image which Benjamin has constructed out of montage. It has explosive power: Benjamin likens historiography as he conceives it 'to the process of splitting the atom' (1999f: N3, 4). By virtue of being constructed out of a montage of citations, Benjamin's historical images polarize (or split) that moment 'into fore- and after-history always anew, never in the same way' (1999f: N7a, 1; see also N7a, 8). This is why he refers to the historical image as dialectical, and our recognition of it (its becoming *legible* to us) as a moment of awakening. He writes: 'The dialectic image is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast – as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability' (1999f: N9, 7). The dialectical image is in this sense a *standpoint* consisting of the interrelationship between what Benjamin calls fore- and after-history. Our recognition occurs in quantum time: as a flash, an instant. Hence Benjamin's description of the historiography that underpins *AP* as 'dialectics at a standstill' (for example, 1999f: N2a, 3). But how are Benjamin's dialectical images constructed?

Construction

The foregoing discussion of Benjamin's image-citations suggests that the Paris arcades take their shape for us through historical rupture. It seems as if their contours are constructed out of montage. Here we come close to the kind of historiography that Benjamin alludes to in 'The Storyteller' and passages of *AP*. It presents the landscape of history as emerging from the interaction between historical sources and their collectors: between history and its chroniclers.⁴¹ In *AP*, Benjamin uses image-citations to rouse us from our nineteenth-century dream state which are intended to show history in a new light, to throw up a new aspect.

Consider the following quotation from Thesis XVII of 'On the Concept of History':

Materialist historiography ... is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking is crystallized as a monad. The historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where it confronts him as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic arrest of happening, or (to put it differently) a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.

(Benjamin, 20003c [1940]: 396)

There may be some tension between understanding historiography in terms of a 'constructive principle' and thinking that historical configurations 'crystallize into a monad'. In modern philosophy, 'monad' refers to 'a capacity for being reduced to or analysed into atomic propositions or other elements' (*OED*). It is associated with Leibniz, whom, regrettably for those seeking to understand its role in *AP*, Benjamin does not cite.⁴² Leibniz was a rationalist; his philosophy is the 'pure reason' which Kant critiqued. Leibniz's monad refers to living things and souls, all different from each other; monads are the 'atoms of nature'. In Leibniz's world – which consists of an infinite number of monads – the monad is an atom at one level, and at another level a *reflection* of the complete world whose harmony is pre-given.

The appeal of the monad to Benjamin is illuminated by the fact that it 'carries' this broader meaning. The connotation of necessity, however, suggests that his use of the term 'monad' is perhaps unfortunate. Benjamin writes of the 'telescoping of the past through the present' (1999f: N7a, 3). But to suggest that 'wherever a dialectical process is realized, we are dealing with a monad' (1999f: N11, 4) seems to grate against Benjamin's contention that truth is not timeless, but rather is 'bound to a nucleus of time lying hidden *within the knower and the*

known alike' (1999f: N3, 2, my italics). It also conflicts with his dismissal of Keller's notion of a truth that 'will not escape us' (1999b: N3a, 1). Benjamin's striving for concepts that statically *reflect* history in the present conflicts with this more dynamic notion of laying new *aspects* of history open to view.

The notion of historical rupture is conceived by Benjamin as a moment of redemption. This is the *Urphänomen* of history. The *Urphänomen* is not a first cause or a final goal in history. But the moment of rupture does sustain the kind of absolute power which is conveyed by the term *Aufhebung*.⁴³ This might appear to be the malevolent trace of historical materialism in Benjamin's project, because it seems wedded to a deeper notion of history-as-discovery.⁴⁴ Perhaps one could argue that – in light of Benjamin's specific interpretation of surrealism and Proust's remembrances in Section N of *AP* – the landscape of the Parisian arcades is pre-formed. On this reading, and for all his remarks about his own specific insights as an historian – the work is written by one 'who scales dizzy heights' (1999f: N2, 4) – Benjamin's surrealist historiography would over-extend the reasoning suggested by Interpretation 2 of the primal plant too far. The primal phenomenon is no longer a construction, but becomes an absolute object with which we, as subjects, can but hope for reconciliation. If so, Benjamin's use of the 'monad' concept threatens to close off, not open up, aspects on history. This is partly because it seems to be an objective pre-configuration, but also because it implies there actually *is* totality and harmony in the world.

But note Benjamin's use of the term 'monad' in his earlier *Trauerspiel* study. In the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', he states that 'every idea contains the image of the world' (1998 [1928]: 48).⁴⁵ Crucially for Benjamin, it is through the interrelation *between* monads that truth is revealed. Like the concept of 'origin' as Benjamin employs it in this study, the monad expresses a moment of 'becoming': 'Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis' (1998 [1928]: 46). By seeking to reveal the 'origin' of the *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin hopes to 'rescue' the mourning-play from its 'ruins' by presenting allegory not only as destructive but as capable of *redeeming*. By doing so, he lays down a significant marker for his subsequent treatment of history. Through immanent criticism of the *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin seeks to 'redeem' or 'fulfil' an art-form that has been misunderstood and neglected. But on another level, the substance of the plays themselves, specifically their *allegorical* representation of history, will play an even more vital role in Benjamin's own subsequent treatment of redemption in relation to history. The *Trauerspiel* freezes around allegory, only to be unfrozen and frozen again: '... the constant pause, the sudden change of direction, and consolidation into new rigidity' (1998 [1928]: 197). Each constellation of images that is frozen by the allegorist disrupts time's flow. Hence Benjamin's comparison between the mystical instant (*Nu*) of the symbol and the 'now' (*Jetzt*) of the allegory (1998 [1928]: 183): allegories do not constitute a denial of time but rather its *seizure*.⁴⁶ This seizure is a form of redemption.

Simmel's treatment of money through analogy also seems to consist of pre-configuration. In this case, however, it is the *imagined* configuration of a totality. In the Preface to *PM*, Simmel writes that 'the unity of these investigations [lies] in the possibility – which must be demonstrated – of finding in each of life's details the totality of its meaning' (2004 [1907]: 55). This is clarified when Simmel distinguishes between art and philosophy in their relation to generality and totality. Art tends to focus on the particular – a landscape or a mood – and any 'extension' of this focus to the general level is regarded as an 'enrichment'. Philosophy, by contrast, 'whose problem is nothing less than the totality of being', is reduced in its relation to totality. Simmel inverts this reduction by using money as a vehicle for philosophical discussion: '... to regard the problem as restricted and small in order to do justice to it by extending it to the totality and the highest level of generality' (2004 [1907]: 55–6). This suggests that money is more akin to a proto-form than a monad. It is a *carrier of analogy*. As such, it is closer to Interpretation 3 of the primal plant. As a proto-form, money is not simply an invention but emerges from what Oakes calls the 'incessant energies of life' (1980: 13). This is clarified by Simmel's conception of form, and his ambiguous neo-Kantianism.

Simmel argues that societal forms have a kind of *equivalence*: 'They lie on the same plane and have the same right to be heard' (1964 [1950]: 18). But the specifically *social* category of understanding, while occupying the same plane as others, possesses a claim to uniqueness. It offers the 'possibility of cognition in front of the *totality* of human existence' (1964 [1950]: 18, my italics). This possibility arises from a deep connection between social *forms* and the *contents* of social life. Societal facts are always 'socially embodied, produced, or transmitted' (1965 [1950]: 21). This holds for the facts of all social sciences, not only sociology. 'The facts of politics, religion, economics, law, culture styles, language, and innumerable others can be analysed ... as products and developments of society' (1964 [1950]: 18). This recalls the special – if not primal – status of sociation as a social form. Simmel establishes the concept of sociation by asking

... whether perhaps it is possible to find, in the most heterogeneous historical developments *that share nothing but the fact that they are exhibited by one particular group*, a common law, or a rhythm, that is fully derivable from this one fact.

(1964 [1950]: 19, my italics)

He finds that rhythm in sociation. It enables him to describe the sociological method as 'genetic' in relation to other human studies, although not in order to exclude their own specific approaches. The status of sociology is analogous to the principle of induction, which has 'penetrated into all kinds of problem areas'. Sociology is similarly all-embracing (1964 [1950]: 13). Its universality corresponds to the uniqueness of its subject-matter, namely, sociation (1964 [1950]: 14).

Yet Simmel's analysis of sociation is most striking for what it says about the connection between sociological abstraction and the 'totality' of social life. Sociological abstractions fundamentally consist of societal forms. But such forms find their expression not only in sociology: '... in actuality, sociological phenomena do not exist in ... isolation and recomposition, but ... are factored out of this living reality by means of an added concept' (1964 [1950]: 21). This concept is added by means of an individual or collective frame of reference which can consist of standpoints from different distances, or aspects from different angles. These standpoints and aspects are *on the same plane*. Thus for all of its texture, Simmel's presentation of social life succeeds by virtue of its *flatness*: in its aspects, and its types and its forms, seen up close and from afar.

In *The Problems of the Philosophy of History* (1977 [1892]), Simmel (like Kant) is partly engaged in refuting empiricism. According to Oakes, Simmel claims that 'it is necessary to emancipate the mind from history in the same way that Kant freed it from nature' (1980: 6). In simple terms, the upshot of this emancipation is seeing man as 'constructing' not only nature, but also history. It would follow that Simmel's task is then to discern under what conditions we can experience reality historically, or think historically. According to Oakes, all of Simmel's work is centred on 'the assumption that the world as a whole and specific aspects of it become possible objects of experience only if they are constituted by some form or forms' (1980: 8). Yet Simmel's relationship to *The Critique of Pure Reason* remains ambiguous.

According to Simmel, historical thought 'synthesizes discontinuous, fragmentary, and discrete data into continuous wholes' (Oakes, 1980: 11). These wholes are 'constructs' along the lines of Interpretation 2 of the primal plant. For Oakes, Simmel does not propose a stark choice between a conception of form as immanent and autonomous, or instead as intimately related to the raw material that forms constitute. He suggests a third possibility: 'Although the categories of a form do not reproduce the properties of real life nor can they be deduced or derived from life, forms themselves are created by the incessant energies of life' (1980: 13).

A clearer sense of this third possibility can be gleaned from Simmel's essay 'The Adventurer'. Simmel characterizes the adventure as more sharply bounded in time than other forms of experience, 'freed of the entanglement and concatenations which are characteristic of those forms' (1971 [1910]: 188). The adventure has 'necessity and meaning' due to its connection with the 'character and identity' of the adventurer's life (1971 [1910]: 190). This connection arises because the adventure is neither an abrupt event which disrupts life's flow, nor a part of life's flow. Rather, the adventure *synthesizes* various forms: chance combines with necessity, lack of seriousness with a high degree of risk, activity with passivity – 'what we conquer and what is given to us' (1971 [1910]: 192). Crucially for Simmel, this is a genuine synthesis – it is 'no mere hodgepodge' (1971 [1910]: 191). The synthesis is possible since the adventure both is wrenched away from

life and takes on life's forms by interacting with the stream of life: '... as if hurdling this stream, it connects with the most recondite instincts and some ultimate intention of life as a whole' (1971 [1910]: 196). The adventure is thus defined by its form, not its content. More specifically, it is defined by the sense in which the deeper currents of life are laid bare and thereby accentuated: '... an action is completely torn out of the inclusive context of life and ... simultaneously the whole strength and intensity of life stream into it' (1971 [1910]: 198).

There are intriguing analogies between Simmel's adventure and Benjamin's dialectical image. Both ideas seek to capture intense interconnections between surface and depth, inner and outer. Both are cut away from an underlying continuity, while at the same time encapsulating that continuity. And both concepts intersect with an intense experience of memory (which Simmel calls 'dreamlike', Benjamin 'awakening'). But the differences between the ideas are equally instructive. The configuration which constitutes the dialectical image and the synthesis which constitutes the adventure each have a sense of necessity. Yet whereas Benjamin's historiography sets up the dialectical image as a pre-formed constellation rupturing into the present, for Simmel the necessity emerges only insofar as the adventure is experienced. Simmel's adventure neither has form imposed upon it, nor does it emerge and take shape pre-formed.

Do social forms therefore approach that third category Simmel describes in his note to Keyserling, inhabiting a space *beyond* subject and object? For this interpretation to be plausible, Simmel would need to have ventured further across Kantian terrain than, perhaps, he does. His reticence is implicit in the distinction drawn in the essay 'How Is Society Possible?' (Wolff, 1959 [1908]) between society as a *pre-formed* synthesis versus society as *constructed* by an outside observer. As constructions, social forms retain the elasticity and texture that Simmel is searching for among the 'unnamed tissue' of social life. In *PM* and elsewhere, he unfolds social forms into an analogical arrangement similar to morphology in Interpretation 3 of the primal plant. Money carries these analogies, it is the vehicle of their unfolding. Money is not what *holds the analogies together*, however. They are held by the universal trend that money expresses:

Modern times, particularly the most recent, are permeated by a feeling of tension, expectation and unreleased intense desires – as if in anticipation of what is essential, of the definitive of the specific meaning and central point of life and things. This is obviously connected with the over-emphasis that the means often gain over the ends of life in mature cultures.

(2004 [1907]: 481)

Such a statement would be impossible unless society is conceived as a totality. Conceiving the societal totality as a creature of the imagination would suggest it lies beyond the boundary of experience, and should be treated like a Kantian regulative ideal. But Simmel goes beyond this by holding a conception of society

which is *immanently* Kantian: society imagines itself as, and strives to actually *be*, a totality. This is clearest in what is reputed to be Simmel's most 'philosophical' book, *The Sociology of Religion*. There he argues, much like Durkheim, that religion is a unifying and synthesizing force in society. Religion unifies society's own aspiration to form a unity of itself: 'Society aspires to totality and organic unity, each of its members constituting but a component part' (1959: 48). Totality thereby ceases to be a regulative ideal. It becomes a reality both as *synthesis* and as *aspiration*, each pre-configuring the other. Hence Simmel's analogies become heavier, stickier, less elastic. They are constructed by virtue of an absolute, inner identity, not piece-by-piece likeness and difference:

I mean by analogy not an accidental equality of phenomena, independent of each other, but unity of psychical category, expressing itself sometimes in the material of human reciprocity. ... The immanence of [social] and the transcendence of [religious] phenomena are merely differentiations of matter. (1959: 29)

There is ambiguity, then, in both treatments of Goethe's *Urphänomen*. Benjamin may have over-extended the Goethean notion by conceiving historical images as pre-formed objects that he, the historian, must discover by arranging citations. Simmel, too, may have overreached in his attempt to develop a neo-Kantian sociology. Perhaps he avoids the dichotomy between subject and object more successfully than Benjamin, but only by synthesizing them as a real and pre-figured totality. But can the potential elasticity of both instances of analogical reasoning and presentation be revived?

Refreshment

Benjamin's approach to historiography is centred on a rupture which takes place, and is frozen within, the present. The dialectical image is not a mere standpoint, but rather a *standstill*. Part of Benjamin's attraction to Goethe's primal phenomenon is that it allows him to escape a mechanistic notion of causality. The superstructure is not determined by the infrastructure, but is its expression: '... precisely as, with the sleeper, an overfull stomach finds not its reflection but its expression in the contents of dreams, which, from a causal point of view, it may be said to "condition"' (1999f: K2, 5). Benjamin is concerned with threads of expression in history, not causes (1999f: N1a, 6). He attempts 'to grasp an economic process as perceptible, *Ur*-phenomenon, from out of which proceed all manifestations of life in the arcades (and, accordingly, in the nineteenth century)' (1999f: N1a, 6). Benjamin describes the purpose of Section N of *AP* as to '*say* something about the method of composition itself ... to characterize and preserve the intervals of reflection, the distances lying between the most essential parts of this work, which are turned most intensively to the outside' (1999f: N1, 3, my

italics). But Section N's 'theory' is at odds with *AP*, undermining it as the 'centre' it should not possess. This expresses the ambiguity of Benjamin's historiography, hovering between a notion of historical conception as 'lying *between* knower and known', and as a pre-formed configuration: an *object*. The former conception lies outside the dualism between history-as-discovery and history-as-invention. The latter conception does not. The former image of historiography comes closer to encapsulating the 'presentations' contained within *AP*, but only once they are wrenched away from Section N, which threatens to bind them together.

Our understanding of *AP* may be enriched and enlivened if we disrupt the internal relations within the text as it appears, incomplete, before us. *AP* can be seen to work more powerfully if it is rendered even more provisional, by pulling out the theoretical foundations which are meant to underpin it. This makes possible a more dynamic relationship between the mode of presentation of *AP* and its substance as representation. Without its theoretical section, *Arcades* genuinely might come-into-rupture as 'arcades': *as we explore them*, not as pre-formed.

In Section Q of *AP*, Benjamin explores notions of *panorama*. Here, citations move against one another in a way that both realizes *and* undermines the aims in Section N. In Section Q, he provides an analogical presentation for citations to 'speak for themselves' and, moreover, *each other*. Panorama denotes something commanding

... a view of the whole landscape – a picture of a landscape or other scene, either arranged on the inside of a cylindrical surface round the spectator as a centre (a cyclorama), or unrolled or unfolded and made to pass before him, so as to show the various parts in succession.

(OED)

According to the *AP*'s translator, panoramas first appeared in France in 1799. James Thayer acquired the patent and developed two rotundas on the Boulevard Monmartre, separated by the Passage de Panoramas. The rotunda was a 'large circular tableaux, painted in trompe-l'oeil and designed to be viewed from the centre of the rotunda' (Benjamin, 1999f: editor's note), displaying battle scenes and cityscapes. New panoramic forms then appeared: the cosmorama, neorama, georama.⁴⁷

The concept of panorama operates as an image in Section Q. But it also *conveys* Benjamin's arguments against the substance and presentation of classical historiography more successfully than when he *relates* those arguments in Section N. The image enables him to counter-pose citations which reinforce his opposition to notions of progress, and the homogeneous, empty time within which historiographical narratives are framed. For example, when he cites Wiertz on the impossibility of perfection in art – 'The most difficult problem was perfect relief, deep perspective carried to the most complete illusion. The stereoscope resolved it' – Benjamin suggests this demonstrates how people viewed the stereoscope,

and, more generally, ‘shows very clearly that the theory of “progress” in the arts is bound up with the idea of the imitation of nature, and must be discussed in the context of this idea’ (1999f: Q2, 1). The analogy here is between the imitation of *nature* and of *history*: Benjamin questions the ‘realism’ of each by counter-posing them. Thus citations are not simply presented ‘in themselves’. They ironize each another. They are further destabilized by Benjamin’s own remarks. When he says that pathos ‘lies hidden in the art of the panoramas’, the word lingers over the citation which follows. The quotation from Wiertz is in a catalogue on his own painting. This painting, says Wiertz, ‘has a distinctly panoramic tendency’, and he moves on to relate the panorama to pure realism in painting – ‘... a represented object would seem within reach of your hand’ (1999f: Q1a, 5). The more emphatic Wiertz becomes, the more his words wither beneath Benjamin’s jibe. Movement, not standstill, is the outcome.

Benjamin’s treatment of panorama as analogous to a particular kind of cinematography raises further questions about the homogeneity of time. The analogy rests on the diorama, wherein the gradual passage of daylight is compressed to a quarter or half of an hour:

Here is something like a sportive precursor of fast-motion cinematography – a witty, and somewhat malicious, ‘dancing’ acceleration of time, which, by way of contrast, makes one thing of the hopelessness of a mimesis, as Breton evokes it in *Nadja*: the painter who in late afternoon sets up his easel before the Vieux-Port in Marseilles and, in the waning light of day, constantly alters the light-relations in his picture, until it shows only darkness. *For Breton, however, it was ‘unfinished’.*

(1999f: Q1a, 4, my italics)

Section Q’s effect is not that conceived by Benjamin in Section N. The panorama and diorama images act as vehicles persuading us of the impossibility of *completing* history: in a text and in reality (as *telos*). Section Q does not serve as a frozen image. It conjures new aspects on the nineteenth century (and the arcades) through its internal relations – likenesses and differences suggested by the analogies. Benjamin’s citations, together with his accompanying remarks, do not expose the nineteenth century to a pure white light. The images of text *shimmer*.⁴⁸

Simmel argues that to analyse sociological problems requires going ‘*beneath* the concrete knowledge of social life’ (1964 [1950]: 24, my italics). In *PM*, he aims ‘to construct a new storey beneath historical materialism’ (2004 [1907]: 56).⁴⁹ As already suggested, he moves from *beneath* to *beyond* social life. He says that the sociologist who wants to supplement the fragmentary character of empirical facts ‘in the direction of a closed system’ must look for the religious or metaphysical significance of them. This significance may be asserted *or* doubted as both ‘derive from a super-empirical world view’ (1964 [1950]: 24). According to

Simmel, such extensions beyond social life can only be arrived at by *interpreting* facts, ‘by efforts to bring the relative and problematical elements of social reality under an over-all view’. This ‘over-all view’ does not compete with empirical claims but ‘serves needs which are quite different from those answered by empirical propositions’ (1964 [1950]: 25). To construct such a view is a ‘metaphysical’ task based on world-view, valuation and ultimate or undemonstrable conviction (1964 [1950]: 25). Is such an extension beyond social life desirable, and *necessary* to achieve what Simmel calls an ‘over-all view’? The answer depends on what qualities an over-all view would have. Simmel suggests that it should possess completeness. I want to suggest that it does not require completeness. The task of constructing it, while perhaps requiring imagination, is not metaphysical. The task entails a particular mode of *presentation* and of *reasoning*.

Analogies are multi-faceted; they work in various ways and move in differing directions. In Simmel’s writing, analogies are sometimes *illustrative*, enabling him to shed light on new aspects of a phenomenon. When discussing the importance of distance in (or to) art, he describes being in the farthest Alpine reaches, an inaccessible world representing ‘the extreme enhancement of and stylization of what nature as a whole still means to us’ (2004 [1907]: 487). He suggests that landscape painting is a result of our being *distanced* from nature. Illustrative analogies work in one direction. Little light is shed on the Alps by virtue of having their farthest reaches described as remote; Simmel’s point is to invite us to view landscape painting in terms of its distance from, rather than proximity to, nature. Without this treatment, the analogy might disturb, but could not enliven, the discussion.

Elsewhere, Simmel introduces analogies that work *substantively*. These analogies ‘slide’ against each other, making contact at different points and thereby illuminating each other in varying ways. Simmel characterizes credit-money as the example *par excellence* of the prioritization of means over ends, or of means *becoming* ends. His analogy between credit-money and the build-up of state military power initially jars:

The regular army is a mere preparation, a latent energy, a contingency, whose ultimate goal and purpose not only very rarely materializes but is also avoided at all costs. Indeed, the enormous buildup of military forces is praised as the only means of preventing their explosion.

(2004 [1907]: 481)

The analogy suggests that military power involves latency, potential and energy, not only deterrence. Credit-money, likewise, ceases to be distinguished by its detachment from metal, as it normally was at the time Simmel was writing.⁵⁰ It is characterized instead by its expression of money’s status as a pure form of empowerment (2004 [1907]: 211). Simmel’s substantive analogies work as parallel ideas passing before the mind’s eye, switching back and forth. They encourage us to interpret rather than to see, enticing us into active thought.

According to Kracauer, *PM* realizes the concept of social totality more successfully than any of Simmel's other works. Kracauer's confrontation with *PM* is powerfully reminiscent of Goethe's confrontation with the Palermo garden:

Nowhere else does Simmel develop such a comprehensive image of the interlocking and entwining of phenomena. He clearly elaborates the essence of these phenomena, only to dissolve it immediately in a multitude of relations; he shows how they determine one another and uncovers the many inherent meanings they have in common ... The inexhaustible mass of interspersed analogies points repeatedly to the unified core idea of the entire work, which can also be briefly formulated as follows: every point in the totality is accessible from every other point; one phenomena carries and supports another; there is nothing absolute that exists outside any links to the remaining phenomena and that has validity in and for itself.

(1995: 249–50)

Kracauer conveys the *flatness* of Simmel's presentation.⁵¹ Simmel refuses to construct a hierarchy in the arrangement of analogies, and, above all, to hierarchize those that work substantively. Yet this flatness is also deceiving: the images that the analogies express are not uniform in their *distance* from the eye. Simmel's arrangement flattens, but does not *homogenize*. His analogies enable us to view money up close and from afar, major organs intermingling with unnamed tissue.

Flatness – here conceived as the absence of any ranking of explanatory factors – is *generated* by analogical thinking and *conveyed* by analogical presentation. In Simmel's writing, it is preferable to the construction of a theory seeking to explain a phenomenon when only a provisional description is possible. This is vital when we consider Simmel's recourse to the social totality. This concept should remain beyond the horizon of *PM* as 'unknowable'. If it becomes an organizing principle and an overarching form, it immobilizes the analogical. We should regard the concept of social totality in *PM* with as much caution as Section N in *AP*. In a review of the English translation, Alan Ryan writes that the text 'sparkles' (see blurb on book jacket). Wrench out the universalizing trend, and it may begin to shimmer.

Concluding Remarks

Benjamin alleges that Goethe conflates 'archetype' with 'model'. This conflation arises out of Goethe's inability to explain the synthesis between an object as *perceived*, on the one hand (Interpretation 1 of the primal plant), and as *intuited*, on the other (Interpretation 2). 'Instead of resorting to philosophical investigation, his studies seek in vain through experiments to furnish empirical evidence for the identity of both spheres ... the *ur*-phenomenon as archetype [*Urbild*] too often turned into nature as model [*Vorbild*]' (Benjamin, 1996c [1924–5]: 314–15). Benjamin's claim hinges on a statement about perception. He contends that the

Urphänomen only presents itself to perception in art, whereas in science *ideas* predominate, which are capable ‘of illuminating the object of perception but never of transforming it in intuition’ (1996c [1924–5]: 315).⁵² Benjamin’s own preoccupation with primal *images* in *AP* is partly explained by this distinction. It also invites us to ask what Goethe was confronting in the Palermo public gardens. Nature in its rawest form as Goethe suggests,⁵³ or at its most *stylized*, as Simmel would have it?

The primal plant enables Goethe to grasp diversity and change. As an archetype, it is not of itself a representation. It is a creature of comparison. The writings of Simmel and Benjamin persuade – and refresh⁵⁴ – most when the mode of presentation combines with substance. Adorno criticizes Benjamin for constructing an ‘extremely objectivistic and accordingly universalistic metaphysics of language that agrees almost literally with Wittgenstein’s famous maxim’ (1997 [1972]: 205). The maxim which Adorno refers to is probably ‘What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence’ (1961 [1921]: §7).⁵⁵ Adorno’s criticism is prompted by a letter from Benjamin that was written, as its recipient concedes, five years before the *Tractatus* was published. It is possible that if he had cited the *Tractatus* in *AP*, Benjamin might have selected: ‘The picture is a fact’ (1961 [1921]: §2.141) – or perhaps: ‘The picture, however, cannot represent its form of representation; it shows it forth’ (1961 [1921]: §2.172). Both citations would push the limits of *AP*’s monads. When read in the light of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, they richly suggest what Benjamin might have meant when he suggested that Goethe in Palermo was confronting not raw nature, nor stylized nature, but nature as a ‘chaos of symbols’ (1996c [1924–5]: 315).

Notes

I would like to thank Susanne Weber for all original translations from German.

1. I propose the following three interpretations only as possible – but by no means definitive – understandings of the idea of the *Urpflanze*. *Italienische Reise* was written when Goethe was preparing his scientific writings for publication, and it seems likely that this coloured his retrospective account of its ‘discovery’; Boyle explicitly questions whether the later account can be trusted (1991: 472). Likewise, Steigerwald writes of *Italienische Reise* that, ‘since he subsequently destroyed most of the documents he used in its writing, it cannot be known to what extent it is a reliable account of his actual experiences and thoughts at the time’ (2002: 291). Neither am I suggesting that Goethe’s idea was original. As Nisbet writes, ‘Goethe’s theories were not arrived at independently, but are the product of traditions which still flourished in the science of his day and have since died out or lost their distinct identity’ (1972: ix). Regarding the idea of the *Urpflanze* (and the ‘equivalent’ theory of the archetypal animal), Nisbet adds: ‘Several writers, including Diderot and Robinet, had postulated a prototype for *all* natural forms, and Buffon and Herder, somewhat more realistically, had maintained that the animals, particularly the vertebrates, are all constructed on a single model’ (1972: 18).
2. The metamorphosis of plants and animals, respectively.
3. Goethe’s sympathy with Kant’s philosophy stemmed from his reading of *The Critique of Judgement*. This suggests that the ‘regulative ideal’ that Goethe has in mind for the primal plant

is not the regulative employment of reason – which Kant reworks after *The Critique of Pure Reason* – but rather the regulative employment of *judgement*, particularly teleological judgements such as those found in biological science (Gardner, 1999: 222).

4. As Cassirer notes, such 'a regulative principle ... is necessary for the use of experience itself, completing it and giving it a systematic unity' (1945: 74–5).
5. 'As there seemed no possibility of preserving this marvellous creation, I decided to make a drawing of it' (Goethe, 1962: 368).
6. Morphology can be defined as 'that branch of biology which is concerned with the form of animals and plants, and of the structures, homologies, and metamorphoses which govern or influence that form'. In this paper, however, I am using the following definition: 'Shape, form, external structure or arrangement, especially as an object of study or classification' (both *OED*). Boyle states that Goethe coined the term, and cites probably his earliest attempt to define it:

Morphology rests on the conviction that everything that is must also manifest and show itself. ... The organic, the vegetable, the animal, the human, all manifests itself, appears as what it is, to our inner and outer sense. Form is something mobile, that comes into being and passes away.

(2000: 459)

As I understand it, 'morphology' yields both a system of analogical presentation and a process of analogical reasoning. It is open to question how to treat these slightly different senses of 'morphology'. Here, by 'analogical presentation and/or representation', I refer to a particular means of laying material 'open to view'. By 'analogical thinking or reasoning', on the other hand, I refer to the way in which problems and questions are *thought through*.

7. *Analogy* is 'the process of reasoning from parallel cases', whereas *simile* is 'a comparison of one thing with another, especially as an ornament in poetry or rhetoric' (both *OED*). These definitions portray simile as more fleeting, analogy as more substantial. While both are species of comparison, analogy is a broader category, which is usually understood to contain simile. I do not presuppose a singular interpretation of what 'thinking by analogy' entails. In sociology, Simmel comes to mind as the exemplar of this technique. He argues that 'the introduction of a new perspective on facts must support the different sites of its method through analogies derived from established fields' (1995 [1908]: 39). As Kracauer writes, 'Simmel is indefatigable when it comes to establishing analogies' (1995: 235). Kracauer distinguishes between *analogy* and *metaphor*: analogy consists of a comparison between the functions, types or form of phenomena that are held to be parallel, whereas metaphor gives a sensuous expression to the meaning a phenomenon has for us. 'Analogy is either true or false, whereas metaphor is either beautiful or ugly' (1995: 236). Besides Simmel, many other sociologists have used analogy in one way or another: for example, Durkheim, Parsons and Luhmann. Whether or not these treatments of analogy, which appear to be markedly different from that of Simmel, should be regarded as alternative ways of 'thinking by analogy' or merely as different uses of analogy is open to question. Simmel's employment of analogy connects his intellectual methodology intimately with the mode by which he presents his arguments. I doubt that the same could be said of the others.
8. Boyle draws a clear line between them, suggesting that after 1787 'it will take Goethe another three years to formulate his botanical principles, and by then the concept of the primal plant will be practically forgotten' (1991: 501).
9. Boyle describes the essay in which the idea first appears as 'Goethe's response to the challenge of post-Kantian *Naturphilosophie*' (2000: 597).

10. Nisbet, for example, argues that although the two terms are not equivalent – ‘since the “Urphänomen” is an observable phenomenon, such as the magnet, whereas the “Typus” [i.e. the equivalent term for *Urpflanze* within the animal kingdom] is an ideal model to which no empirical instance conforms absolutely’ – the *Urphänomen* evolved out of the earlier term, and ‘it is possible to follow exactly how Goethe transformed the one idea into the other’ (1972: 39). Stephenson appears to agree, stating that *Urphänomen* was Goethe’s ‘favoured term’ for objects of ‘higher perception’ such as *Urform* and *Urpflanze* (1995: 12–13).

11. In regard to the ‘pure phenomenon’ as Goethe described it in 1798, Boyle writes:

Not, of course, that theory or abstraction has taken the place of the object: we are still dealing with ‘phenomena’, with what we know directly through our senses. But neither can this ‘pure phenomena’ ever be a matter of a momentary, unadulterated vision; rather it is what the educated and active mind learns to see in a long series, perhaps a lifetime, of manifestations through and behind the chance distortions of the empirical, which in practice will never be absent.

(2000: 598)

12. ‘Origin – it is, in effect, the concept of *Ur*-phenomenon extracted from the pagan context of nature and brought into the Jewish contexts of history. Now, in my work on the arcades, I am equally concerned with fathoming an origin’ (*AP*, N2a, 4).

13. *Urphänomen* is also rendered in *PM* as ‘a basic feature [*Urphänomen*] of the mind in its form and personality (2004 [1907]: 64), and (in relation to the sensation of total qualities of pleasure or pain) as ‘the original phenomenon [*Urphänomen*], whose components cannot be compared with each other because this would require a measure independent of both and yet comprehending both equally’ (2004 [1907]: 140).

14. N3a, 2 of *AP* sheds some light on the notion of *Urgeschichte*, suggesting that it does not consist of forms ‘recovered among the inventory of the nineteenth century’, but rather of an ‘originary form of primal history’, that is, a form ‘in which the whole of primal history groups itself anew in images appropriate to that century’.

15. Besides arguing that ‘not a single line of these investigations is meant to be about economics’ (2004 [1907]: 54), Simmel writes that

... money is simply a means, a material or an example for the *presentation* of relations that exist between the most superficial, ‘realistic’ and fortuitous phenomena and the most idealized powers of existence, the most profound currents of individual life and history.

(2004 [1907]: 55, my italics)

16. Frisby – one of the translators of the English edition of *PM* – notes that the book ‘is not written in the style of an academic treatise, but in a freer style of presentation that Simmel had already established in his dissertation’. I am persuaded by Frisby’s sense of a text in ‘freestyle’, but slightly less by the observation that ‘Simmel’s writing, *like poetry*, requires no footnotes’ (2004a [1978]: 5, my italics). A text in freestyle that requires no footnotes: an essay, perhaps?

17. That this conflicts with Goethe’s remarks about forging the primal plant into a complete system underlines the uncertainty of his own interpretation of the primal plant.

18. By ‘closure’ I do not mean the status of operational autonomy attained by an autopoietic system (for example, Maturana and Varela, 1980). Rather, the term as I am using it refers to a conception

of theory which allows only a singular interpretation of an object of study or which, as Goethe would have it, seeks to provide ultimate solutions.

19. In 'Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History"', Benjamin identifies 'the three most important positions of historicism' as: first, the idea of universal history, that is, the notion that 'the history of humanity is composed of peoples'; second, the idea that history can be narrated; and, third, the presentation of history in 'empathy with the victor' (2003d [1940]: 406). His rejection of the idea of universal history expresses a fundamental critique of three 'schools' of historical thought: historicism, the Social Democratic Left and historical materialism in its 'vulgar' form. According to Benjamin, these schools are bound together by their acceptance of a chronological view of time: respectively, as a linear chain of events, a form of progress driven by technology, and a series of defeats that constitute the price that has to be paid for the inevitable victory of the workers' movement.
20. This is the point Benjamin makes in Thesis VII of 'On the Concept of History': 'With whom does historicism actually sympathize? The answer is inevitable: with the victor' (Benjamin, 2003d [1940]: 391). (By contrast, in the same thesis, the task of historical materialism is to 'brush history against the grain'.) For Benjamin, all of these historical perspectives, despite substantive differences between them, share an innate complicity with fascism. Fascism is not merely a temporary aberration from the ongoing march of progress, moreover, but rather the latest and most brutal manifestation of a particular representation of history according to an underlying conception of historical time that is both chronological and cumulative. Neither the representations of history that Benjamin has in mind when he refers to universal history, nor the conception of historical time that unifies these representations, leaves history itself unscathed. Both serve to perpetuate historical brutality.
21. Benjamin argues that historiography can avoid the illusion of continuity only if it resists forcing history into a homogeneous temporal framework. He describes such a framework in terms of the notion of 'empty time'. In its form, historicism is 'empty' because it consists merely of quantitative transitions, that is to say, additions of facts laid out on an infinite temporal continuum. This, for Benjamin, is all that our understanding of progress really amounts to: a succession of facts.
22. He therefore seeks to account for 'all the toughness and elasticity, all the colour and consistency of social life, that it so striking and yet so mysterious' (1964 [1950]: 10).
23. In addition, Simmel's analyses disrupt such distinctions as we conventionally understand them. As Kracauer writes: 'It is very indicative that in his journey through the world he always strives to bring together the things that are furthest apart' (1995: 250).
24. Oakes defines *forms* as 'the a priori categories of the mind', and *content* (or *process*) as 'the raw material of events, actions, and experiences' (1980: 3–4). However, he adds that 'Simmel's own remarks on form are metaphorical and illustrative rather than analytical', hence the concept of form is 'opaque and evasive, but also essential and axiomatic' (1980: 9). A list of *kinds* of form in Simmel: category; a collection of categories; languages into which the world is translated; a general schema; a taxonomy; a system of classification; a conceptual scheme; and an epistemological category. Oakes adds that the concept of form in Simmel's writing has at least three referents: as a constitutive *category*; as a constitutive *activity*; and as a *product* of constitutive activity (1980: 9–10).
25. Perhaps the same might be said of Weber's own use of concepts in *Economy and Society*. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

26. Note that Simmel goes on to oppose this conception of sociology as an 'erroneous exaggeration' – 'all this conception does is to yield a new common name for all the branches of knowledge that will continue to exist anyway, unperturbed and autonomous, with all their specific contents and nomenclatures, tendencies and methods' (1964 [1950]: 12).
27. In 'Sociology of the Senses', Simmel draws an analogy with the form of the body, and suggests that this is derived from the 'innumerable and ceaseless interactions between ... cells'. These cells are the 'smallest elements' – 'How they adhere to one another or destroy each other, how they assimilate or chemically influence one another – only this gradually permits one to see how the body shapes, maintains or changes its form' (1997 [1907]: 109).
28. Adorno describes Benjamin's approach as aiming 'to eliminate all overt commentary and to have the meanings emerge solely through a shock-like montage of the material. ... His magnum opus, the crowning of his antisubjectivism, was to consist solely of citations' (1981 [1967]: 239, cited in Teidemann, 1999: 1013 n. 6). Tiedemann disagrees, referring to letters which contain no reference to it: he specifically argues that Benjamin did not intend 'a montage of quotations' (Benjamin, 1999f: 1013 n. 6).
29. The historiographical principles at stake here can be better understood in relation Benjamin's approach to criticism. In 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', he argues that Goethe's notion of the 'ideal' of art 'is, in its epistemological determination, an "idea" in the Platonic sense; in its sphere, embraced in art, is unity and the absence of beginning, the Eleatic stasis' (1996b [1920]: 181). Benjamin likens the 'idea' in this context to an archetype, but in a highly specific sense:

In relation to the ideal, the single work remains, as it were, a torso. It is an individuated endeavour to represent the archetype; only as a prototype can it last with others of its sort, but they can never vitally coalesce into the unity of the ideal itself.

(1996b [1920]: 181)

Benjamin's description of the individual work as a 'torso', or fragment, in relation to the idea resembles his treatment of the idea as monadological in his *Trauerspiel* study, as well as his use of constellations and stars as a recurrent metaphor. Goethe's notion of the *Urphänomen* also exemplifies this 'idea'. See notes 34 and 45, respectively, for further clarification on 'constellation' and 'ideas'.

30. In 'The Storyteller', Benjamin points to a key difference between the historian and the storyteller or chronicler: 'The historian's task is to *explain* in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with simply *displaying* them as models of the course of the world' (2002a [1936]: 152, second emphasis added).
31. Many of the texts Benjamin cites refer to images, of course.
32. In German, *Zitieren*, 'to cite', can also mean to summon, although this is becoming rare. If *zitieren* or *herbeizitieren* is used, the word has connotations of sanctioning or punishing.
33. 'It belongs to the concept of citation ... that the historical object in each case is torn from its context' (1999f: N11, 3).
34. In the *Trauerspiel* study, Benjamin states that it is through a particular arrangement of concepts that ideas can manifest themselves. He calls this arrangement a *constellation*, and likens it to a grouping of stars:

Ideas are timeless constellations, and by virtue of the elements' being seen as points in such constellations, phenomena are subdivided and at the same time redeemed, so that those

elements which it is the function of the concept to elicit from phenomena are most clearly evident at the extremes.

(1998: 34–5)

35. Benjamin is drawn to surrealist images partly because of their *corporeal* power. This lies behind an approach for which Benjamin himself coined the term *anthropological materialism*. He refers to anthropological materialism specifically in 'Surrealism'. This is in the context of an argument that revolution cannot be triggered merely by collectivizing the forces of production but requires a physical transformation within the collectivity itself:

Only when in technology body and image space so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the Communist Manifesto. For the moment, only the surrealists have understood its present commands.

(1999a [1929]: 217–18)

With Proust too, it is partly the *bodily* connotations of involuntary memory which intrigue Benjamin:

Proust's work *A la Recherche du temps perdu* may be regarded as an attempt to produce experience, as Bergson imagines it, in a synthetic way under today's social conditions, for there is less and less hope that it will come into being in a natural way.

(2003b [1940]: 315)

36. There is, perhaps, a subtle affinity between the form of revolutionary experience that Benjamin discovers in surrealism and the epistemological position that he sets out in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to his *Trauerspiel* study. In relation to both the art-work and experience, Benjamin maintains that a phenomenon can be 'elevated' by virtue of its having been mortified and reconfigured from within. Analogously to the *mortification* and *rescue* of the art-work, Benjamin views the destructiveness of surrealism – and, indeed, of Baudelaire's allegories – as a precondition for a *heightening of conscious experience*. In particular, it is the interplay *between* destructiveness and revolutionary nihilism which draws Benjamin to surrealism: 'No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution – not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism' (1999a [1929]: 210). Nevertheless, Benjamin suggests that profane illumination must not lead simply to *revolt* but to *revolution*. That is to say, it must lead to something beyond revolutionary consciousness itself. This suggests that the experience of intoxication that Benjamin identifies in surrealism is a *necessary* condition for revolution, but not a *sufficient* one. Intoxication alone leads merely to 'a praxis oscillating between fitness exercises and celebration in advance' (1999a [1929]: 216).
37. He also writes of drawing a diagram of his life that would resemble a labyrinth whose entrances resemble 'primal acquaintances' – 'So many primal relationships, so many entrances to the maze' (1999d [1932]: 614) Regarding Proust, Benjamin suggests that even the *arrangement* of Proust's writing evokes the most important qualities of remembrance: '... the laws of remembrance were operative even within the confines of the work' (1999b [1929]: 238). Proust's own proofreading manuscripts were notoriously condensed: 'The galleys always came back covered with writing to the edge of the page, but not a single misprint had been corrected; all available space had been used for fresh text' (1999b [1929]: 238). In Latin, *textum* means 'web', and Proust captures the sense in which memory *weaves* events into a particular unity. Benjamin suggests that remembrance plays the role of the *actus purus* in relation to the arrangement of Proust's text: 'One may even say that the intermittences of author and plot are only the reverse of the continuum of memory, the figure on the back side of the carpet' (1999b [1929]: 238). Intriguingly, Simmel uses the same term – *actus purus* – to describe money (2004 [1907]: 511).

38. He argues that sociologists do not face a choice between the discovery of 'timelessly valid laws' or 'unique historical processes' (1971 [1910]: 28). Both are valid – the first for the induction of uniformity or regularity, the latter for understanding historical change.
39. Crucially, then, the collective frame of reference should not be regarded as an abstraction from the 'reality' of personal cognition, or the individual frame of reference. Rather, both frames, equally, are *interpretations* of the real (1964 [1950]: 8–9).
40. 'This is the work of *la mémoire involontaire*, the rejuvenating force which is a match for the inexorable process of aging. When that which has been is reflected in the dewy fresh "instant," a painful shock of rejuvenation pulls it together once more' (1999b [1929]: 244).
41. In other words, history is not a pre-formed object, or the wilful invention of its chronicler. This bears comparison with Simmel's remarks in 'Philosophie der Landschaft' ('The Philosophy of Landscape') (1913). He suggests that 'landscape is not given by the fact that a number of things are spread out next to each other on a piece of land and are viewed "immediately" ' – rather, landscape emerges out of a 'peculiar process of the mind which creates a landscape out of all of this through several of its presuppositions and forms'.
42. Although he does cite Leibniz in a letter to Florens Christian Rang –

The task of philosophy is to name the idea, as Adam named nature, in order to overcome the works, which are to be seen as nature returned. – Leibniz's entire way of thinking, his idea of the monad, which I adopt for my definition of ideas ... seems to me to comprise the *summa* of a theory of ideas. The task of interpreting works of art is to concentrate creaturely life in ideas.
(in Benjamin, 1996e: 389)

Benjamin also cites Leibniz in the *Trauerspiel* study, where he writes:

The idea is a monad – the pre-stabilized representation of phenomena resides within it, as in their objective interpretation. ... The idea is a monad – that means briefly: every idea contains the image of the world. The purpose of the representation of the idea is nothing less than an abbreviated outline of this image of the world.
(1998 [1928]: 47–8)

Both references lend support to my interpretation of Benjamin's references to 'monadological structure' in *AP*.

43. *Aufhebung* – repeal, suspension.
44. It might also be taken to suggest that he fails, in the end, to escape the *telos* of historical materialism.
45. Ideas, Benjamin writes, 'are not so much given in a primordial language as in a primordial form of perception, in which words possess their own nobility as named, *unimpaired by cognitive meaning*' (1998 [1928]: 36, italics added). It is by virtue of this that ideas are able to enter into 'harmonious relationship' with each other without losing their integrity as distinctive entities: 'Every idea is a sun and is related to other ideas just as suns are related to each other' (1998 [1928]: 37). In his earlier essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' (1996a [1916]), Benjamin argues that in its 'pure' state, language symbolizes the non-communicable, namely, that which is beyond communication. Here in the *Trauerspiel* study, he compares the idea to the primordial name. God's creative words can 'stand up on their own in perfect isolation, as mere [that is, signifying] words never can' (1998 [1928]: 37).

46. This suggests that allegory, more perhaps than montage, might hold the key to the arrangements of citations within *AP*, and sheds light on Baudelaire's increasing significance for that project. 'The Baudelairean allegory – unlike the Baroque allegory – bears traces of the rage needed to break into this world, to lay waste its harmonious structures,' Benjamin writes in 'Central Park' (2003a [1939]: 174).
47. 'There were panoramas, dioramas, cosmoramas, diaphoramas, navaloramas, pleoramas ... fantoscope[s], fantasma-parastases, phantasmagorical and fantasmaparastatic *experiences*, picturesque journeys in a room, georamas; optical picturesques, cinéoramas, phanoramas, steroramas, cycloramas, *panorama dramatique*' (1999f: Q1, 1).
48. 'To shine with a tremulous or flickering light; to gleam faintly' (*OED*).
49. This enigmatic claim is partly illuminated in a four-page self-advertisement for *PM* which Simmel published in 1901:

I extend the claim of historical materialism, which allows all forms and contents of culture to emerge out of the prevailing economic relations, by evidence that the economic valuation and movements are, for their part, the expression of more deeply lying currents of individual and societal spirit [*Geist*].

(cited in Frisby, 2004b: 520)

50. Durkheim's review of *PM* alleges that Simmel fails to distinguish between metallic and paper money (Durkheim, 1978 [1900–01]: 159). The analogy here suggests that the criticism is unjustified.
51. Kracauer notes that Simmel tends to treat his objects of study as 'mere examples', and this is why his works manifest 'such a strongly developed uniform quality' (1995: 251). The web that Simmel spins 'is not constructed according to a plan, like a firmly established system of thought; instead, it has no other purpose than to be there and to testify through its very existence to the interconnectedness of all things' (1995: 252).
52. Benjamin adds that '*ur*-phenomena do not exist before art; they subsist within it. By rights, they can never provide standards of measurement' (1996c [1924–5]: 315).
53. Goethe is referring to the idea of nature *in itself*:

The highest thing would be to understand that everything factual is already theory. The blue of the sky reveals to us the fundamental law of chromatics. Only one must not look for anything behind the phenomena; they are themselves the doctrine.

(Benjamin, 1996b [1920]: 192 n. 149)

54. Even Weber concedes that Simmel's writing is also 'brilliant' and inimitable, and that his work is full of 'new theoretical ideas' and 'subtle observations', containing 'a wealth of stimulation for one's own further thought' (1981: 78) – albeit it not by virtue of the *arrangement* of the ideas.
55. The passage closes with the 'decisive proviso that the ontological asceticism of language is the only way to say the unutterable' (Adorno, 1997 [1972]: 205). It seems likely that Adorno has the final maxim the *Tractatus* in mind because this passage (from *Aesthetic Theory*) corresponds to several other of Adorno's critical remarks on Wittgenstein (for example, Adorno, 2003 [1973]: 81).

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Nigel Dodd is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the London School of Economics. He is author of *The Sociology of Money* (Polity, 1994) and *Social Theory and Modernity* (Polity, 1999), as well as numerous articles on the sociology of money and economic sociology – most recently 'Reinventing Monies in Europe' (*Economy and Society*, November 2005). He is currently writing a book which explores the work of Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault for their conceptions of time and historiography.

Address: London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK.
[email: n.b.dodd@lse.ac.uk]