

years now: the great philosophical work that has no end in view but itself, that makes no concessions to anybody, and that, in its significance, will compensate you for so much that has happened in recent years."

I know that this is the language of truest friendship—no less so than that which led you to say that you would regard it as a real misfortune if Brecht were to gain any influence over this work. With regard to that, please allow me to say the following:

If I have ever put into practice a motto from Gracián—"In all things seek to make time your ally"—it was in the way I have proceeded with this work.<sup>4</sup> It began with Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*—I could never read more than two or three pages of this on going to bed, because my heart began beating so fast that I had to put it aside.<sup>5</sup> What a warning! What a hint of the years and years I would have to put between myself and such reading. And yet the earliest notes and sketches for the Arcades Project date from that time.<sup>6</sup>—Then came the Berlin years, when what was best in my friendship with Hessel was nourished by conversations about the Arcades Project.<sup>7</sup> The subtitle "A Dialectical Fairyland"—now discarded—originated then. This subtitle hints at the rhapsodic character of the presentation I had in mind at that time, the relics of which—I now realize—could not adequately ground the work's form and language. But at that time I was also philosophizing in a blithely archaic way, still ensnared in nature. It was the conversations with you in Frankfurt, especially the "historic" discussion in the "Schweizerhäuschen," and then the truly historic ones around the table with you, Asja, Felizitas, and Horkheimer, which brought that period to an end.<sup>8</sup> Rhapsodic naïveté had had its day. The forced development of this Romantic mode made it more quickly obsolete, but at that time, and for years afterward, I had no inking of any other. In addition, those years marked the beginning of my outward difficulties, which have made it seem providential that my inner ones had accustomed me to a temporizing, dilatory manner of working. Then came the decisive meeting with Brecht, which severely exacerbated all the aporias inherent in this work, though I still did not become estranged from it. Yet any significance this recent period might have had for the work—and it was far from slight—could not be given form until the limits of that significance had become clear to me. Any "directives" from that quarter thus remained without effect.

You, especially, will easily see how the factors I have sketched above are precipitated in the exposé, to which I shall just add these few words. Of course, the exposé does not yet perfectly embody my ideas, although it does not conflict with them at any point. Just as, in the "Baroque" book [*Origin of the German Trauerspiel*], the self-contained exposition of the epistemological premises followed their probative formulation in the material itself, the same will be the case here. But this time I cannot guarantee that it will take the form of a separate chapter—whether at the end or at the beginning.

## Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on the Essay "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century"

Paris  
May 31, 1935

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

Although these lines have been a bit slow in coming, they will, in conjunction with the enclosed exposé,<sup>1</sup> give you the fullest account of my work, and of my inward and outward state.

Before saying a few words about the content of the exposé, I shall touch on its role in my relations with the Institute. This is quickly done. For that role, so far, does not go beyond the fact that I first received the impulse to write the piece in a conversation with Pollock at the end of April.<sup>2</sup> It goes without saying that the source of this impulse was external and disparate. But for this very reason it was able to shake up a mass of material that I had been carefully protecting from outside influences for so many years. And that shock made crystallization possible. I would emphasize most strongly that this impulse, which has been a legitimate and fertile element in the whole economy of the work, is the only external, heterogeneous factor that has played any significant part in it. I am prompted to emphasize this by the concerns expressed in your letter—concerns which I take to be an understandable expression of friendly interest, and also—after such a long interruption of a dialogue lasting years—as inevitable. Just this morning these same concerns found an echo in a letter I received from Felizitas.<sup>3</sup>

"I am amazed that Fritz [Pollock] is interested in the sketches. Are you really thinking of writing for the journal? I think you would be taking a terrible risk in doing so; there is not much latitude allowed, and you would never be able to produce what your true friends have been awaiting for

This question remains open. But the exposé does contain important indications of the premises themselves, which you above all will be able to discern, seeing that they are motifs you touched on in your last letter. Moreover, in a way surprising even to me, the analogies between this book and the Baroque book now emerge far more clearly than at any earlier stage of the plan. You must allow me to see this as an especially significant confirmation of the process of remelting by which the whole mass of ideas, originally driven by metaphysics, has reached a state of aggregation in which the world of dialectical images is secured against any objections provoked by metaphysics.

At this stage in the process (for the first time, I admit), I can calmly await anything that may be mobilized against my method by orthodox Marxism. I believe, indeed, that in the long run I shall have a strong position in the Marxist debate, if only because the fundamental question of the historical image is being dealt with here for the first time in all its implications. And as the philosophy of a work depends not only on its terminology but also on its standpoint, I feel confident that this is the exposé of the "great philosophical work" Felizitas speaks of, even though I'm not too attached to that designation. As you know, my main concern is with the "primal history [*Urgeschichte*] of the nineteenth century."

In this work I see the real—if not the only—reason not to lose courage in the struggle for existence. That I can write it only in Paris, from the first word to the last, is entirely clear to me now, despite the great mass of preliminary work supporting it. Naturally, it can first be written only in Germany. My minimum expenditure in Paris is one thousand francs per month; Pollock made this sum available to me in May, and I shall receive the same amount for June. But to be able to go on working, I need this amount over an extended period. There are difficulties enough, in any case; violent misgraines frequently remind me how precarious my existence is. Whether and under what heading the Institute can take an interest in the work, and whether it might be necessary to supplement this interest with other studies—perhaps you will be able to clarify that with Pollock better than I. I'm willing to take on any assignment; but work of any importance, especially the study on Fuchs, would require that I put aside the Arcades while writing it. (I would prefer not to take up the work on *Die neue Zeit* at present. More on that later.)<sup>9</sup>

I had so little confidence that the work "as actually conceived" could be published by the Institute that just this April I orally assured Pollock of the contrary. But whether the new and far-reaching sociological perspectives, which provide a secure framework for the work's interpretive tensions, could now justify involvement by the Institute is a different question. Without such involvement the work could not be realized in this or any other form, since a hiatus between plan and execution at this stage would proba-

bly jeopardize any later realization very seriously. At any rate, the outline contains—not at every point, to be sure, but at those points which are decisive for me—definitions of the philosophical concepts essential to such a realization. You, in particular, will miss a number of keywords—"plush," "boredom," the definition of "phantasmagoria"—but these motifs need only be given their place. In some cases, their elaboration is well advanced but does not belong in this exposé. The reason has to do less with the outward function of the exposé than with the inner one, which was to permeate the old, established components with the new ones I have acquired over the years.

Please do not show the attached sketch to anyone—no exceptions!—and return it to me as soon as possible. It is intended only for my own studies. Another, which I shall finish shortly and make several copies of, will reach you later.

San Remo is unlikely to be possible as a meeting place for us this year.<sup>10</sup> Couldn't you arrange to travel from Oxford to Berlin via Paris? Please give this careful consideration!

I would very much like to see [Lotte] Lenya and Max Ernst.<sup>11</sup> If you can arrange anything, you can be sure of my agreement.

I'm delighted to hear that you expect to be able to write your study in the foreseeable future.<sup>12</sup> Must I wait until our meeting to find out more about it?

I have not yet made up my mind to write Else Herzberger myself.<sup>13</sup> I don't know if I can put it off much longer.

With warmest regards,  
Walter Benjamin

Hornberg im Schwarzwald  
August 2-4, 1935

Dear Herr Benjamin,

Let me try, at last, to say something about your exposé, which I have studied in great detail and have again discussed with Felizitas, whose views are fully reflected in this reply. It seems to me in keeping with the importance of the subject—which, as you know, I regard extremely highly—if I speak with complete frankness and proceed without preamble to the central questions, which I'm sure I can view as central in the same sense for both of us. But before embarking on the critical discussion, I would say that the exposé seems to me full of extremely important conceptions—however inadequately they can be conveyed by an outline or a "sequence of ideas," es-

pecially given your manner of working. As examples of these important conceptions, I shall single out only the magnificent passage on dwelling as a leaving of traces, the crucial statements on the collector and on the liberation of things from the curse of being useful, and the dialectical approach to Haussmann. Likewise, the sketch of the chapter on Baudelaire seems to me wholly successful as an interpretation of the poet, as does the formulation of the category of *nouveauté* (pages 40–41).<sup>14</sup>

You will guess from this—and will hardly have expected otherwise in any case—that I am again concerned about the complex delineated by the keywords “primal history [*Urgeschichte*] of the nineteenth century,” “dialectical image,” “configuration of myth and modernity.” If I disregard here the distinction between “material” and “epistemological” questions, this may not be in keeping with the outward arrangement of the exposé but is undoubtedly consistent with its philosophic core, whose movement is intended to abolish such an opposition—just as happens, of course, in the two established modern versions of the dialectic. Let me take the motto on page 33 as my starting point: “Chaque époque rêve la suivante” (“Each epoch dreams the one to follow”). This seems to me an important instrument, since all the motifs of the theory of the dialectical image which seem to me, in principle, open to criticism—as *undialectical*—crystallize around this proposition. Thus, the elimination of this proposition might result in a correction of the theory. For it implies three things: the conception of the dialectical image as belonging to the content of consciousness, even if a collective consciousness; its linear—I would almost say, historical-development—relation to the future as utopia; and the notion of the “epoch” as, precisely, the self-contained subject corresponding to this particular content of consciousness. Now, it seems to me of utmost importance not only that this version of the dialectical image, which may be called an immanent version, threatens the original power of the concept (which was a theological power)—causing a simplification detrimental not to subjective nuances but to the truth content itself—but that, precisely in so doing, it fails to take account of the social movement enacted through contradiction, for the sake of which you sacrifice theology.

If you locate the dialectical image in consciousness as “dream,” not only has the concept thereby become disenchanted and commonplace, but it has also forfeited its objective authority, which might legitimate it from a materialist standpoint. The fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness, but is dialectical in the crucial sense that it produces consciousness. This means, however, that consciousness or the unconscious cannot simply reflect it as dream, but responds to it equally with desire and fear. But through the mirror-realism (*sit venia verbo*),<sup>15</sup> which informs the present immanent version of the dialectical image, precisely this dialectical power of the fetish character is lost. To revert to the language of the splen-

did first sketch of the Arcades:<sup>16</sup> if the dialectical image is nothing but the mode of apprehension of the fetish character in the collective consciousness, then the Saint-Simonian conception of the commodified world as utopia might well be disclosed, but not its obverse—the dialectical image of the nineteenth century as hell. But only the latter could put the image of the Golden Age in its proper place, and this double meaning—of underworld and Arcadia—might prove conclusive for an interpretation of Offenbach in particular; both of these are explicit categories in his work and can be traced even in the details of his instrumentation. Thus, the discarding of the category of hell found in the first sketch, and especially of the brilliant passage on the gambler—for which the passage on speculation and games of chance is no compensation<sup>17</sup>—seems to me to represent a loss not just of luster, but of dialectical coherence. Now, I would be the last person to discount the relevance of the immanence of consciousness to the nineteenth century. But the concept of the dialectical image cannot be derived from it; rather, immanent consciousness itself is, as an *intérior*, the dialectical image of the nineteenth century as alienation. Here I must stand by the second chapter of *Kierkegaard*,<sup>18</sup> even against this new version. In it I argue that the dialectical image could not be located as dream in consciousness; rather, dream should be turned out [*entäußert*] through dialectical interpretation, and immanent consciousness itself understood as a constellation of the real. Just as if it were the astronomical phase in which hell moves among mankind. Only the star-chart of such wanderings could, it seems to me, open a perspective on history as primal history.—Let me try to formulate the same objection once more, from the diametrically opposite position. In keeping with the conception of the dialectical image as immanent (to which, to use the positive term, I would contrast your earlier concept of it as *model*), you construe the relation of the most ancient to the most modern, which was central to the first sketch, as a utopian orientation toward a “classless society.”<sup>19</sup> In this way the archaic becomes an added, complementary element, instead of being itself the “most modern,” and is thus de-dialecticized. At the same time, however, likewise undialectically, the image of classlessness is back-dated into myth, insofar as it is merely conjured up from the *arche*, instead of becoming truly transparent as a phantasmagoria of hell. The category under which the archaic merges with modernity therefore seems to me far less “the Golden Age” than “catastrophe.” I once noted that the recent past always presents itself as if it had been annihilated by catastrophes. I would say now: but it therefore presents itself as primal history. And here I know myself to be in agreement with the most audacious passage in the *Trauerspiel* book.

If, by its disenchantment, the dialectical image is psychologized as “dream,” it succumbs precisely in this way to the magic of bourgeois psychology. For who is the subject of the dream? In the nineteenth century, cer-

tainly only the individual, from whose dreaming, however, neither the fetish character nor its monuments can be read in a directly mimetic way. For this reason the collective consciousness is brought into play; and in the present version I fear that it cannot be distinguished from Jung's concept. It is open to criticism from both sides: from that of the social process, since it hypostatizes archaic images precisely where dialectical ones are produced by the commodity character—and are produced not within an archaic collective ego, but within alienated bourgeois individuals; and from that of psychology, since, as Horkheimer says, the mass ego exists only in earthquakes and mass catastrophes, while otherwise the objective multiple [*Mehrwert*] exists precisely in individual subjects, and asserts itself against them.<sup>20</sup> The collective consciousness was invented only to distract attention from true objectivity and from the alienated subjectivity that is its correlate. Our task is to polarize and dissolve this "consciousness" dialectically into society and individual, and not to galvanize it as a pictorial correlative of the commodity character. That no differentiation between classes remains in the dreaming collective speaks a clear enough warning.

But, finally, the mythical-archaic category of the "Golden Age"—and this seems to me decisive with respect to society—also has fatal consequences for the category of the commodity itself. If the essential ambiguity of the Golden Age (a term, incidentally, which is greatly in need of theorizing and which certainly cannot stand as it is)—namely, its ambiguity towards Hell—is suppressed, the commodity, as the substance of the age, itself becomes hell and is negated in a way which might indeed make the immediacy of the primal state appear as truth. Thus, the disenchantment of the dialectical image leads straight to unrefracted mythical thinking, and here Klages<sup>21</sup> sounds the alarm as Jung did earlier. Nowhere, however, are remedies more available from the sketch itself than here. This would be the central place for the theory of the collector who frees things from the curse of being useful; this, too, if I understand you rightly, is the place for Haussmann, whose class-consciousness inaugurated the disintegration of the phantasmagoria through the consummation of the commodity character in a Hegelian self-consciousness. To understand the commodity as a dialectical image means to understand it, too, as a motif of its decline and "sublation" [*Aufhebung*], and not as a motif of mere regression to an earlier state. On the one hand, the commodity is the alienated object whose use value withers away; but on the other, it is the enduring object which, having become alien, survives immediately. In commodities, and not directly for human beings, we have the promise of immortality, and the fetish—to take further the relation you rightly initiated between the Arcades Project and the book on the Baroque—is a faithless last image for the nineteenth century, as only the death's head was earlier. Here, it seems to me, is where the decisive epistemological value of Kafka lies, especially that of Odradek<sup>22</sup> as the use-

lessly surviving commodity; Surrealism may reach its apogee in this fairy tale, just as *Trauerspiel* does in *Hamlet*. But with regard to the internal questions of society, this means that the mere concept of use value is by no means sufficient to criticize the commodity character, but simply leads us back to the stage prior to the division of labor. That was always my real reservation regarding Berta,<sup>23</sup> so that both her "collective" and her immediate concept of function have always been suspect to me, as being themselves "regressive." Perhaps you can see from these reflections, whose factual content concerns precisely the categories in the exposé which might accord with Berta's, that my resistance to them is not an insular attempt to rescue autonomous art or any such thing, but relates closely to what seem to me the originary motifs of our philosophical friendship. If I might venture to draw together the arc of my critique, it would have to encompass the extremes. How could it be otherwise? A restitution of theology, or rather a radicalization of the dialectic extending into its incandescent theological core, would necessarily also mean an extreme sharpening of the social—indeed, economic—motif of the dialectic. That, too, would have to be taken historically. The commodity character *specific* for the nineteenth century—that is, the industrial production of commodities—would need to be far more clearly elaborated in material terms, because commodity character and alienation have existed since the infancy of capitalism (in other words, the age of manufacture—the Baroque), just as, on the other hand, the "unity" of the modern age since then has resided precisely in the commodity character. But only a precise definition of the industrial form of the commodity as clearly distinct from the earlier form could fully yield the "primal history" and ontology of the nineteenth century. All allusions to the commodity form "as such" endow this primal history with a metaphorical character which cannot be tolerated in this important case. I surmise that the greatest interpretive results are to be gained if you rely here entirely on your procedure of blind elaboration of the material. If my critique, by contrast, moves in the sphere of a certain theoretical abstraction, that is doubtless necessary; but I know that you will not regard this necessity as a matter of *Weltanschauung*, and thereby dismiss my reservations.

Nevertheless, please allow me to make a few more concrete observations, which of course can mean something only against the foregoing theoretical background. As a title I would suggest "Paris, Hauptstadt des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts," not "die Hauptstadt"—unless, along with hell, the Arcades title is really to be resurrected. The division of chapters according to men does not seem quite felicitous; it tends to impose a systematic exterior architecture which makes me uneasy. Weren't there earlier sections divided according to materials like "plush," "dust," and so on? The connection Fourier-arcade isn't really clear. As an appropriate arrangement here, I could imagine a constellation of the different urban and commodity materials,

which would then be deciphered in the later parts as the dialectical image and the theory relating to it.—In the epigraph on the first page, the word “portique” very beautifully evokes the motif of “antiquity”; regarding the new as the most ancient, perhaps a basic theory of Empire forms could be given here (as is done in the Baroque book for *melancholia*, for example). At any rate, it would be necessary to make the concept of the state as an end in itself in the Empire transparent as mere ideology—as is no doubt implied in the sentences that follow [in the second paragraph of the exposé]. The concept of construction is not illuminated at all at this point, although, as both the alienation *and* the control of material, it is already eminently dialectical, and, in my view, could be expounded dialectically straightforwardly (with a sharp distinction to be drawn between this and the present-day concept of construction; probably the term “engineer,” very characteristic of the nineteenth century, would be a useful implement here). Moreover, the notion of the collective unconscious, which makes its appearance here and on which I have already said something in principle, is not quite transparent in its introduction or its exposition.—Regarding page 33, I would question whether cast iron really is the first artificial building material (bricks!); in general, the use of “first” tends to give me pause. Perhaps the complementary formulation might be added here: “Each epoch dreams of itself as annihilated by catastrophes”—page 33. The formulation that “the new is permeated with the old” seems very dubious to me in the light of my critique of the dialectical image as a regression. It is not that it harks back to the old, but that the new, as semblance and phantasmagoria, is itself the old. Perhaps I might recall here, without being too insistent, a few formulations, also on ambiguity, in the section on the *intérieur* in my *Kierkegaard*. I would add that dialectical images as models are not social products but objective constellations in which the social condition represents itself. Consequently, no ideology or social “accomplishment” of any sort can ever be attributed to the dialectical image. My objection to a merely negative approach to reification—the critique of the “Klages” element in the sketch—is based principally on the passage on the machine on page 34. The overvaluation of machine technology and the machine as such has always been a peculiarity of backward-looking bourgeois theories: the relations of production are obscured by abstract reference to the means of production.—The very important Hegelian concept of the second nature, subsequently taken up by Georg [Lukács]<sup>24</sup> and others, is relevant to pages 34–35. The *diable à Paris* might well escort one to hell.—Regarding page 35: I strongly doubt that the worker is appearing “for the last time” outside his class as part of the setting and so forth.—The idea of a primal history of the feuilleton, on which your “Kraus” has so much to say, is fascinating; this would be the place for Heine.<sup>25</sup> An old expression for journalistic, *Schablonstil* [cliché style], comes to mind here; it might be worth tracing its origin. The expres-

sion “feeling for life” [*Lebensgefühl*], used in cultural and intellectual history, is quite disreputable.—Your credulous embrace of the beginnings of technology seems to me to go hand in hand with your overvaluation of the archaic as such. I noted down the formulation: Myth is not the classless longing of the true society, but the objective character of painting in the modernity itself.—Page 36: the conception of the history of painting in the nineteenth century as a flight from photography (which, incidentally, corresponds strictly to the idea of music as a flight from the “banal”) is quite magnificent, but also undialectical—that is, the contribution to discoveries in painting made by the productive forces not absorbed in the commodity form should not be understood in a directly concrete way, but understood merely in the negative of its trace (the precise location of this dialectic is probably Manet). This seems to me connected to the mythologizing or archaizing tendency of the exposé. Since they belong to the past, the discoveries in painting are turned, in a sense, into fixed constellations in the philosophy of history—constellations from which the productive force has departed. Under the undialectical gaze of myth, which is that of Medusa, the subjective component of the dialectic vanishes.—The Golden Age on page 36 is perhaps the true transition to hell.—The connection between the world exhibitions and the workers is not clear to me, and looks like conjecture; certainly, it should be asserted only with great caution.—Page 37, of course, requires a major definition and theory of the phantasmagoria.—Page 37 was a *mere tekel* [warning] to me. I recall with Felizitas the overwhelming impression the Saturn quotation made on us earlier;<sup>26</sup> the quotation has not survived sober reflection. The ring of Saturn should not become the cast-iron balcony, but the latter should become the bodily ring of Saturn. And here I am happy to oppose you not with abstractions but with your own achievement: the incomparable “Moon” chapter in “Berlin Childhood,” whose philosophical content would fit very well here.<sup>27</sup> Something you once said about your Arcades work occurred to me here: that it could only be wrung from the sphere of madness.<sup>28</sup> That it has moved away from madness instead of subjugating it is attested by the interpretation of the Saturn quotation, which rebounds from that sphere. My real resistance is located at this point, which Siegfried [Kracauer] might well applaud.<sup>29</sup> And it is because of the enormous seriousness of the matter that I must speak so brutally here.—The fetish concept of the commodity must be backed up, as you no doubt plan to do, by the relevant passages from its originator.—The concept of the organic, which also appears on page 37 and points to a static anthropology and so forth, probably cannot be maintained, or only in the sense that it exists before the fetish as such, and thus is itself historical, in much the same way as “landscape.”—The dialectical motif of the commodity in “Odradek” probably belongs with page 37.—Here the workers’ movement again appears somewhat like a *deus ex ma-*

china; of course, this may be the fault of the abbreviated style of the exposé, as in the case of some similar forms—this being a reservation that applies to many of my other reservations. The passage on fashion seems very important to me, although its interpretation probably needs to be detached from the notion of the organic—that is, of a superior “nature”—and related to the living [*das Lebendige*]. In this connection the idea of *changeant*, of shot silk, occurred to me; it probably has expressive significance for the nineteenth century, and doubtless is also tied to industrial processes. Perhaps you might look into this. Frau Hessel, whose reports in the *FZ* [*Frankfurter Zeitung*] we always read with great interest, is sure to know about it.<sup>30</sup>—Page 38 contains the passage which gives rise to my special misgivings about the abstract use of the category of the commodity—as if it had appeared “for the first time” as such in the nineteenth century. (Incidentally, the same objection applies to the *intérior* and to the sociology of inwardness in the Kierkegaard book, and all my complaints about your exposé here must also be directed against my own earlier work.) I believe the category of the commodity could be effectively concretized through the specifically modern categories of world trade and imperialism. For example: the arcade as bazaar, and antique shops as world trade markets of the temporal. The significance of distance that has been fetched and brought back—perhaps the problem of winning over intentionless strata and [the theme of] imperial conquest. I’m just suggesting ideas; naturally, you’ll be able to derive far more conclusive insights on this from your material, and define the specific form of the nineteenth-century world of things (perhaps from its reverse side—detritus, remnants, ruins).—The passage on the office [*Kontor*], at the beginning of Part IV, may also lack historical precision. To me it appears less a straightforward antithesis of the *intérior* than a relic of earlier forms of room, probably Baroque (for example globes, wall maps, the railings, and other material forms).—Page 38: regarding the theory of Jugendstil,<sup>31</sup> while I agree with you that it represents a decisive shattering of the *intérior*, for me that precludes its ability to “mobilize all the forces of inwardness.” Rather, it seeks to rescue and realize them through “externalization” [*Veräusserung*] (this is the place, above all, for the theory of Symbolism, and especially of Mallarmé’s *intérieurs*, which have a significance diametrically opposed to Kierkegaard’s, for example). In Jugendstil, sex fills the place of inwardness. It has recourse to sex because only there does the private individual encounter himself or herself not as inward but as corporate. This applies to all Jugendstil art, from Ibsen to Maeterlinck and D’Annunzio. The origins of Strauss and of Jugendstil, accordingly, lie in Wagner, and not in the chamber music of Brahms.—Concrete seems to me a material uncharacteristic of Jugendstil; its place is probably in the curious vacuum around 1910. I think it likely, incidentally, that Jugendstil proper coincides with the major economic crisis around 1900; concrete belongs to

the prewar boom period.—Page 39: I would draw your attention to the very curious interpretation of the Master Builder Solness in Wedekind’s posthumous papers.<sup>32</sup> I’m not conversant with the psychoanalytic literature on waking up, but will look into it. Yet isn’t psychoanalysis, with its dream-interpretation, awakening tendency and its deliberate and polemical rejection of hypnosis (as seen in Freud’s “Introductory Lectures”),<sup>33</sup> itself a part of Jugendstil, with which it is contemporaneous? A question of the first importance, which might lead very far, is likely to be involved here. As a corrective to my critique at the level of principle, I would add here that if I reject the use of the collective consciousness, I of course do not do so in order to leave the “bourgeois individual” in place as the true *substrate*. The individual should be made transparent as a social function by reference to the *intérior*, and its self-sufficiency unmasked as illusion [*Schein*]. But as illusion not in relation to a hypostatized collective consciousness, but in relation to the real social process itself. In this the “individual” is a dialectical instrument of transition which cannot be mythicized away, but can only be sublated [*aufgehoben*].—Once more I would like to emphasize most strongly the passage on the liberation of things from “the drudgery of being useful” as the brilliant turning-point in the dialectical redemption of the commodity.—Page 39: I would be pleased if the theory of the collector and of the *intérior* as *étui* could be elaborated as fully as possible.—Page 40: I would draw your attention to Maupassant’s “La Nuit,” which seems to me the dialectical keystone corresponding to Poe’s “Man of the Crowd” as the foundation stone.<sup>34</sup> The passage on the crowd-as-veil I find wonderful.—Page 40 is the place for the critique of the dialectical image. That the theory set out here does not yet meet the immense demands made by this subject is something you undoubtedly know better than I. I would only say that ambiguity is not the translation of the dialectic into image, but is the “trace” of that image, which itself still has to be thoroughly dialecticized by theory. I seem to recall there’s a useful sentence on this in the *intérior* chapter of *Kierkegaard*. Perhaps the final stanza of the great “Femmes damnées” from [Baudelaire’s] *Pièces condamnées* should be added to pages 40–41.—The concept of false consciousness, in my view, must be employed cautiously, and certainly cannot be used nowadays without reference to its Hegelian origin.—“The snob” was originally not an aesthetic concept but a social concept; it gained currency through Thackeray. A very sharp distinction should be drawn between the snob and the dandy; the history of the snob itself should probably be followed up—and for this you have the most splendid material in Proust.—The thesis on page 41 on *l’art pour l’art* [art for art’s sake] and the *Gesamtkunstwerk* [total work of art] does not seem to me tenable in this form. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* and “artism” in the precise sense are diametrically opposed attempts to escape commodity character, and are not identical. Thus, Baudelaire’s relationship to Wagner is as dialectic-

tical as his relationship with the whore.—Pages 41–42: the theory of speculation entirely fails to satisfy me. It lacks, first, the theory of gambling which is such a magnificent feature of the Arcades sketch, and, second, a truly economic theory of the speculator. Speculation is the negative expression of the irrationality of capitalist *ratio*. Perhaps this passage, too, could benefit from “extrapolation to extremes.”—Pages 41–42: an explicit theory of perspective is probably called for here; I believe there was something on this in the original Arcades draft.<sup>35</sup> The stereoscope, which was invented between 1810 and 1820, is relevant here.—The fine dialectical conception of the Haussmann chapter might perhaps emerge more sharply in the full text than appears in the exposé, from which it has to be construed.

I must ask you once more to excuse the carping form of these glosses; but I think I owe you at least some specific examples of the critique I have offered in principle.

As for the book you were inquiring about,<sup>36</sup> I shall turn to my friend Wind at the Warburg Institute in London; with luck, I can get it for you myself. I am enclosing the exposé. Finally, I would ask your pardon for making a copy of this letter for Felizitas and myself; it is certainly not my usual practice, but I hope that it is justified in this case by the contents of the letter, and I would like to think that it will make further discussion of these matters easier for us.—I had merely asked Siegfried<sup>37</sup> to relay my apologies for the delay in responding to your exposé; I said nothing to him about when it was written, let alone what it contained. Anyway, he hasn't answered a lengthy letter of mine, so, in my present situation,<sup>38</sup> I am quite out of sorts. I cannot end without asking you to forgive the appearance of this letter. It was composed on a very defective typewriter, and its length made a written draft impractical.

Felizitas and I are getting on as well as could be expected in these sub-Alpine surroundings. I have not been able to work at all, except for drafting a plan for a collection of my essays on music.<sup>39</sup> Whether it will ever see the light of day, I do not know.

In true friendship,

Yours, as ever,

Teddie Wiesengrund

Dear Detlef,<sup>40</sup>

Many thanks for the Baba!<sup>41</sup> For today, only abundant greetings and good wishes for the remainder of your vacation. Expect a response from me very soon; for the moment, I'm deep into the Arcades. Affectionately,

Yours, as ever,

Felizitas (do you spell it with a c or a z?)

August 5, 1935

Dear Herr Benjamin,

The attempt to reconcile your “dream” momentum—as the subjective element in the dialectical image—with the conception of the latter as model has led me to some formulations, which I am sending along today. They represent my latest thoughts on the matter.

With the vitiating of their use value, the alienated things are hollowed out, and as ciphers they draw in meanings. Subjectivity takes possession of those things, insofar as it invests them with intentions of desire and fear. And insofar as the defunct things stand in as images of subjective intentions, the latter present themselves as immemorial and eternal. Dialectical images are constellated between alienated things and incoming and disappearing meaning—are instantiated in the moment of indifference between death and meaning. While things in appearance are awakened to what is newest, death transforms the meanings to what is most ancient.<sup>42</sup>

Both letters unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. Letter by Benjamin from *Gesammelte Briefe*, V, 95–100; translated by Edmund Jephcott. Letter by Adorno from *Adorno-Benjamin Briefwechsel, 1928–1940* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 138–152; body of letter translated by Edmund Jephcott, postscript of August 5 translated by Howard Eiland.

## Notes

1. Benjamin refers to his essay “Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts” (Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century), which is translated in this volume and which also appears at the beginning of his *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project). For the version of the exposé which Benjamin sent to Adorno in 1935, see Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), pp. 1237–1249.
2. Friedrich Pollock (1894–1970), a German economist, was one of the founders of the Institute of Social Research in 1923, and he remained a member of its inner circle, contributing articles on “state capitalism” to the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*.
3. “Felizitas” was Benjamin's name for Margarete (Gretel) Karplus (1902–1993), whom he met in 1928 and who would become Adorno's wife in 1937. Benjamin cites her letter of May 28, 1935, which echoes concerns expressed by Adorno in a letter of May 20 to Benjamin. Adorno was hoping that the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* would publish Benjamin's philosophical work on the arcades, but he was initially concerned that this work would not fit with the journal's historical-sociological orientation. These doubts were dispelled after a careful reading of the material (letter of June 5 to Benjamin).
4. Baltasar Gracián (1601–1658) was a Spanish writer and philosopher, the author

of *El Criticón* (1651–1657). On the passage quoted by Benjamin (which is evidently a citation in Gracián), see Karl Borinski, *Baltasar Gracian und die Hofliteratur in Deutschland* (Halle, 1894), p. 29.

5. *Le Paysan de Paris* (Paris Peasant) was published in 1926 by the novelist, poet, and essayist Louis Aragon (1897–1982), a leader of the Dadaists and later of the Surrealists. Benjamin translated sections of the book for *Die literarische Welt* in 1928. Its descriptions of the Paris arcades, with their "cult of the ephemeral" and their "equivocal atmosphere," had a powerful influence on Benjamin's conception of the *Passagen-Werk*.
6. Reference is to mid-1927. See *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 871–872, 919–925.
7. Franz Hessel (1880–1941), writer and translator, and an editor with Rowohlt Verlag in Berlin, collaborated with Benjamin on translating Proust from 1925 to 1928 and on planning a newspaper article on the Paris arcades in 1927. He emigrated to Paris in 1938. Benjamin's reviews of two of Hessel's books appear in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 69–71, 262–267 (trans. Rodney Livingstone).
8. These conversations, during which Benjamin read from his early drafts of the *Passagen-Werk* (at that time conceived as an essay entitled "Pariser Passagen: Eine dialektische Feerie" [Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairyland]), took place at Königstein and Frankfurt in September and October of 1929. Among the subjects discussed was the "dialectical image," a concept central to Benjamin's later thought. The group included Asja Lacin (1891–1979), a Russian Communist educator with whom Benjamin had fallen in love in 1924 on Capri, and Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), a German philosopher who had helped found the Institute of Social Research and was its director from 1930. "Schweizerhäuschen": Benjamin is presumably referring to a restaurant, inn, pub, or other meeting place.
9. Benjamin is referring to his essay "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian" (published in 1937; reproduced in this volume) and to a projected but never completed article on the "cultural politics" of *Die neue Zeit*, the ideological organ of Germany's Social Democratic Party.
10. San Remo, Italy, was where Benjamin's divorced wife, Dora (née Kellner; 1890–1964), was now living. She was running a guest house, "Villa Verde," in which Benjamin himself would find periodic refuge, from 1934 through 1937.
11. Lotte Lenya (1898–1981), the well-known German actress and singer, was acquainted with Adorno. According to the latter, she was on close terms with Max Ernst (1891–1976), the German Dadaist and Surrealist painter.
12. The book in question, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* (Against Epistemology: A Metacritique), was not published until 1956.
13. Else Herzberger (1877?–1962) was a friend of Adorno's parents and a businesswoman. She provided financial support to Benjamin in 1934 and gave him temporary accommodations in 1937.
14. Page numbers refer to the 1935 exposé, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," as translated above in this volume. The original page numbers of Benjamin's manuscript, to which Adorno refers in the German text of this letter,

are indicated in the printed version of that manuscript in Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), pp. 1237–1249. Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891), as prefect of the Seine (1853–1870) under Napoleon III, inaugurated and carried through a large-scale renovation of Paris, which necessitated the demolition of many old Parisian neighborhoods and many arcades built in the first half of the century.

15. *Sit venia verbo*: "if you'll pardon the expression."
16. In conversation, Adorno explained to Rolf Tiedemann, the editor of the German editions of Adorno and Benjamin, that he was thinking here of particular pieces which Benjamin had read to him in 1929, the so-called "Pariser Passagen II" (The Arcades of Paris). See *The Arcades Project*, pp. 873–884.
17. For the passage on the gambler, see *The Arcades Project*, pp. 882–883. For the passage on speculation and games of chance, see the beginning of Part VI of "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (in this volume).
18. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 24–46; see esp. 40–46.
19. See the beginning of the second section of Part I of "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (in this volume).
20. See Max Horkheimer, "History and Psychology" (1932), in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 121.
21. Ludwig Klages (1872–1956), author of *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* (The Intellect as Adversary of the Soul; 1929–1933), was a conservative German philosopher who believed that humanity had been led astray by the pre-dominance of the intellect. See Benjamin's essay on Bachofen in this volume.
22. See Franz Kafka, "The Cares of a Family Man," in Kafka, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken, 1971), pp. 427–429 (trans. Willa and Edwin Muir). Odradek is a diminutive creature, resembling a flat star-shaped spool for thread, who can stand upright and roll around but can never be laid hold of, and has no fixed abode.
23. "Berta" is an alias for Bertolt Brecht, whose name, like that of Georg Lukács, was best avoided in a letter written in National Socialist Germany and sent to an addressee in Paris.
24. Adorno has in mind the influential collection of essays in the sociology of knowledge, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (History and Class Consciousness), by the Hungarian-born Marxist philosopher and literary critic, Georg Lukács (1885–1971).
25. Benjamin's 1931 essay "Karl Kraus" appears in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 433–458 (trans. Edmund Jephcott). The German-born lyric poet and literary critic Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), who moved to Paris in 1831, collected his feuilleton writings in such volumes as *Der Salon* (1835–1840) and *Vermischte Schriften* (1854). On the "primal history of the feuilleton," see *The Arcades Project, Convolute d*, "Literary History, Hugo," esp. pp. 770–778.
26. Adorno is probably alluding to the conversations that took place in Königstein in 1929 (see Note 8 above), during which Benjamin read out the text "Der

Saturnring oder Etwas vom Eisenbau" (The Ring of Saturn, or Some Remarks on Iron Construction), now in the *Passagen-Werk*. For "the Saturn quotation," see *The Arcades Project*, p. 885.

27. See *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (below in this volume) for the 1934 version of "The Moon."
28. Benjamin said this during a conversation with his friends in Königstein in 1929. See Adorno's letter of November 10, 1938, to Benjamin, in *Adorno-Benjamin Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), p. 365; in English in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming). The idea is echoed in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 842 (Convolute C<sup>o</sup>, 13) and 456-457 (Convolute N1, 4).
29. Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966), a friend of both Benjamin and Adorno, was cultural editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* from 1924 to 1933. He emigrated to the United States in 1941. He was the author of *Theory of Film* (1960), *The Mass Ornament* (1963), and other books on modern culture.
30. Helen Hessel was the wife of Benjamin's friend and collaborator Franz Hessel. She worked as a correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.
31. Jugendstil was a style of architectural, figurative, and applied art that flourished in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth; it was closely connected with Art Nouveau. It signified not only a crossing of the cultural barrier separating "higher" from "lower" arts, but an educational movement intent on restructuring the human environment. Both Benjamin and Adorno extend its significance to include various forms of writing.
32. See Frank Wedekind, "Schriftsteller Ibsen und Baumeister Solness" (The Writer Ibsen and *The Master Builder*), in Wedekind, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9 (Munich: G. Müller, 1921), pp. 340-358. Ibsen's play *The Master Builder* dates from 1892.
33. Adorno refers to Freud's *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis) of 1916-1917.
34. Maupassant's story, "La Nuit cauchemare" (The Nightmare), was published in 1887. Benjamin quotes from it in *The Arcades Project*, p. 570; see also p. 420. For the relevant passage from Poe's story "The Man of the Crowd" (first published in 1840), see *The Arcades Project*, p. 445.
35. See *The Arcades Project*, p. 877 (Convolute c<sup>o</sup>, 2).
36. In a postscript to his letter of July 29 to Gretel Karplus, Benjamin had written: "Could you ask Teddie if he will have (or has had) a chance to look at Noack's *Triumphbogen* [Triumphal Arch] in *Warburg Library Studies?*" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, p. 1127). The book—Ferdinand Noack's *Triumph und Triumphbogen* (1928)—is cited in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 96-97, 415.
37. Adorno had written on July 5 to his friend and mentor Siegfried Kracauer, who had lost his job as an editor at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1933 and fled to France. See note 29.
38. Adorno's aunt had recently died.
39. The planned collection, to carry the title *The Great Pan is Dead*, never materialized.
40. One of the pseudonyms Benjamin had been using since 1933 was "Detlef Holz."

41. On the envelope of his most recent letter to Gretel Karplus (July 29, 1935), Benjamin had drawn a picture showing an elephant driving a car, whose roof it had raised with its trunk. Benjamin had written underneath: "The elephant, by the way, comes from the best of the recent French books for children. He's called Baba" (Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe, Volume 5: 1935-1937* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999], p. 132). Benjamin evidently misremembered the name of the elephant; it is "Babar." The series began in 1931 with *Histoire de Babar* (The Story of Babar), written and illustrated by Jean de Brunhoff (1899-1937).

42. Adorno's postscript of August 5 is quoted virtually in toto in *The Arcades Project*, p. 466.