WALTER BENJAMIN

THE PRODUCTION OF AN INTELLECTUAL FIGURE

by

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Abstract

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), a twentieth-century Jewish-German intellectual, has recently achieved iconic status; however, during his lifetime, many scholars considered him to be a failure. This substantial shift in scholarly attitude invites questions concerning how intellectual figures are understood and constructed within academia.

Cultural studies has renewed and enlarged the sphere of interest in Benjamin's work while, at the same time, canonizing and thus freezing it. This dissertation addresses the non-canonical side of the production of Walter Benjamin and, in so doing, shows what traditional scholarship has overlooked -- the effect of the so-called "private" sphere on so-called "public" intellectuals. The dominant model for traditional scholarly studies remains both abstract and linear: it consists of tracing the influence of one (usually male) scholar upon another. This dissertation disrupts the tacit assumptions behind such an approach to knowledge by showing how intellectuals are produced both by and at the intersections of the public and the private. The general scholarly acceptance of this false dichotomy, commonly referred to as the public/private split, has resulted in viewing scholars as though they exist in an abstract realm of ideas rather than in a concrete realm of lived reality. I draw on and add to the insights of feminist and cultural studies scholars who have attempted to show how people's interested contradictory locations, defined, as they are, by class, religion, ethnicity, gender, and so on, intersect with and affect their publicly constructed identities. To this end, my study provides a concrete example of how one particular intellectual, Walter Benjamin, has been (and continues to be) produced within specific historical, social, and cultural contexts.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated with love to my mother, Inge Geider. Her unconditional love together with her support for this and all of my endeavours has helped me step through doors of possibility that were held shut to her by her own historical, social, and cultural contexts.

Introduction

This project is located at the intersection of cultural studies and critical pedagogy – interdisciplinary fields that have developed in similar and often parallel ways during the past two decades. These two areas understand culture as process rather than product, and they characterize knowledge production as one instance of cultural production. I contend that these two areas intersect at numerous points that can and should be brought into productive dialogue with one another. Proceeding from this shared conception of culture and knowledge, this study examines ways of understanding intellectual figures according to the premise, again common to both fields, that identity and subjectivity are formed in and by every sphere of existence. Moreover, these spheres are all social sites that depend on cultural conditions (Johnson 11). The subject of this analysis is Walter Benjamin, a figure whose work has been used and examined in both fields and, therefore, may function to show how and where they intersect.

While there are numerous ways of defining cultural studies and critical pedagogy, the definitions relevant to this study are those that are derived from the work of the Birmingham Centre of Cultural Studies. These fields have four things in common:

First, both fields are interdisciplinary. While disciplinary work places its subjects of study within specific, established frameworks and methodologies, positioning them with regard to the work of others within that discipline, interdisciplinary studies occur at the intersection of various disciplines, bringing new insights that may not be seen from within a single discipline. From this it follows that each examined subject is embedded within its own specific context and that each new cultural context suggests a particular methodological constellation rather than *a* new method or theory (Denham, Kacandes, and Petropoulos 16; emphasis in original). Both fields also examine not only a chosen object of study, but also the means by which knowledge about that subject is determined; that is, they attempt to understand the problematic nature of knowledge claims (Michel

33) by examining knowledge not as a product but as a process. They do not seek "truth"; rather, they attempt to understand how "truth" is produced, and they do this by taking a critical attitude towards both their objects of study and their own practices (Taubeneck 162). This pronounced shift of attention from product to process is accompanied by a pedagogical shift from transmission, mastery, and reproduction to interaction, critical engagement, and production.

The second thing that both fields have in common is that they generally agree with Stuart Hall's definition of culture as "*both* the meanings and values which arise amongst distinctive groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships through which they 'handle' and respond to the conditions of existence; *and* as the lived traditions and practices through which these 'understandings' are expressed and in which they are embodied" ("Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms" 527; emphasis in original). Consequently, culture is understood not in terms of artefacts or objects, but in terms of numerous processes simultaneously occurring within all social spheres. Thus cultural objects, such as texts, are not examined for what they *are* but, rather, for *why* and *how* a society has labelled them in certain ways (e.g., as beautiful or true) (Kacandes 11; emphasis in original). The analysis of cultural processes occurs within an understanding of culture as primarily relational. Yet these relations represent neither harmony nor homogeneity but, rather, a creative tension between possibly contradictory elements (Denham, Kacandes, and Petropoulos 16). Such tension facilitates the detection and understanding of the dynamics of cultural processes. Given that culture is comprised of numerous relational processes, there can be no final answers to questions, as processes continually shift and change. Consequently, both fields are engaged in projects that, by definition, can never be completed.

The third thing that cultural studies and critical pedagogy have in common is their general perception that education is closely linked to culture. As Richard Johnson has argued, cultural studies and educational practices and processes are interdependent (6). Investigations concerning

education ask questions relating to how, by whom, and for whom knowledge is produced and disseminated. Related to education are issues concerning intellectuals. Within the two fields under discussion, the intellectual is understood as a cultural phenomenon inhabiting a particular subject position. As Johnson maintains, "[s]ubjectivities are formed in every sphere of existence, in all social sites that all depend on cultural conditions" (11). In other words, intellectuals are constructed at many sites, not only in those related to institutions of formal learning. Twentieth-century German-Jewish intellectual Walter Benjamin was constructed in many ways and in many locations, both during his life and after. Understanding the intellectual as a cultural phenomenon allows for a fuller, less distorted examination of intellectual figures -- an examination that looks not for where they fit in relation to others in the same field but, rather, for how they fit within their respective social and cultural contexts. These contexts contain both public and private spheres, situations of both formal and informal education. Intellectuals are made not only at their desks and in lecture halls, but also around the kitchen table.

A consequence of taking into account both public and private spheres is that people other than intellectuals are enabled to speak. Until recently, the intellectual has occupied a privileged position with regard to knowledge production and dissemination -- a position that has been increasingly challenged. Cultural studies and critical pedagogy problematize this position of authority and, in so doing, make the connections between scholarship and society more obvious.

Benjamin, like other intellectual figures, is neither a harmonious whole nor a homogeneous entity but, rather, a complex, often ambiguous and contradictory figure. Moreover, Benjamin the intellectual is inseparable from Benjamin the man, for the social contexts within which he lived formed both him and his work. His private life and informal educational and social situations contributed to shaping him as much as did the social institutions with which he was associated.

This brings me to the final thing that cultural studies and critical pedagogy have in common: namely, their politics. Both fields are political in that they assume that practice matters and that intellectual work both can and should make a difference (Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg 6). As Irene Kacandes maintains, "[o]ne of the ways in which cultural studies tries to make a difference is by showing just what is 'at stake' in the world around us, that is by naming and investigating categories that are inherently relevant to contemporary societies" (10). In the words of Graham Murdock, "making a difference" is "making available the repertoire of meanings through which the social world ... is understood and acted on" (68). The questions that we ask ourselves, the work we do, and the connections between that work and the society in which we live should all, in some way, contribute to improving the general social welfare (Denham, Kacandes, and Petropoulos 1), to "making the goal of knowing the world subserve the goal of eliminating injustice in it" (Lutz 308). The importance of seeking social justice and connecting intellectual work to its cultural/social context may be seen in the making of Walter Benjamin.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter One

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of Benjamin scholarship. The major works reviewed maintain the separation of public and private, referring to the latter, if at all, as background to, rather than as constitutive of, Benjamin's work. Many of the works that attempt to provide an overall understanding of Benjamin's *oeuvre* do so by classifying him as a particular kind of scholar within a specific scholarly tradition. Most attempt to determine whether Benjamin is messianic or materialistic, while others focus on elucidating the psychological and institutional ways in which he has been constructed as a failure. The messianic-versus-materialist distinction that was prominent in earlier research has gradually given way to understandings that attempt to show that Benjamin

was, in fact, both, with his early work being primarily messianic and his later work being primarily materialistic. These sorts of classifications provide a strategy that effectively silences those dimensions of Benjamin and his work that do not fit pre-established categories.[1]

Such polarized understandings of Benjamin are problematic in that they posit separate and opposing spheres that render relational understandings virtually impossible and leave numerous dimensions of his life and work unexamined. Specifically, the private realm remains unexplored, and, with it, all those elements traditionally held to be external to the intellectual (public) realm: emotions, interpersonal relationships, reproductive and maintenance work, and the role of gender.

For example, my survey of how Asja Lacis has been portrayed illustrates that, regardless of her many accomplishments and the significant role she played in Benjamin's life and work, she is generally either dismissed or understood as a pleasant diversion. Sometimes she appears in the role of a mythologized figure: as Ariadne or as a muse to the genius, Benjamin. To date, there has been no satisfactory way of explaining Lacis' role in Benjamin's life.

Overall, within the fields of critical pedagogy and cultural studies in Great Britain and North America, engagement with Benjamin is both diverse and uneven, ranging from detailed analyses to brief references. Iain Chambers and Roger Simon provide examples of how Benjamin's work may be used to gain insights into popular culture (Chambers) and the practices of remembrance and commemoration (Simon). Most commonly, however, those who cite Benjamin as an authority do not engage with any aspect of his work. Such studies, among them Giroux's and McLaren's work, demonstrate that Benjamin has become an icon -- someone whose function is to represent an idea

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[1] The verb "to silence" generally denotes intentionality. I use this verb neither to imply that individuals consciously set out to purge certain aspects of Benjamin's habilitation process nor to imply that there was a university conspiracy against him; rather, I believe that the underlying assumptions concerning what constitutes a successful scholar effectively silenced certain aspects of his habilitation because, for various (often unexamined) reasons, they were considered of no relevance.

or attitude. Common to all of the studies reviewed is that they deal with Benjamin as an idea rather than as a person.

In sum, there are large gaps and silences in the Benjamin literature, primarily with respect to the intersection of the public and the private, the intellectual and the emotional, and the role of women in Benjamin's life and work. The aim of my project is to begin to bridge those gaps and to begin rethinking a number of assumptions underlying scholarly work that, by virtually ignoring the private, the emotional, and women, portrays the making of intellectual figures as abstracted from social contexts.

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical and methodological framework for my analysis of Benjamin. I accept Dorothy Smith's assertion that the scholarly production of knowledge is subject to different regimes of truth at different junctures and that the frameworks within which "great" intellectual figures are examined determine which dimensions of their lives and works are valorized and which are silenced. I accept Toril Moi's notion that knowledge about intellectual figures is "made" by a network of discourses that includes various strands, such as gender, religion, race, location, and class. As examining all of these interrelated dimensions would be too formidable a task for one dissertation, I concentrate on gender, while indicating how gender intersects with other social locations by class, ethnicity, religion, and nation.

As Moi and others have noted, intellectual figures generally become the subject of research in two forms: (1) biography, which examines "life"; and (2) literary-cultural criticism, which examines an aestheticized form of their intellectual work. The theory and practice of this split is both informed by and reinforces the still prevalent public/private dichotomy. Because the implicit assumption that women belong in the private sphere is still predominant in Benjamin scholarship,

women's contributions to making Benjamin as a public intellectual figure are devalued, minimized, or ignored. Moi points out that intellectuals are often reduced to a concept or a set of ideas. Thus, for example, Benjamin is often reduced to his idea of "rubbing history against the grain." Her criticism of how intellectual figures are understood leads her to propose the method of personal genealogy -- a relational analysis that includes both the private and the public and that stands counter to most scholarly analysis, which contents itself with looking at abstract interactions between ideas. The method of personal genealogy provides a means of examining how cultural and educational processes contribute to the making of an intellectual. It is both gendered and situated, thus including the whole person. As Nancy Miller asserts, "public spaces of institutional life remain haunted by the emotions institutional authority prefers to exclude: desire, love, anxiety, pain" (983). Moi insists that there should be no methodological distinction between a person's written texts and her/his life texts.

Like Moi, I begin from the premise that numerous written and life texts intersect to "make" the person being analyzed. The verb "to make" indicates: (1) how the educational institution produced and continues to produce Benjamin, first through the process of his education and then through research about him; (2) how he was/is produced by his own texts; and (3) how he was/is produced by his gendered social position. I analyze the complex intersections of the multiple dimensions of Benjamin's life and work in a relational manner; that is, both with and against one another.

Moi's study focuses on making meanings, whereas my study, which is based on a materialist understanding of discursive analysis, focuses on issues of power relations and materiality. By discourse I refer to a process that both forms and is formed by material reality and, as such, has material consequences within specific social and historical contexts. Thus meanings are not neutral but, rather, privilege certain groups and specific kinds of knowledge. This being the case, academics

need to be accountable for the formative role their work plays in the production of knowledge. In this connection, I turn to Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who explain that accountability involves not only devising critical analytic tools and taking responsibility for them, but also finding new and more accurate ways of understanding the world. The goal of these new understandings should be social justice.

The challenge I undertake is twofold: (1) to avoid the prevalent bifurcation that either reduces the intellectual's accomplishments to effects of personal circumstances or views those accomplishments as aesthetic objects, "undefiled" by life; and (2) to provide a feminist analysis of Walter Benjamin that foregrounds the dimension of gender and critiques and disrupts the still prevalent public/private, professional/personal split. Feminist scholarship recognizes the need to examine how knowledge is produced at various intersections of public and private. As Magda Lewis has observed: "Knowledge production is always the result of our intellectual efforts to make sense of our most mundane and most profound social experiences, motivated by our moral/political agenda and laced with conversation, casual remarks, the circulating of books and articles that have interested us and which we think might interest others, and the mutual critique of texts" (Lewis 123-24). To say that Benjamin is no more than the sum of his work and the product of the influence of the "great men" before him is to present a limited and distorted understanding of him in particular and of intellectual figures in general -- one that continues to privilege the traditional, masculine intellectual lineage. Whereas numerous scholars have set a goal of producing a "whole" picture of Benjamin's work and thought, following my feminist predecessors, I address the inconsistent and the contradictory in an attempt to provide an understanding of Benjamin that includes not only his ideas, but also the social relations that made his work possible.

Chapter Three

The recognition that knowledge is produced by individuals situated within specific social, interpersonal, and intellectual communities requires a new type of scholarship -- a scholarship that addresses not only those texts that exist within established intellectual traditions, but also the production of scholarship itself. Chapter 3 contains an analysis of the nature and effects of splitting an intellectual into private and public, particularly as this split relates to gender. Benjamin is positioned within the larger, German social context and his own familial context, especially his relationship with his wife, Dora Kellner/Benjamin. These dimensions are most often regarded as background to the intellectual, when in fact they are constitutive of both his/her work and subjectivity. As Angela McRobbie notes in her criticism of Paul Willis, in order to understand members of a social group, it is necessary to include private as well as public dimensions. Benjamin was made by his class and family affiliations as much as by his institutional and public associations.

Like numerous middle-class, acculturated Jewish families in Berlin, the Benjamins strove to be as much like other middle-class Germans as possible, and they aspired to enter the class of the educated bourgeoisie. As Benjamin attempted to enter this class, German society and the university itself were undergoing a great deal of change. Although it was virtually his birthright, as the son of a wealthy family, to attend university, the general uncertainty brought about by social change and the high unemployment rate among intellectuals was blamed on Jews (among other marginal groups), thus reducing his chances of success. This situation positioned Benjamin as both privileged and marginalized, and it contributed to his becoming a "failure."

In Chapter 3 I revisit Benjamin as the "poor, struggling genius," as he has often been constructed, particularly in conjunction with his outsider position vis-à-vis the university. The evidence seems to suggest that the loss of material privileges, together with his own reluctance to

take on most forms of employment, contributed to a perception of poverty and hardship that coloured both his work and later understandings of him.

According to Benjamin, culture is produced not only by the great, but also by the nameless: "Es [das Kulturgut] dankt sein Dasein nicht nur der Mühe der großen Genien, die es geschaffen haben, sondern auch der namenlosen Fron ihrer Zeitgenossen" ("Über den Begriff der Geschichte" 696) ["They (cultural assets) owe their existence not only to efforts of the great minds and talents, who have created it, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries" ("Theses on the Philosophy of History" 258)]. These "nameless toilers" are often those who dwell in the private sphere, those engaged in the so-called reproductive work that enables cultural production; namely women. It is the supportive work generally performed by women that enables the public work, and it is this "anonymous toil" that is written out of official accounts of how both knowledge and culture are produced. One such nameless toiler, who was involved with a "great mind and talent," is Walter Benjamin's wife, Dora Kellner/Benjamin. She typed some of her husband's work, shared many of his intellectual interests, tended to his domestic needs, had the connections to assist in the publication of a number of his essays, and earned most of the family income. As yet she has not been included in any discussion of Benjamin's work, although her "supporting role" has been acknowledged in biographical works.[2] No one has questioned her role, thus perpetuating the myth that the intellectual is somehow "above" daily necessities, having a "wife" who tends to such matters. In Chapter 3, I examine Benjamin's social and familial situation and how the discourse of the wife has been employed by Benjamin scholars and, to some degree, by Dora and Walter

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[2] Fuld's biography mentions the factual aspects: when and how the Benjamins met, married, and later divorced. Brodersen provides more information about Dora herself, her parents, and the kind of work she did while married to Walter. Scholem, *The Story of a Friendship*, also discusses the emotional ups and downs of the Benjamin marriage, to which he was witness. Puttnels and Smith provide a wealth of information about Dora and the Benjamin marriage without attempting to establish links between it and Benjamin's work.

themselves, to minimize Dora Kellner/Benjamin's role in the making of Walter Benjamin. My questions are: Does our understanding of what makes an intellectual need to include scrubbing toilets and changing diapers? How do the private and public intersect to make intellectual labour possible? In other words, I question the prevalent notion of the intellectual as an abstract, decontextualized individual and seek to understand the material processes that contribute to the production of an intellectual figure by conducting a relational analysis of how the public and private spheres contribute to intellectual production.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 examines how the university made Benjamin at the time of his attempted habilitation at the University of Frankfurt. I analyze the institution of the university and its members at that time, together with Benjamin's relationship with academia, in order to demonstrate how various strands of his life contributed to making him. These strands include his disdain for institutions of education (which appears to have begun with his enthusiasm for Gustav Wyneken's school reform and his own involvement in the Student Reform Movement).[3] Other strands include the rejection of his habilitation, the anti-Semitism of the University of Frankfurt, the inflexibility of both the institution and Benjamin himself (especially his sharp criticism of all existing forms of formal education and the majority of formal educators), and the fact that his work did not conform to any particular discipline, school of thought, or methodological paradigm.

Benjamin's academic failure is comprised of numerous dimensions, including systemic anti-Semitism, the strict adherence to disciplines, and his supervisor's ambitions. The professors he

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[3] Gustav Wyneken (1875-1964), an educational reformer who ran the private school Benjamin attended for a short time, was an influential leader in the Student Reform Movement. Benjamin was strongly influenced by Wyneken and his ideas, although he broke off all relations with Wyneken in 1915 because of the latter's pro-war stance.

worked with had their own careers to consider, and they wished to enhance those careers by reproducing themselves -- by fathering[4] a bright, new scholar and by avoiding being associated with "undesirables." However, Benjamin's life circumstances and desires also played a role in his leaving the university. These include his financial situation, pressure from his parents to stop depending on them for financial support, the responsibilities of being a husband and father, his own reluctance to devote any of his time to teaching and mentoring students, and his long-standing disdain for the university as an institution and for many of its faculty members (whom he felt to be generally incompetent).

Although the various conflicts that arose during Benjamin's university years have been examined to some degree, for the most part this examination has been framed within antagonistic terms: Benjamin versus the institution or Benjamin versus various individual members of the institution.[5] Missing to date is not only a relational analysis of these antagonistic relationships and the various dimensions that comprise them, but also a closer examination of one relationship in particular. I refer here to Benjamin's association with Gottfried Salomon-Delatour, who could be considered his mentor during his attempt at habilitation. While not directly involved in Benjamin's formal educational process, Salomon[6] played an important role that has not yet been acknowledged. Salomon has been neglected for two main reasons: (1) he holds no place in the intellectual traditions within which Benjamin is generally placed and (2) his mentoring relationship with Benjamin is

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[4] This is very apparent in the German word for supervisor: "Doktorvater," literally, doctor-father. In German, the process, the relationship, and its obvious gendering are much more explicit than they are in English.

[5] See, for example, Irving Wohlfarth, "Resentment Begins at Home: Nietzsche, Benjamin, and the University," *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections*, Ed. Gary Smith, (Cambridge, Mass/London: MIT Press, 1988) 224-59; and Burkhardt Lindner, "Habilitationsakte Benjamin: Über ein 'akademisches Trauerspiel' und über ein Vorkapitel der 'Frankfurter Schule'" ["The Benjamin Habilitation File: An 'Academic Tragedy' and a Preface to the 'Frankfurt School'"], *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 53/54 (1984): 147-65.

[6] Salomon is referred to both as Salomon and as Salomon-Delatour -- in fact he published under both names. I will refer to him as Salomon.

nurturing and, hence, is considered to be part of the private realm, and therefore irrelevant to Benjamin's intellectual life. Evidence provided by the recently published Benjamin/Salomon correspondence indicates that Salomon played an important role in the making of Walter Benjamin. He was Benjamin's main contact at the University of Frankfurt and, as such, a friend and mentor who provided support for Benjamin and his work. Furthermore, the two men shared numerous intellectual interests, and it is possible to clearly trace Salomon's influences on Benjamin's work.

My examination shows that one can arrive at no easy conclusions concerning Benjamin's academic failure (and success). Like all other aspects that contribute to the making of an intellectual, acceptance by the university is contingent upon numerous dimensions, both in and out of the control of the individual. This being the case, a scholar cannot adequately be defined by his/her acceptance or rejection by a university. Consequently, it is not the fact of Benjamin's rejection that is of primary interest to me, but rather the processes by which it occurred. Only when the various strands are taken into consideration is it possible to arrive at a fuller understanding of how the institution makes an intellectual figure.

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 addresses Benjamin's relationship with Asja Lacis and the time they spent in Capri. There is a general consensus that this trip was a major event in Benjamin's life and work. Momme Brodersen, for example, maintains that "in contrast to Theodor Wiesengrund (later Adorno), with whom he had become acquainted the year before in Frankfurt, Ernst Bloch and Alfred Sohn-Rethel, ... Benjamin's stay on Capri was to mark a turning point in his life that had a lasting influence on his writing" (Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin* 135).

Bernd Witte, in his intellectual biography of Benjamin, argues that "[t]he year 1924 marked a decisive change in Benjamin's life and thinking. Under the impact of his experiences at the time,

he transformed himself from esoteric philosopher to politically engaged writer, from language mystic to dialectical materialist" (71). Michael Jennings asserts that Benjamin "dated his espousal of Marxism to a stay on Capri in 1924, during which he established a complex intellectual and erotic relationship with the Latvian Communist theater director Asja Lacis" (70). Benjamin himself describes this trip as a turning point: in a letter to his friend Gershom Scholem he refers to "vital liberation" and "intense insight" (*Correspondence* 245). I will examine Benjamin's becoming a Marxist in terms of how the various discourses outlined above intersect and, in so doing, will provide a multidimensional understanding of his trip to Capri.

In Chapter 5, I discuss how Benjamin's lifelong criticism of institutional scholarship was intensified by his experience of what he and Lacis referred to as "Porosität" [porosity]. Although the concept is implicit in Benjamin's pre-Capri writings, it is in "Naples," the essay he wrote with Lacis, that he first explicitly discusses and names it. The essay resulted from their observation and analysis of the porous boundaries between public and private life in Naples. This notion was further developed in Benjamin's considerations concerning the porosity of life and work, of theory and practice, and the shift to interior and exterior that came to the fore years later in the "Arcades Project." I explore how this concept is made material in architecture and in Benjamin's writings about his childhood.

Lacis and Benjamin began their examination of Naples with a discussion of the porosity of Neapolitan architecture and the ways in which it both constructs and is constructed by the daily lives of the people living in the city. The body is vital to their understanding of porosity, for physical and conceptual boundaries restrict the body not only in its movement and activities, but also in its enjoyment of sensual pleasures. For Benjamin and Lacis, an examination of the key sensual forms of sleeping, eating, and sexuality led to an understanding of porosity.

The relationship between Lacis and Benjamin can, itself, be described as porous, as it occurs at the intersection of various sensual, emotional, political, and intellectual dimensions. His erotic passion for Lacis is due, at least in part, to her being somewhat exotic -- neither German nor Jew. Furthermore, her assertive, independent sexuality made her unlike either a "mother" or a "whore," the two basic roles assigned to women within a Western patriarchal system. Politically, Lacis was a living example of both intellectual exploration and practical progressive political change -- and Benjamin wished to engage in both (particularly in the face of the social and economic upheavals of Weimar Germany).

Looking back at his own sexual awakening, Benjamin sees how various dimensions of his subjectivity intersected: the religious, the erotic, and the intellectual. He found the fact of his thinking two contradictory thoughts simultaneously to be orgasmic. However, he fails to see such interconnections in his relationship with Dora. Dora was his first intellectual, political, and sexual partner, yet when she became his wife and Stefan's mother, his physical, intellectual, and political attraction to her seems to have dwindled and died. She was no longer his partner and support but a hindrance. Although he attempted a materialist social analysis, he continued to subscribe to a worldview that defined women's roles with little regard for their lived realities. In fact, most of his writing fails to address the situation of women at all. This is a blind spot, and it stands in contradiction to the fact that his own intellectual work relies, in part, on women.

Benjamin does, however, examine the complex intersections of the political, intellectual, and sexual both in his childhood reflections and in his relationship with Lacis. He further develops the themes and analysis of "Naples" in "One-Way Street," an essay in which his dedication names Lacis as the engineer of this street. More than an Ariadne (as she has often been described) who leads Benjamin through the labyrinth of the city, Lacis is the creator of the path they follow in order to study the porous and shifting boundaries of modern urban life and to critique bourgeois life and

values. She provides him with an example of an alternative means of being an intellectual. Lacis not only engages in intellectual discussions and activities, but in Moscow she works with one of Russia's most marginalized groups -- the street children. She combines theory and practice in order to affect progressive social change, something Benjamin repeatedly admires and learns from. Lacis literally grounds Benjamin's work, giving him the basis for his material social analysis and a model for integrating theory and practice.

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 recounts how Benjamin travelled to Moscow, first to escape the many difficulties of his life, and second, to be with Lacis and attempt to find a point of convergence for his erotic, political, and intellectual passions. Crucial to this chapter is the constellation formed by Lacis' work with children, her pedagogical and theatrical interests, her activism in the cause of the Russian Revolution, Benjamin's pedagogical interests, his renewed politicization, his understanding of porosity, and his work in the new medium of radio. The way in which the dimensions of this constellation converge illustrates Benjamin's theoretical and practical engagement with new forms of cultural production. Rather than rejecting and condemning popular culture, as did his colleagues Adorno and Horkheimer, Benjamin embraced its positive potential not only for disseminating knowledge, but also for producing it, and for creating new cultural forms. His radio plays and talks have a didactic intent that is traceable to his early involvement in the Student Reform Movement, to his relationship with Lacis, and to his knowledge of her work in the proletarian children's theatre. Unlike the professors who gave traditional lectures on the radio, Benjamin made the medium part of the message. His emphasis on sound drew the listeners' attention to the functioning of this new medium, and helped them understand it . His perhaps naive hope was that this understanding would also make them critical rather than passive.

Unlike other didactic radio plays of the time, Benjamin's radio work did not attempt a one-way dissemination of knowledge, but encouraged thought and feedback. He hoped to break with the traditional forms of formal education in order to involve the audience directly as participants in making knowledge rather than in merely consuming it. He was, moreover, one of the few intellectuals involved in the early days of radio who considered the ramifications of bringing public education into the private sphere of the home.

The examination of Benjamin's and Lacis' relationship in Chapters 5 and 6 provides a step towards examining interrelations between "whole persons," as Alison Jaggar calls them, rather than disembodied ideas. Such whole persons consist of emotions as well as intellects, bodies as well as minds, and private as well as public lives; and all of this is interrelated and shaped by gender, location, class, and religion -- those discourses identified by Moi in discussing her method of personal genealogy. All these relationships play a part in making intellectual labour and the production of knowledge possible.

By examining these relationships, I attempt to recover those dimensions of scholarship that have, as yet, received little attention; namely, those traditionally categorized as private and thus constructed as having little relevance to academic endeavour. By demonstrating some of the ways in which the private is constitutive of the intellectual's subjectivity, identity, and work, I hope to provide a fuller understanding of intellectual labour and intellectual figures than that to which most now subscribe. That such an endeavour is crucial to cultural studies and critical pedagogy is self-evident.

Chapter 1

Literature Overview: Identifying the Issues

Introduction

Not only has Walter Benjamin been (re)claimed by Germanists re-examining his work in light of its significance for literary criticism, but he is also now being examined by such disciplines as philosophy, sociology, art, and history, to name only a few. Interest in his work is strong not only in established disciplines, but also in new ones. Some, such as cultural studies and critical pedagogy, which not only critique and attempt to disrupt disciplinary boundaries but which are often explicitly anti-disciplinary, celebrate Benjamin as a founding father and regularly cite his work to authorize their own.

Benjamin's writing has prompted numerous analyses, some of which examine specific aspects of his work, some of which provide an overview of his entire *oeuvre*. These studies are conducted from many ideological standpoints and are both discipline-specific and interdisciplinary. Benjamin's work resonates in many areas, and this has resulted in ever-growing amounts of research that construct and reconstruct his significance. The process of constructing and reconstructing Benjamin as a leading twentieth-century intellectual figure is at the heart of this thesis, which attempts to address how scholars understand intellectual figures and how cultural politics affect these understandings.

Early Benjamin studies categorize his work as messianic, while many later studies categorize it as materialistic. Examinations of his work that attempt to illustrate how he combines the former with the latter in fact merely trace one or the other of these two poles throughout his work, in order to "prove" that he was primarily messianic or materialistic. While these tendencies are primarily observable in German-speaking scholarship (which has access to all of Benjamin's work), English-

speaking scholarship tends to analyze Benjamin primarily on the basis of only three essays: "The Storyteller," "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," -- the three works that Jameson refers to as "the great symbolic trilogy" (Jameson 269).[7]

It is also evident that many Benjamin studies are ahistorical and decontextualized, easily leading to the mistaken conclusion that Walter Benjamin is a disembodied mass of ideas floating in a metaphysical realm. This conclusion tends to produce an attempt to apply Benjamin's ideas universally. Such understandings, of Benjamin in particular and of intellectuals in general, are more interesting for what they silence and ignore than for what they appear to say. By reducing Benjamin and his significance to the sum of his work, his life is either totally ignored or stands as mere background information. This split between "career" and "life" is one of the key strategies employed in the cultural politics of understanding intellectual figures. Assuming that work is separable from life, such scholarship detaches the person in question from her/his social reality. This manner of dealing with Benjamin is to be found not only in the areas of literary and social theory, but also in critical pedagogy and cultural studies.

Feminist theory has long criticized this split, showing how it is used to validate and perpetuate a perspective that devalues and silences not only women, but all marginalized social groups involved in the construction of knowledge. Based on a wealth of evidence taken from lived reality in conjunction with academic analysis, feminist thought has demonstrated that categories such as political/personal, public/private, are historical constructs. Generally, binary oppositions

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[7] Based on an examination of the bibliographies of English-language scholarship, it appears that many English-speaking scholars have been limited to only those works that have been translated into English. Jameson goes so far as to suggest that one of the reasons for Benjamin's popularity in North America is that the few works that have been translated provide a tantalizing glimpse of fragments of his work (268). Menninghaus has also observed that the "American" Benjamin consists of only a limited number of translated texts (199).

such as public/private not only prioritize one pole (public) over the other (private), but by associating dominant social groups with one over the other they perpetuate positions of social privilege, authorizing practices that limit social justice.

It is the limitations that binary oppositions impose on the making of knowledge that provide the starting point for my investigation of Walter Benjamin. I propose that the still prevalent distinction in Benjamin scholarship between public and private, in conjunction with the desire both to classify Benjamin and to understand his work as a coherent body of ideas, serves to exclude far too many dimensions. This strategy of separation has resulted, among other things, in Asja Lacis' influence on Benjamin remaining virtually unexplored. Women, love, the erotic -- these are all traditionally relegated to the private sphere. And so there is no examination of the intersection of the erotic and the intellectual, as it plays itself out in the relationship between Benjamin (a rich, young, Jewish, philosophically and religiously inclined German husband and father) and Lacis (a Christian, Latvian, Marxist activist, mother, and life-partner of a successful theatre director). How can we claim to understand Benjamin until this relationship has been examined?

This split between public and private is a widespread strategy that, for the most part, remains unarticulated and unexamined in literary and social criticism, and in cultural studies -- fields in which the majority of Benjamin scholarship is still found. The first goal of my project is, therefore, to critique this bifurcation of Benjamin into man versus scholar. I do this with the support of a large body of feminist research that clearly illustrates the ideological nature of the public/private split and the insufficiency of attempting to understand an intellectual figure in an ahistorical, universalizing manner.

My second goal is to disrupt and problematize the public/private distinction by engaging the texts of Benjamin's work and life together with the texts produced about him. This engagement takes into account Benjamin's national, religious, socioeconomic, gender-specific, historical

position. While focusing primarily on the dimension of gender, I will indicate where this overlaps with other dimensions. In other words, I will examine the intersection of Benjamin's writings not only with his being male, but also with his being a middle-class Jewish intellectual living in Germany during the Weimar Republic.[8] The result will raise important questions about the canonical intellectual figuration of Walter Benjamin.

To accomplish these goals, I employ the method of personal genealogy, as developed by Moi in her ground-breaking study of the making of an intellectual woman, Simone de Beauvoir. Personal genealogy refers to a way of charting the intersections between life and work. Rather than attempting to disclose an original identity by means of a linear, causal narrative, as is generally done in biographies and intellectual history, personal genealogy "seeks to achieve a sense of emergence or production and to understand the complex play of different kinds of power involved in social phenomena" (Moi 7). Personal genealogy does not attempt to situate an intellectual within a particular intellectual lineage; rather, it situates her/him within a specific historical, spatial, social context (i.e., the context of her/his lived life). It explicates knowledge production as a relational rather than as a causal process. In other words, the public and the private, the intellectual and the emotional, are not kept separate but are investigated at the points where they intersect. From this perspective, the question of power is addressed by asking how institutions and the individuals within them define who is an intellectual, what knowledge is worthwhile, and what questions are worth asking. With regard to Benjamin, I attempt to determine how and why he was constructed as a failure during his own lifetime and as an intellectual "superstar" after his death.

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[8] The Weimar Republic existed from the end of the First World War and the abdication of William II (1918) until Adolf Hitler was named Chancellor (1933). This first German republic was named after the city of Weimar, where the new constitution was forged by the National Assembly (1919).

In order to understand the processes involved in knowledge production, I will examine those traditional Western assumptions (especially the public/private split) that inform decisions concerning which aspects of an intellectual's life and work should be addressed and which should not. These decisions determine which writings are considered worthwhile and thus find their way into the canons of various fields of study. I am interested in the processes that go into making all "important" intellectual figures, and Benjamin provides an excellent example of how these processes operate, especially with regard to how certain elements come to be excluded.

I begin with an overview of Benjamin scholarship, first in critical pedagogy and cultural studies, then in literary criticism and social theory, in order to indicate a number of gaps in current understandings. These gaps are a result of: (1) bifurcating Benjamin into a public and private entity; (2) attempting to come to an overall understanding of Benjamin by classifying him as a particular kind of scholar; and (3) conflating Benjamin the man with Benjamin the scholar.

Overview

In the various areas identified as critical pedagogy, specific references to Benjamin are relatively few. Within one strand of American critical pedagogy, some scholars, for example Peter McLaren and Henry A. Giroux, often refer to Benjamin but without engaging with his work in any way. McLaren uses pertinent quotes from Benjamin to introduce an essay, and Giroux's use of Benjamin consists primarily of references to his idea of "rubbing history against the grain"; usually, Giroux does not even cite a source.[9] In the work of McLaren and Giroux, Benjamin functions as

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[9] See Henry A. Giroux, *Disturbing Pleasures: Learning Popular Culture* (New York/London: Routledge, 1994) 105, 120; *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York/London: Routledge, 1992) 78, 106, 195; "Introduction," *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (Westport, Connecticut/London: Bergin & Garvey, 1987) 16; and Peter McLaren, "Multiculturalism and the Postmodern Critique," *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, Ed. Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren (New York/London: Routledge, 1994) 192; "Schooling the Postmodern Body," Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics., Ed. Henry A. Giroux (Albany:

an icon for a particular attitude. These examples, and numerous others, refer to *Illuminations*, the collection of works most often cited in social sciences and cultural studies.[10] One of the best known Benjamin essays in the English-speaking world is from this collection: "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."[11] In the field of cultural studies, Iain Chambers has productively engaged with this essay in his two ground-breaking studies on popular culture, *Urban Rhythms* and *Popular Culture*.

Popular Culture is a general overview, or mapping, of the various dimensions of British popular culture and of how they inform everyday knowledge. New forms of popular art, which require no specialized knowledge and are not institutionally sanctioned, are juxtaposed with the preserved forms of "official," or institutionalized, culture, which are based on cultivated tastes and formal knowledge. Popular culture is not abstractly contemplated as though it exists in a separate sphere, as has been the case with high culture, but is linked to everyday informal knowledge as it is used, examined, and understood through "distracted reception" (*Popular Culture* 12). *Urban Rhythms*, based on this same understanding of popular culture, traces popular music in British white working-class male culture, examining its various forms and meanings as well as its intersections with the political, social, and economic landscape of British pop music from the mid-fifties to the late seventies.

Chambers builds on Benjamin's understanding of changing modes of cultural production. As Benjamin has shown, "conditions of perception, reception, and artistic production [have] irreversibly changed" (Chambers, "Contamination" 608). More specifically, "[t]he request for 'authenticity' [has been] rendered meaningless by mechanical reproduction" (Chamber, *Urban*

State University of New York Press, 1991) 144.

[10] Hannah Arendt edited and wrote the introduction to this collection, which represents her (successful) attempt to acquaint American readers with Benjamin.

[11] Hereafter this essay will be referred to as "Work of Art."

Rhythms 15). This means that there are "no longer any fixed 'sources,' no 'pure' sounds, no untainted 'aura' against which to evaluate the continual combination, reproduction, and transmission of sounds, images, and objects that circulate in the heterogenous flux of the modern city" (Chambers, "Contamination" 608). Urban culture, not institutionalized cultural forms, is Chambers' referent, and "mechanical reproduction is its privileged mode of cultural production" (Chambers, "Contamination" 612)

In "Work of Art," Benjamin argues that one cannot continue to examine cultural production with outmoded theoretical frameworks and assumptions. He specifically refers to the "aura" of works of art, which, in the past, was closely linked to the uniqueness of the art object. It is this uniqueness -- the uniqueness of the original -- that provided the artwork with its "authenticity" and placed it within institutionalized intellectual traditions that were separate from everyday reality. With the possibility of mechanical reproduction, the aura is no longer the defining feature of art; and, if we are to understand new art forms made possible by new means of production, then the distinction between high and popular culture is no longer viable. This being the case, art can no longer be considered as existing in a separate, autonomous sphere; rather, it must be considered as political: "In dem Augenblick aber, da der Maßstab der Echtheit an der Kunstproduktion versagt, ... tritt ihre Fundierung auf eine andere Praxis: nämlich ihre Fundierung auf Politik" (Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit"[12] 482) ["But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production ... it begins to be based on another practice -- politics" ("Work of Art" 226)].

The continuity and rituals of tradition are broken by these new means of production: "Die Reproduktionstechnik ... löst das Reproduzierte aus dem Bereich der Tradition ab" (Benjamin,

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[12] Hereafter this essay will be referred to as "Kunstwerk."

"Kunstwerk" 477) ["The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" ("Work of Art" 223)]. New means of production precipitate a change in the relationship between the author and the readers: "die Unterscheidung zwischen Autor und Publikum [ist] im Begriff, ihren grundsätzlichen Charakter zu verlieren" (Benjamin, "Kunstwerk" 493) ["the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character" ("Work of Art" 234)]. At this point, the public is more than a mass of consumers, it is also a mass of cultural producers and critics.

Benjamin, unlike his Frankfurt School associates Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, saw the necessity of redefining culture, particularly with regard to the distinction between high culture and mass culture, while still maintaining the positive potential of both the new forms of technology (such as photography, film, and radio) and the cultural forms they produced. By contrast, Adorno's and Horkheimer's analysis focused on mass culture, which they understood to be a tool for the manipulation of the masses within the social and bureaucratic structures of late capitalism.

In "The Culture Industry"(first published in1944), Adorno and Horkheimer analyze mass culture within the context of their experience of fascist Europe and American mass culture. They are clear in their condemnation of it: "Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth is that they are just business made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they produce" (Adorno and Horkheimer 121). To them, television is "the triumph of invested capital" (Adorno and Horkheimer 124). They are equally clear about the victim status of the consumers of mass culture: "The consumers are the workers and employees, the farmers and the middle-class. Capitalist production so confines them, body and soul, that they fall helpless victims to what is offered" (Adorno and Horkheimer 133). The two main threads of this analysis are: (1) the public is an undifferentiated mass of consumers that will do what is expected of them; and (2) cultural

products are commodities that are dominated by propaganda, advertising, and consumerism -- they have nothing to do with art. In short, Adorno and Horkheimer maintain the distinction between high and mass culture, understanding the latter to be negative and detrimental as well as structurally determined by the institutions of late capitalism.

Benjamin, although aware of the potential for the abuse of new cultural forms and the new technology that produced them, also recognized the positive, potentially liberating and pedagogical capabilities of this new technology. He believed that it was necessary to understand art and culture in new ways. Where Adorno and Horkheimer saw the control exerted by the means of production during the workday being continued and reinforced in mass culture, Benjamin envisioned the possibility of bursting the workday world asunder by means of new cultural forms:

> Unsere Kneipen und Großstadtstraßen, unsere Büros und möblierten Zimmer, unsere Bahnhöfe und Fabriken scheinen uns hoffnungslos einzuschließen. Da kam der Film und hat diese Kerkerwelt mit dem Dynamit der Zehntelsekunde gesprengt, so daß wir nun zwischen ihren weitverstreuten Trümmern gelassen abenteuerliche Reisen unternehmen. (" Kunstwerk" 499-500)[13]
>
> ["Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling." ("Work of Art" 238)]

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[13] It should be noted that Benjamin's use of German is somewhat idiosyncratic, often not conforming to standard punctuation, orthography, or syntax.

The (then) new cultural medium of the film, by being able to split time into fractions of a second, explodes the perception of time as a flowing continuum that is difficult, if not impossible, to stop or even alter. It is not only institutions that are prison-like, but also the places where people live and work. Yet, unlike Adorno and Horkheimer, who emphasize these systemic controls, Benjamin indicates possibilities for tearing them asunder. Film, for example, can provide exciting new means of perceiving and experiencing the world, thus enabling the dismantling of established frameworks and systems. With this dismantling, new understandings become possible, which may include previously excluded elements. By extension, it now also becomes possible to intervene in those systems that seem to exercise complete control. I will come back to this form of disruption in Chapter 5, when I examine the modern urban landscape and how Benjamin's understandings of it intersect with social, intellectual, and emotional elements. (In Chapter 6, I will examine the positive potential of the new medium of radio.)

Chambers' work on popular culture builds on Benjamin's idea of breaking down confining frameworks that prioritize institutionalized culture over popular culture. In this view, the public is not controlled by a culture industry, as Adorno and Horkheimer argue, but, rather, both consumes and produces culture. Benjamin's insights in "Work of Art" are important referents for Chambers' arguments in particular, and for the project of cultural studies in general. It is primarily, though by no means solely, on the basis of this article that Benjamin has been made an icon in cultural studies. By limiting him to only a few major, now canonized, articles, we exclude numerous aspects of his work and life, particularly those concerning the issues pertaining to the intersections of the public/private spheres. These issues will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, as I attempt to illustrate the multiple ways in which Benjamin's life and work provide productive sites for cultural studies and critical pedagogy.

The link between cultural studies and critical pedagogy has been explored by Roger Simon, among others. The intersection of the two fields enables the investigation of the

> relation between learning and the social and cultural practices from the perspectives of one or more of the following questions: Whose particular symbolic and social practices regulate and normalize the formation of skills and subjectives [sic] for whom? How has this come to be and how does this continue to happen? What social inequalities are produced within such normalizations? What possibilities for whom are opened up by such practices: What resources and discourses might help support alternative educational practices? In other words, what is at stake ... is the way in which the cultural politics inherent to education sets up the organizing frameworks of research and academic study. (Simon, "Broadening the Vision" 113)

Simon further argues that "education is political in the sense that it is part of a value-based determination of the field of material, social and symbolic resources that both set limits and enable particular possibilities across a full range of daily activity" ("Broadening the Vision" 113). That education is political in the ways identified by Simon has been well established in both cultural studies and critical pedagogy.

Simon attempts to address "the contradiction that exists between the openness of human capacities that we encourage in a free society and the social forms that are provided and within which we must live our lives." He does this in order to achieve the wider aim of "the transformation of the relation between human capacities and social forms ... [that] requires both the expansion of forms to accommodate capacities and the expansion of capacities to make the realization of new forms possible" ("Empowerment as a Pedagogy of Possibility" 372-73). This is Simon's pedagogy of possibility, which understands educational practice "as a form of cultural politics and as a

particular way in which a sense of identity, place, worth ... is informed by practices which organize knowledge and meaning" ("Empowerment as a Pedagogy of Possibility" 373).[14]

Within this general form of critical pedagogy, informed by cultural studies, Simon engages with Benjamin's work in specific projects concerning how past events are learned and commemorated. In "The Pedagogy of Commemoration" and "Remembering the Obligation," the latter co-written with Claudia Eppert, Simon explores ways of understanding the past, asking "how particular ways of apprehending the past might be implicated in our understanding of a complicity with current unjust social relations and the prospects for a personal and communal renewal of identities and the possibilities which structure our everyday lives" ("Forms of Insurgency" 82). For, contrary to the axiom that holds that learning about the past can enable us to avoid repeating its mistakes, remembering the past can mean engendering or justifying the hatreds, violence, and injustices of the present. The pedagogical question then becomes: "What forms of memory can give just recollection to this violence without reproducing relations of hate? ... [We must] recognize that the task is not to forget that past, but to remember it differently" (Simon, "The Pedagogy of Commemoration" 6).

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[14] The discourse of empowerment is problematic in a number of ways, beginning with the questioning of the basic premise that educators are liberated and that their students need to become so by means of the power possessed by the former. The discourse of enabling presupposes the kind of hierarchical power structure that assumes that empowerment is given by someone who has power to someone who does not. Thus the teacher possesses power, which can be given, taken back, or even withheld. Teachers retain the power of validation and posses a superiority of understanding that problematically positions them as controllers of students' agency. For more detailed analyses, see, for example, Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," *Harvard Educational Review* 59.3 (1989): 297-324"; Magda Lewis and Roger Simon, "A Discourse not Intended for Her: Learning and Teaching Within Patriarchy," *Harvard Educational Review* 56.4 (1986): 457-72"; Jennifer Gore, "What We Can Do for You! What *Can* 'We' Do For 'You'?: Struggling over Empowerment in Critical and Feminist Pedagogy," *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*, Ed. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore (New York/London: Routledge, 1992) 54-73; and Deborah Britzman, "Decentering Discourses in Teacher Education: Or, the Unleashing of Unpopular Things," *Journal of Education* 173.3 (1991): 60-80.

Simon's questioning is based on Benjamin's "ongoing dialectic between the past and the present" (Simon, "Forms of Insurgency" 76). Simon engages with Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" ("Über den Begriff der Geschichte") in order to question the notions of history and culture that have been passed on, as tradition, through education and the media. Like Benjamin, he "rubs history against the grain" (Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte" 701, 702, 703) in order to begin dismantling its context. In other words, history has been written by victors and rulers and thus expresses not culture and civilization but barbarism (Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte" 696).

To address these issues, one needs a critical pedagogy in which "past forms of encounter are not grasped as inevitable consequences of history ... but as constituted through the actions of people" (Simon, "Forms of Insurgency" 85). Such a pedagogy asks how history is made "visible, accessible and understood by whom, for whom and with what consequences both for legitimation of action and interest and in accordance with what notions of whose desire?" (Simon, "Forms of Insurgency" 83). Using Benjamin to help show the discontinuities and breaks in history, as well as its constructedness, enables Simon to ask further questions: What should be remembered, why, and how? How can the testimony, remembrance, and representation of the past be put to use to help prevent future injustices? For Simon, the dialectical entwining of the past and present make history not a matter of recollection but, rather, of movement towards greater social justice. This is how, in everyday life, remembrance operates to orient actions and to project desires onto the future. From Simon's work, it is clear that Benjamin speaks to and can inform current debates in critical pedagogy. In Chapter 5, where I consider his concept of porosity and his attempts to map out his own life in the cities in which he lived, it will become clear that Benjamin has much more to offer.

Julian Roberts, in one of the first English-language attempts "to provide a general critical account of Benjamin's work ... [and] a general introductory framework for the interpretation of his

texts" (3), characterizes Benjamin as "the highly respected enigma" (1). Roberts observes that there are no works that "tackle Benjamin as a completed corpus of theory," (2) and he attributes this to the fact that "Benjamin is undeniably a difficult figure, partly because much of his writing is itself extremely concise and opaque, and partly because his opinions do not always appear to be consistent" (3). Roberts' goal is to "overcome these difficulties" (4). The strength of his overview lies precisely in the fact that he rejects, and warns against, what he identifies as two of the most problematic tendencies in Benjamin scholarship: (1) strict classification and (2) "biographical hero-worship." Roberts concludes that "[t]he attempt to extract single-minded purpose from a biographical subject is only a reflection of what Benjamin himself attacked as the intellectuals' mythology of 'creative personality.' In this sense there is not really any conclusion to draw about Benjamin" (5).

The conclusion to which Roberts refers is the classification of Benjamin as a particular kind of scholar: messianic as opposed to materialist, or, alternatively, literary critic as opposed to philosopher. Roberts recognizes that such classifications are based primarily on only one of Benjamin's multiple dimensions and that they seek a mythical unity. To Roberts' insights I would add that this way of understanding an intellectual figure lends support to particular assumptions. The first assumption is that a person's career is somehow separate from the person her/himself, from which it follows that intellectual life can be separated from emotional life, and that intellectual work occurs within a space that does not have anything to do with the private sphere.

Roberts tacitly accepts such assumptions. Although he does recognize that "[i]t is necessary to attend to the question of 'background,'" which he defines as "a set of influences and traditions" (Roberts 4), the influences he refers to are primarily intellectual. While acknowledging the social, political, and historical dimensions of Benjamin's life (such as Benjamin's involvement with the Student Reform Movement and the impact of the First World War), Roberts' primary concern is

Benjamin's intellectual lineage. He chronologically traces the influences on Benjamin's work, beginning with Gustav Wyneken, Benjamin's teacher and a prominent educational reformer. Roberts explicates Benjamin's relationships to: (1) Zionism, as exemplified by the assimilationist Hermann Cohen and the nationalistic Martin Buber; (2) Communism, as exemplified by Ernst Bloch and Bertolt Brecht; and (3) the Frankfurt School, as exemplified by Theodor Adorno. Roberts further situates Benjamin within the intellectual movements of the time, which include neo-Kantianism, Heideggerianism, the philosophical socialism of Lukács, and the Stefan George literary circle. In other words, Roberts provides a wealth of information and a comprehensive, even-handed overview of Benjamin within the framework of standard intellectual history. The elements Roberts refers to as "background" are the ones I wish to move to the foreground, as it is my thesis that it is the interrelationship between the latter and the former that "made" Walter Benjamin.

Richard Wolin discusses "the often acrimonious debate over which is the *authentic* Benjamin, the 'materialist' or 'theological'" (108). He observes that "[v]irtually every contribution to the ever-growing voluminous secondary literature on Benjamin has felt compelled to take one side or the other in this debate" (Wolin 288). Wolin's solution is to retain the split and to see Benjamin's work in two chronological phases. However, rather than emphasizing one phase over the other, he attempts to elucidate each as a separate entity.

In his overview of previous Benjamin scholarship, Michael W. Jennings further elaborates on the theological versus the materialist debate:

> Benjamin's critics have tended to resolve the contradictory character of much of his work by presenting two distinct Walter Benjamins. Scholem and Adorno themselves ... initiated the tendency. Scholem's writings on Benjamin emphasize the early works and those later pieces most clearly marked by the theological tendencies of the early work. ... Adorno privileges the late, Marxist Benjamin....

> Thus, in Benjamin's commentators, one finds, in the years up to 1924, a "metaphysical" thinker deeply indebted to Jewish mysticism, Romantic aesthetics, and Idealist philosophy. After 1924, the argument goes, Benjamin develops into a historical materialist who ... rigorously differentiates between writings of a metaphysical and a political cast. (5-7)

This split between a fundamentally different early and late Benjamin has a long tradition, which began at the inception of Benjamin scholarship. Like Adorno and Scholem, those who followed in their footsteps have sought to fix Benjamin into a particular intellectual identity. Roberts, as discussed above, attempts to work against this tendency, yet he explains Benjamin's early work as being the background to his "real" work of historical materialism: "historical materialism[,] which Benjamin reached at the end of his long apprenticeship[,] cannot be fully understood without the sometimes rather arduous negotiation of what led up to it" (103). Although Roberts claims not to arrive at specific conclusions, and although he attempts to avoid any strict classification of Benjamin, he ultimately fails to heed his own advice. Roberts, in his narrative of progress and development, does not discount Benjamin's early thought; instead, it becomes a training ground for attaining the goal of becoming a historical materialist. Although aware of the inadequacies of making either/or distinctions, Roberts ends up doing just that.

Michael Jennings endeavours to break away from the either/or questions concerning Benjamin by stressing the continuity throughout his work:

> The conceptual model of life as a series of discrete stages is, however, inappropriate to Benjamin, not least because he himself repeatedly stressed the paradoxical continuity of his thinking. ... I will argue for one Benjamin, for a thinker whose late work *combines* mysticism and Marxism. ... Benjamin is willing to allow those contradictions to clash with one another in order to explore the "paradoxical

> reversals"... that occur when such apparent contraries as radical politics and theology meet. (7-8)

Jennings rightly takes issue with those who attempt to describe Benjamin in terms of a number of developmental stages that culminate in a position located on an intellectual map. He also disagrees with those who insist that Benjamin can only be identified with one pole or the other of a binary opposition. Jennings seeks to look at all aspects of Benjamin's work, and he recognizes the value of the tension between positions previously thought to be incompatible, if not mutually exclusive. This recognition allows him to examine that productive tension, and he acknowledges that Benjamin himself viewed his work as connected rather than disjointed. In a letter to Max Rychner[15] he wrote: "there is a bridge to the way dialectical materialism looks at things from the perspective of my particular stance on the philosophy of language, however strained and problematical that bridge might be" (*Correspondence* 372).

However, merely combining two aspects of Benjamin's thought that were previously perceived to be incompatible over-simplifies the complexity of Benjamin's work.[16] Pierre Missac criticizes this attempt to resolve the complex contradictions in Benjamin and his work as amounting to the use of "convenient oxymorons," such as Marxist rabbi (8), and he accuses critics who attempt such a synthesis of "making do with formulas that are at best descriptions, posing the problem without making headway on it" (22-23). Further to this, it should be noted that such practices reify binary oppositions by positing that they work together rather than against one another. Instead of being classified as either messianic or materialist, Benjamin's work becomes a

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[15] Rychner (1897-1965) was a literary critic, professor of literature and editor of a literary journal, *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*.

[16] See Jeremy Gaines, "Research on Walter Benjamin," *Theory, Culture and Society* 10.3 (1993): 149-167, for further criticism of Jennings. According to Gaines, although Jennings claims that one of his major goals is to examine the link between the theory and practice of literary criticism, he severs that link by examining only Benjamin's theory.

kind of dialectical mixture, in which opposites are overcome by a harmonious blending. Benjamin himself, by refusing to commit to either one or the other polarity, kept the various contradictory aspects of his work in constant tension with one another, always rubbing against the grain of given systems by choosing tension over harmony.

At the core of my project is the separation of the public from the private Benjamin -- a separation that occurs by virtue of the underlying assumptions concerning what constitutes an intellectual. In the previously discussed studies, as well as in numerous others, Benjamin the intellectual is assumed to have had a day-to-day lived reality, emotions, and a personal life, but they are presented as irrelevant to his intellectual production. Benjamin's own work provides us with direction, in that it emphasizes the examination of those things that established systems of knowledge production disregard. One such disregarded element is the interconnection between the intellect and the emotions. Although he has not further examined the significance of these experiences, Missac has observed that "it is surely not insignificant that the three *Liebeserlebnisse* -- which one could translate here as 'experiences of romantic passion' -- accompany (or are accompanied by) the composition of Benjamin's first three critical works (to which we should add *One-Way Street*)" (7).[17]

Although not considered in early Benjamin scholarship, the intersection of the intellectual and emotional, the public and the private, has recently begun to be acknowledged. However, as yet there are only a few theoretical frameworks that provide a means of exploring those dimensions in conjunction with his philosophical and literary influences. When one begins to examine those intersections, it becomes clear that gender plays a significant role. The private and emotional have

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[17] The critical works he refers to are Benjamin's dissertation, "Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik" ["The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism"], his essay "Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften" [Goethe's Elective Affinities"], and his habilitation "Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels" ["The Origin of the German Tragic Drama"].

long been associated with women, and Benjamin's relationships with women are only gradually beginning to be explored. The following overview of the treatment of Benjamin's relationship with Asja Lacis illustrates how this relationship was initially dismissed. And, although it has recently been acknowledged, it has not yet been closely examined.

Benjamin's and Lacis' relationship began with their first meeting in Capri in 1924, and it coincided with the beginning of Benjamin's serious engagement with Marxism. Many critics have been all too quick to dismiss Lacis as solely a love/sex object. Adorno, for example, dismisses the possibility that Lacis co-wrote "Naples": "Dann war ich sehr beeindruckt von einem größeren Aufsatz, ... den er publizierte unter seinem Namen und dem von Frau Asja Lacis, obwohl schwer ein Zweifel daran sein kann, daß diese Arbeit ganz und gar das Produkt Benjamins war" (*Über Walter Benjamin* 10) [Then I was very impressed by a longer essay ... published under his own name and that of Mrs. Asja Lacis, although there can hardly be any doubt that this work was absolutely produced by Benjamin].[18] Benjamin's first biographer, Werner Fuld, discounts any influence Lacis may have had on Benjamin and presents by far the most negative picture of her. In his discussion of their months together in Capri he disputes Lacis' role in Benjamin's interest in Marxism: "Der Einbezug marxistischer Perspektiven in Benjamins Denken erfolgte nicht durch Vermittlung von Asja Lacis, die sein Interesse nur vertiefte, sondern durch Ernst Bloch" (Fuld 158) [The inclusion of Marxist perspectives in Benjamin's thought was not the consequence of any mediation by Lacis, who only deepened his interest, but rather came about through Ernst Bloch]. Fuld seeks to establish a clear lineage regarding who influenced whom. His critical stance towards

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[18] Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Lacis is ostensibly based on the fact that her memoirs are "unreliable"(156),[19] although he does not substantiate this contention.

For Fuld, Lacis is a beautiful, naive girl who is attracted to Benjamin because she perceives him to be wealthy: "Für die *schöne, aber naive* Asja, die sich Benjamin als wohlhabend dachte, mußte dieses unregelmäßige Leben als Bohème erscheinen" (Fuld 157; emphasis mine) [For the *beautiful but naive* Asja, who thought Benjamin was wealthy, this irregular life must have appeared bohemian (emphasis mine)]. His dismissal of her co-authorship of "Naples" is based solely on Adorno's opinion (Fuld 157) -- an opinion that has been proven incorrect. Benjamin himself made a number of references to Lacis' co-authorship of "Naples."[20]

Fuld dismisses Lacis' ability to understand Benjamin, other than at a very basic, unsophisticated level, because, according to him, she had no understanding of philosophical concepts. When Benjamin remarks that Lacis was surprised to hear him speak about communist ideas in connection with something he had been reading, Fuld believes that Benjamin was merely being polite about her lack of comprehension:

> damit ist sehr vornehm ausgedrückt, daß die junge Kommunistin seine unerwarteten Lektüreerfahrungen und ihre Beziehung zu seinem philosophischen Denken überhaupt nicht verstand. Was sie verstand, war, daß Benjamin sich scheinbar plötzlich für den Kommunismus interessierte. Tatsächlich war für Benjamin durch die Lukács-Lektüre nun auch die politische Praxis der Kommunisten ins Blickfeld gerückt, aber er war dadurch nicht einfach "bekehrt." (160)

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[19] "In ihrem nicht sehr zuverlässigen Erinnerungsbuch erzählt sie, wie sie Benjamin auf Capri kennenlernte" (Fuld 156). [In her not very reliable memoirs she tells how she met Benjamin in Capri].

[20] See, for example, his letter to Scholem, ca. 20-25 May 1925 (*Briefe* Vol 3, 37; *Correspondence* 267).

> [that was merely a polite way of saying that the young communist did not understand his unexpected reading material (meaning Lukács) and its connection to his work. What she understood was that Benjamin appeared to suddenly be interested in communism. In fact by reading Lukács the political practice of communism became a topic of interest for Benjamin, but he was not thereby simply "converted."]

Fuld assumes that Lacis' limited reasoning abilities and fervent Marxist beliefs could only allow her to believe that Benjamin had been "converted." To counter Fuld's assertion regarding Lacis' alleged limited capabilities, one need only be aware of her numerous accomplishments. For example, her list of Latvian, Russian, and German publications in respected literary as well as political journals is six pages long (Miglane 250-55). As a theatre director ("Dramaturg"), she almost single-handedly turned a small provincial Latvian theatre into one of the leading theatres in the Soviet Union (Haus 146). In spite of evidence to the contrary, Fuld repeatedly attempts to demonstrate Lacis' weak mental faculties and insists that her belief in Communism tainted every facet of her life, thus making her incapable of understanding Benjamin's work, much less having any influence on it.

Consider Fuld's explanation of Lacis' reaction when Benjamin told her he was analyzing German Baroque tragedy of the seventeenth century (his habilitation). In her memoirs, Lacis writes that she responded by making a face and asking: "wozu sich mit der toten Literatur beschäftigen?"(Lacis 43) [Why busy oneself with dead literature?]. Fuld interprets this as her inability to understand what Benjamin was working on:

> Als Kommunistin, die ihren Kopf mit vermeintlich aktuellen Tageskämpfen füllte, konnte Asja Lacis nicht wissen, daß es keine tote Literatur gibt, außer der, welcher die gerade Lebenden nicht genügen können. Benjamin aber, in Unkenntnis so einfältiger Verdrängungstechnik, war irritiert. (157)

> [As a Communist, whose head was probably filled with current daily battles, Asja Lacis could not know that there is no dead literature, except for that which those presently living are unable to satisfy. Benjamin, however, who was not knowledgeable about such simple-minded suppression techniques, was irritated].

In Fuld's interpretation the reader is witness to a clash between a humanistic view of the arts, which places them in a noble realm above the mundane concerns of critical social engagement, and a communistic view. Fuld is derisive, dismissing Lacis without considering her critique of Benjamin's work.

Certainly Benjamin was irritated, but, like Susan Buck-Morss, I attribute that irritation to the fact that Lacis appears to have understood why he was having such difficulty writing the theoretical part of his study of tragic drama. Buck-Morss credits Lacis with providing one of the clearest summaries of the intent of Benjamin's study. Her criticism "hits the mark. Benjamin was having great difficulty writing the theoretical introduction to the piece, not only because of the distractions of being in love, but also because the 'thematic restrictions' of the study were making it 'awkward' for him to express his own thoughts" (*Dialectics of Seeing* 15). Lacis had an understanding of Benjamin's work; she was not a naive golddigger, as Fuld would insist. The evidence concerning Lacis points rather to a remarkable person who had a great deal of intelligence, a strong commitment to her work, and much to offer the people with whom she associated.

Fuld's reasons for this inordinately negative treatment of Lacis could be explained in a number of ways. First, he seems to have been influenced by Adorno's negative attitude towards her. Second, it is possible she is his means of passing a moral judgement: Benjamin was a married man with whom Lacis had a lengthy affair. If this is the case, then there is clearly a gendered double standard, for this negative judgement applies only to Lacis and not to Benjamin. Third, one could surmise that Fuld was strongly opposed to Communism (although this should be noticeable in his

discussion of Bertolt Brecht, which it is not). Fourth, he may have an underlying assumption that women should remain in the private sphere, as they are, by definition, incapable of the intellectual rigour required in the public sphere. Given the type of arguments Fuld uses against Lacis, all of which centre on the deficiency of her mental capabilities, the fourth explanation seems the most probable, although the others may play a role as well.[21]

Where Fuld consistently dismisses and derides Lacis, later biographers Hans Puttneis and Gary Smith almost completely ignore her. By contrast, Brodersen, whose biography attempts to weave together the public and private strands, gives Lacis and her relationship with Benjamin more serious and balanced consideration.[22] He states, for example, that Benjamin's "love for Asja Lacis was to open up to him a sphere of intellectual production" (*Walter Benjamin* 140). This form of acknowledgement of Lacis' role in Benjamin's life and work has become relatively common. Terry Eagleton, for example, asserts:

> There were rather more pleasurable reasons for this illumination [concerning the political practice of communism] than ploughing his way through Lukács: on Capri Benjamin had also met Asja Lacis, the Lettish Bolshevik and theatre director whom

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[21] Fuld's references to Lacis are biting, and he insists that she had solely a negative influence on Benjamin, always distracting him from his "real" work. Further evidence for the possibility of the gendered assumptions I have indicated is his treatment of another "career woman," Benjamin's sister-in-law, Hilde Benjamin. Fuld's references to her are equally acerbic and dismissive.

[22] Although his work has become widely read, analysed and cited, there are, to my knowledge, only three biographies of Benjamin (those by Fuld, Witte, and Brodersen). There are also a number of personal reminiscences, including: Theodor Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1968), which contains reminiscences by Adorno himself; Ernst Bloch, Max Rychner, Gershom Scholem and Jean Selz; Herbert Belmore, "Some Recollections of Walter Benjamin," *German Life and Letters* 28.2 (1975): 119-27 and "Walter Benjamin," *German Life and Letters* 15 (1962): 309-13; Edouard Roditi, "Meetings with Walter Benjamin," *Partisan Review* 53.2 (1986): 263-67; Lisa Fittko, "'Der alte Benjamin': Flucht über die Pyrenäen," *Merkur* 403 (1982): 35-49, which recounts Benjamin's last days crossing the Pyrenees; and Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin. The Story of a Friendship*, Trans. Harry Zohn (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), probably the most well-known recounting of Benjamin's life by his life-long friend.

> he described as one of the most remarkable women he had ever encountered, and who was to become his lover. (153)

Here Eagleton indicates Lacis' significance to Benjamin, however, the reader is left without any explanation of how or why she was so "remarkable."[23] As Eagleton makes no further mention of Lacis, the reader only knows that she provided Benjamin's "pleasurable illumination," which could be interpreted as sexual innuendo, particularly given that he ends his comments about Lacis by stating that she became Benjamin's lover. By not offering anything further, Eagleton leaves his version of this relationship open to the assumption that love/sex, represented by Lacis, merely made the difficult task of theoretical analysis (serious, intellectual, "real" work) more pleasant, without actually contributing to it.

As Moi found in her study of de Beauvoir, "[t]he implication is that whatever a woman says, or writes or thinks is less important and less interesting than what she *is*" (78, emphasis in original). She illustrates how critics tend to have difficulty dealing with a woman who refuses to stay in the private sphere and how especially infuriating they find someone, like de Beauvoir, whose explicitly political participation in the world cannot be ignored (Moi 82-84). In the case of Lacis, she is sometimes labelled as "beautiful but naive" (Fuld 157), sometimes simply as Benjamin's lover, as though these comments were sufficient to explain her life and her relationship with Benjamin.[24]

This emphasis on what a woman *is* rather than on what she *does* has also been observed by Biddy Martin in her study of the nineteenth-century intellectual figure, Lou Andreas-Salomé. In

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[23] Eagleton takes this phrase from one of Benjamin's letters to Scholem: "eine der hervorragendsten Frauen, die ich kennengelernt habe" (*Briefe* Vol 2, 473). ["one of the most splendid women I have ever met" (*Correspondence* 245)].

[24] This has also been found to apply to other marginalized social groups. For example, in her analysis of totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt points out how the exclusionary practices of dominant groups force marginal groups to justify what they *are* rather than what they *do* (Morris B. Kaplan 126).

her critique of how the critics deal with Salomé's relationships to famous men, Martin comes to a conclusion similar to Moi's:

> Salomé has been variously construed as murderous seductress, phallic mother, narcissistic parasite, and total disciple or, more positively, a muse, inspiration, support, and interpreter. What is striking, of course, is the structural similarity of those positions, always the guarantee of "his" identity, "his" significance, and the critic's "truths" ... Her significance to Nietzsche, Rilke, or Freud ... is not easily contained by conventional stereotypes of the adoring daughter, the domesticated wife, or the femme fatale. (11-12)[25]

What Salomé *is* has been the most important dimension in attempts to understand her, but Martin adds an important insight. What the intellectual woman, in this case Salomé, *is* must never get in the way of, or overshadow, the importance of the "great man/men" in her life. Similarly, critics and biographers alike tend to undermine Lacis' significance in Benjamin's life by referring to her either as a love/sex interest or as a catalyst who brings about changes in him. In this way, whether intentionally or unintentionally, they avoid having to explain a woman whose life does not fit the stereotypes of feminine existence.

In spite of Lacis' accomplishments as a social activist, theatre director, and founder of a proletarian children's theatre, not to mention the important role she played in Benjamin's life, even Benjamin scholar Susan Buck-Morss reduces her to a mythical figure. Although Buck-Morss' treatment of Lacis is generally more nuanced than most, at one point she describes Lacis as Benjamin's Ariadne (11). Ariadne, the woman who provided Theseus with the thread that enabled him to traverse the labyrinth, is the archetypal helping, nurturing female. She leads the hero out of

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[25] When referred to by last name only, Lou Andreas-Salomé is often called "Andreas-Salomé," however Martin uses only "Salomé." I have chosen to stay with Martin's usage.

trouble at a critical moment, allowing him to continue on his heroic quests, only to be discarded and forgotten once she has served her purpose in furthering his narrative. Because Buck-Morss does not analyze how Lacis' life and work intersects with Benjamin's, Lacis remains an Ariadne -- a woman who is reduced to being a catalyst or, at best, a muse.

Roberts acknowledges that Lacis "awakened his [Benjamin's] interest in art as a form of political action" (51), but he provides no further explanation of how this happened or what form it took. In addition, there is clearly a gendered difference in the manner in which Roberts explains influences in Benjamin's life. A woman who sparks an interest is in a different category than a man who writes a book. Roberts tells us that "Lacis was a Latvian theatrical producer who worked with important left-wing dramatists such as Piscator and Brecht ... she was thirty-three, and on holiday with her daughter Daga. Her lover ... was also intermittently with her" (50-51). By contrast, Roberts informs us that Lukács

> had gone through a development similar to that now experienced by Benjamin. His early work in literary criticism was a brilliant extension of the critical modes dominant at the time ... In 1918, on the general wave of disgust with the war ... he joined the Hungarian communist party ... *History and Class Consciousness* documents the conversion of an avant-garde neo-Hegelian ... to a practice-oriented Marxism. (51)

The information about Lacis refers to the important men with whom she worked, her age, her lover, and the fact that she is a mother -- in short, details concerning her private life. Lukács, by contrast, is described only in terms of his career -- his public, or intellectual, life.

Jennings deals with Lacis and Lukács in much the same way when he explains that Benjamin

> dated his espousal of Marxism to a stay on Capri in 1924, during which he established a complex intellectual and erotic relationship with the Latvian

> Communist theater director Asja Lacis. As important as this relationship was, his reading of Lukács's monumental *History and Class Consciousness* was equally important for Benjamin's turn to Marxism. (70)

Although he professes the equal importance of Lukács and Lacis, Jennings devotes eleven pages to explaining Lukács' influence and only five lines to Lacis' (i.e., those quoted above). Again, the subtext appears to be that, as a woman, Lacis could only influence Benjamin in so far as his love for her made him interested in what she did. Lukács' influence, however, came in the form of a scholarly book written within an identifiable intellectual tradition and, therefore, is more deserving of attention. In the scholarly tradition of explaining and understanding theories only in relation to other theories, the task becomes one of understanding how Benjamin "connects to other 'great' figures," as Buck-Morss has observed (*Dialectics of Seeing* 52).

In these examples, Lacis is reduced to an object whose function is to propel Benjamin's work. She is of interest only in so far as she fulfills a specific function in Benjamin's intellectual life. Clearly, these researchers possess the scholarly tools and methods for examining relationships between ideas and for tracing generally male scholarly lineages. What appears to be missing, however, are the tools to examine the intersection between public and private spheres and to appreciate the significance of social relationships for intellectual production. I discuss Lacis and her relationship to Benjamin in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

One strand of the various threads that connect public and private consists of how social institutions, particularly the university, make intellectuals. What institutional processes make an intellectual? By what means does an individual become a failure or a success? How and by whom is failure and success determined? Obviously, these processes change according to historical and social circumstances. In the case of Benjamin, during his life he was considered to be a failure, whereas today he is considered to be a success.

His alleged failure has been explored from various psychological and institutional perspectives, and it remains a much debated subject. Hans Mayer, in an address given on the occasion of Benjamin's 100th birthday, focuses on Benjamin as a failure. He repeatedly refers to Benjamin's failure to qualify as a university lecturer. Throughout Mayer's speech, Benjamin is the "gescheiterte Germanist" (18) [failed scholar of German literature] who is constantly revisited throughout his life by the "Schock der gescheiterten Habilitation" (40) [the shock of his failed habilitation]. According to Mayer, the pain of this failure was so great that it remained with Benjamin his entire life: "Der Schmerz über die abgelehnte Habilitationsschrift ließ niemals nach" (Mayer 52) [The pain inflicted by his rejected habilitation dissertation never subsided].

Yet, according to Mayer, this failure should not be understood merely as the result of external circumstances, but, rather, as one of his own making. Mayer argues that Benjamin's affinity for Romanticism caused him to live by the motto "Nicht-Vollendung," (33) [imperfectiblity and incompletion]; that is, nothing can be finished, for to be finished would be to be perfect, which is impossible, as the perfect is the infinite. This is the reaction of the German Romantics to the ideal of the complete and perfect whole of Classicism, which was seen in "Lebenswerk und Kunstwerk" [life's work and work of art]. The art and life of the Romantic thus had to be unharmonious and incomplete, leading Benjamin to his own "produktives Scheitern" (Mayer 33) [productive failure]. Thus, in Mayer's estimation, Benjamin, who does not achieve his habilitation, is never able to overcome this failure.

Further, Mayer links Benjamin's failure to Ernst Bloch's question: "Und wie, wenn ich nun gar nicht wirklich berufen bin, es mir folglich nur einbilde?" [sic] (55) [And what if I am not really chosen, but only imagine myself to be so?]. Rather than being forced to consider this question, Mayer asserts that Benjamin simply avoids it by becoming a failure: "Benjamin ließ einen solchen Augenblick der Wahrheit gar nicht erst zu: er kam ihm zuvor. Das Scheitern hatte er selbst

programmiert" (55) [Benjamin did not even tolerate such a moment of truth: he forestalled it. He programmed his failure himself]. Mayer contends that Benjamin made sure he was a failure in order to avoid facing the *possibility* that he was a failure -- that he might not have been destined for this particular calling.

Mayer draws a parallel between Benjamin and his friend, Ernst Bloch, in order to provide evidence for the former's alleged failure. This parallel is drawn from Bloch's one-page story, "Kein Gesicht" [Without a Face], about a young girl who runs away from home and is temporarily successful as an actress, but ultimately fails and returns home to become a secretary. A few weeks later she becomes an inmate in a mental institution. The story ends with questions regarding the nature of being talented and the role of coincidence in making someone appear talented when she/he really is not. The final question is: "Warum müssen wir, die wir in allem begrenzt sind, so unbegrenzt leiden?" (Bloch 40) [Why must we, who are limited in every way, suffer such unlimited suffering?].

Mayer maintains that the gender of the protagonist is irrelevant: "Es war keine Frauengeschichte" (55) [It was not a woman's story]. He interprets the tale as asking universally applicable questions concerning being truly chosen for a particular calling versus imagining that one has been chosen. However, I contend that this story is obviously a "Frauengeschichte" [woman's story]. It contains the stereotypical situations in which women find themselves, both in literature and in life: if they leave the constraints of home (i.e., patriarchal discipline and control), then they are doomed to be punished and sent back. The disobedient woman often ends in a mental institution, for, so the script goes, any woman who does not maintain her proper place in society must be crazy. The eternal suffering is that of women burdened by these stereotypes and ideologies.

Mayer's appropriation of this story obliterates the gender of the protagonist, which, far from being irrelevant, is utterly crucial.[26]

Mayer's attempt to portray Benjamin as a failure is problematic on a number of counts. First, it is one thing to fail to become a university professor, it is quite another to fail in one's life and work. Mayer's analysis appears to conflate these two things, and this raises a number of questions that I will address later in more detail: Why do we implicitly accept the institution of the university as the arbiter of intellectual success and failure? If intellectual success can only be bestowed by the academy, then what does this say about how we understand Benjamin today? Why is he enjoying such posthumous popularity and success? What does this say about his induction into the canon?

The second problem with Mayer's portrayal of Benjamin as a failure is that he places him within the rarefied stratum of pure mental life, thus reducing him to the sum of his works. From those works, Mayer carefully selects passages that paint a picture of Benjamin that corresponds to his (Mayer's) own particular theory, method, and ideology. In short, we learn more about Mayer than we do about Benjamin.[27]

Benjamin's relationship to the institution of the university bears further investigation, as it is the university that made him. One of Benjamin's biographers, Brodersen, maintains that Benjamin

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[26] The issue of the social construction of women's madness and how it has been employed to control women's behaviour includes a large body of (auto)biographical, literary and filmic works, and academic analyses in numerous disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields. While it is beyond the scope of this project to examine this issue in detail, a number of ground-breaking works should be noted: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1978); Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York/London: Penguin Books, 1987); and Dorothy Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

[27] Jeffrey Grossman comes to much the same conclusion in his overview of Benjamin's reception in the Anglo-American literary institution (426).

failed in his university career because his work did not conform to the disciplinary and methodological norms of the faculty to which it was submitted:

> Aside from the power struggles and intrigues within the philosophy faculty, which presumably played a decisive part in the rejection of Benjamin's *Habilitation* thesis, the question remains whether, and if so which, "objective" arguments were levelled against the work. On the basis of the wording of the report commissioned by the faculty board, Benjamin was only accused of having made one mistake: applying to the wrong address. (*Walter Benjamin* 149)

While Brodersen acknowledges that there were problematic politics and power struggles at the university, he appears to dismiss them in favour of the simple fact that Benjamin's work was sent to the wrong address -- so to speak. In other words, he should have perhaps been associated with a different faculty -- one that would have accepted his habilitation. However, this judgement of Benjamin's work goes beyond its suitability within a particular discipline and is indicative of his critical stance towards the institution of the university and the ways in which it produces knowledge. As Brodersen notes, "Benjamin's treatise was indeed a quite provocatively 'unacademic' work, at least in the customary understanding of the term.... the book was a complete parody if what German professors understood to be a systematic, methodologically reasoned work" (*Walter Benjamin* 149).

The verdict of the university, then, is failure for not heeding disciplinary boundaries and not conforming to established modes of practice and knowledge making. By not attaining his habilitation, Benjamin becomes, according to the structures and normative understandings of the institution, a failure. In other words, not conforming to disciplinary boundaries results in failure. It should be noted, however, that not only were Benjamin's feelings about joining the academic

community ambivalent, but he was also consistently critical of the university as an institution and of the type of scholarship it produced.

While Mayer's interpretation of Benjamin's failure is dubious, Brodersen's interpretation is plausible in so far as it offers an account of that failure within the structure of the university. However, Benjamin's failure to be accepted by the university came about through a combination of many complex factors: strong anti-Semitism at the universities;[28] the rigidity of the German university, which was loathe to accept work that did not conform to disciplinary boundaries and particular methodologies;[29] the power politics of the professors involved; and the incomprehensibility of Benjamin's work, which, to use Grossman's words, "introduced a discourse so foreign to the intellectual and cultural discursive formation at the time, its readers failed to comprehend it" (415). This refers not merely to Benjamin's style and language, as is often the case,[30] but, more important, to his conceptualization of the literary, aesthetic, cultural, philosophical, and historical themes that he addresses.

Certainly Benjamin's own needs and desires also played a role in his failure to get his habilitation. However, perhaps these needs and desires had more to do with his socio-economic position and his strong misgivings about the university as an institution than they did with an affinity for the German Romantics or doubts about his own abilities. Having been brought up the eldest son in a wealthy family, he generally expected to do what he pleased without having to work and earn money. This situation was complicated by his parents' declining affluence, which was brought about

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[28] For example, one of the reasons Benjamin decided not pursue his habilitation at the university of Heidelberg was that there was scant hope for his success there, due to pervasive anti-Semitism. See, for example: Witte, *Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 50; Benjamin's letter to Scholem, dated 30 December 1922 (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 299; *Correspondence* 204); and Donald L. Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany* (Baton Rouge/London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), especially his chapter on anti-Semitism.

[29] This has been discussed at length in many places. See Wohlfarth, "Resentment Begins at Home"; Brodersen, *Spinne im eigenen Netz*, 163-65; and Grossman 414-15.

[30] See, for example, Scholem, *The Story of a Friendship* 129.

by the extreme inflation of the early 1920s (culminating in the currency collapse of 1923). In addition, his parents were (understandably) simply tired of supporting their adult son and his family, and they felt that it was time for him, at the age of thirty-three, to earn his own living. I offer a close examination of Benjamin's failure in Chapter 4, which explores the traditional discourse of university success and failure, the actions of Benjamin's supervisors, and Benjamin's relatively unanalyzed relationship with Gottfried Salomon-Delatour during his years at the University of Frankfurt.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified a number of forms of engagement with Benjamin's work in different academic fields. In the field of (English-speaking) critical pedagogy, particularly at its intersection with cultural studies, engagement with Benjamin has been restricted to a small number of his translated works. While some studies draw on Benjamin for insights into popular culture and ways of comprehending history and tradition, it is much more common to find him reduced to an icon for one specific attitude or idea. This results in a limited and distorted understanding of both Benjamin the scholar and Benjamin the man.

The ongoing discussion in the academy, which seeks to categorize Walter Benjamin as a particular kind of scholar (usually as either messianic or materialist) or as a failure (usually by virtue of his unclassifiability) has also been addressed. I have outlined how these understandings of Benjamin have been determined, and I have attempted to explain why they are problematic, providing only a partial picture of him. Unarticulated in these accounts is the prevalent assumption that we can understand an intellectual figure solely by interpreting the corpus of his (or her) written work. Noticeably missing from such accounts of Benjamin are sustained attempts to examine the significance of the multiple intersections of the public and private spheres and how this relates to

his intellectual labour. This lack is most apparent in how Benjamin's relationship with Asja Lacis had been portrayed.

Chapter 2

Personal Genealogy: Methodology and Theory

"Ah, but what *is* a public person?" ...
"Only a nude body wearing slightly better clothes."

Carol Shields, *Swann*

As previously noted, my study of Walter Benjamin draws on Moi's method of personal genealogy as she develops it in her examination of Simone de Beauvoir. Moi uses this method, first of all, to make an important distinction between her project and that of both biography and literary criticism. For the most part, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the study of an intellectual figure not only subjects her/him to a process of categorization, but also implicitly assumes that her/his life and work are separable. This assumption is not value-neutral, for, as Moi observes:

> When it comes to biography and literary criticism, the life/text distinction normally carries an explicit or implicit value judgement: biographers often consider life more "real" or more "true" than text; many literary critics have a tendency to think of the text as a pure aesthetic object that can only be defiled by the mess we usually call life. (4)

It is not only the bifurcation of life and work (and its implicit value judgement) that is problematic for Moi, but also the very nature of how a traditional biography understands its subject. As Moi asserts:

> Like traditional history, biography is narrative and linear, argues in terms of origins and finalities and seeks to disclose an original identity. Genealogy, on the other hand, seeks to achieve a sense of emergence or production and to understand the

> complex play of different kinds of power involved in social phenomena.... Personal genealogy assumes that every phenomenon may be read as a text, that is to say as a complex network of signifying structures. (7)

Moi criticizes biography for attempting to uncover a person's presumed essence. The chronological telling of a person's life intends to show how events and circumstances led to that person achieving a specific identity. Genealogy, by contrast, explores the process by which a person -- a subjectivity -- evolves, never coming to a final conclusion in a fixed identity. By examining processes rather than attempting to establish a fixed identity, genealogy is able to show how the discourses of a people's lives shape their identity in different ways at different times. In other words, genealogy examines the production of intellectual figures as a social and cultural phenomenon shaped by individuals and the institutions within which they operate.

One could extend what she says of literary criticism to other disciplines and fields of study. The separation of work and person relegates intellectual work to an abstract realm of ideas, separate from the material realm of the writer-theorist. This, of course, harks back to the Cartesian mind/body split and the assumption of a neutral knower seeking universal truth. Within this paradigm, intellectuals are no more than the sum of their writing.

As Sigrid Weigel has noted in her re-reading of Benjamin, most understandings of Benjamin place him within a male tradition of influence and classify his work accordingly. What most often results from this are repeated complaints about contradictions within Benjamin's work and between Benjamin and the lines of tradition (Weigel, *Body- and Image-Space* xii). Weigel's own analysis begins from the premise that the reconstruction of lines of influence misses the point of Benjamin's work, which attempts to disrupt those very lines (*Body- and Image-Space* xi). Her solution is to examine his use of images together with his practice of thinking in an interdisciplinary manner, thus providing new insights that are applicable to philosophy, gender studies, and critical theory. True

to her intentions, Weigel removes Benjamin from any specific disciplinary tradition and lineage; however, her study retains the split between the man with a life history and the intellectual with ideas. Weigel provides a ground-breaking interdisciplinary study, disrupting disciplinary lineage and boundaries, while still abiding by the traditional scholarly practice of splitting the public from the private.

Personal genealogy examines not only inter- but also extra-disciplinary intersections through a relational analysis of the private and the public. Rather than unravelling one or two strands of Benjamin and attempting to transform them into a linear, causal narrative, I will examine specific points of intersection and attempt to show how such strands mutually influence one another and shape Benjamin's material conditions of existence (including, of course, the matrix of power relations).

The usual division between public and private has long been criticized by feminists in many fields. Particularly research in the social sciences has shown how the public sphere, generally associated with men and traditionally male activities, has become normative. Within this paradigm, women, who are generally associated with the private sphere and the body rather than with the public sphere and the mind, are often ignored. Attention paid to women tends to be determined by their deviation from the male norm. These arguments are well-known, and I will therefore only briefly mention a few of the more influential ones. Although the following three scholars -- Joan Kelly, Dorothy Smith, and Alison Jaggar -- work within different disciplines (namely, history, sociology, and political philosophy, respectively), they reach comparable conclusions.

In the 1970s Joan Kelly conducted ground-breaking research that "looked simultaneously at the public and private spheres and at their linkages" (ix). She describes feminist theory as a paradigm shift that moves away from a bifurcated view of social relations; that is, male-public/female-private. She maintains that feminist thought examines sets of socially formed social

relations that "are seen to obtain for women and men, and to do so *at the same time*" (Kelly 58; emphasis in original).

Dorothy Smith demonstrates that knowledge that was previously (and often still is) represented as universal was (is), in fact, knowledge determined from a standpoint located in the public world, traditionally the sphere of men. From the time the public/private split began in the seventeenth century, the public sphere has gradually grown to include government, administration, and all areas of waged labour. Concurrently, the sphere of women was gradually reduced to the private -- that is, the domestic -- sphere (D. Smith, *The Everyday World* 5-6). As a result of this, research did (does) not problematize the everyday world of experience and social relations (D. Smith, *The Everyday World* 98-99). Smith convincingly argues that, if our knowledge is to amount to more than the tracing of abstract and limited lineages, we must go beyond a narrowly defined public sphere and situate knowledge in the everyday world.

By analyzing how liberal, Marxist and radical feminisms understand human nature, Jaggar demonstrates the constructed, ideological nature of the split between public and private, as well as its negative consequences. She arrives at the conclusion "that it is misleading to think of there being two distinct spheres [public and private] at all" (*Feminist Politics* 146).

Kelly, Smith, and Jaggar provide sociological depth to Moi, whose insights are based chiefly on psychoanalytical principles and whose primary concern is the recognition and acceptance of women intellectuals, particularly in fields such as philosophy (where women still tend to be under-represented). Moreover, these studies are relevant beyond the confines of the academy. First, they point out that there are real, material effects to the split between public and private and that, because they produce knowledge based on this split, academics bear some responsibility for those effects. Second, they point out that all knowledge must be re-examined to take into account the fact that it is socially grounded rather than abstract.

Research in the sociology of education brings a slightly different, yet related, perspective to the issue of the public/private split and its relationship to the production of knowledge. Madeleine MacDonald distinguishes between the private (home life, family, friends, and peers) and the public (institutes of formal learning). Knowledge within the context of formal learning is generally detached from lived experience. MacDonald maintains that "numerous sets of oppositions ... divide and distance forms of knowledge and their associated activities. For example we can find the dichotomies of public and private knowledge, politics and psychology, reason and emotion, science and art, technology and nature, reality and fantasy. ... [T]here are also the methodological distinctions between hard and soft data, objectivity and subjectivity" (MacDonald 166). She elucidates the consequences of such divisions as follows:

> the informal everyday experience and everyday communication within the family and peer groups which shape social identities feed into and create procedures and performances fundamental to formal education. However, formal education also selects, and re-focuses and abstracts from such experiences and in so doing de-contextualizes it [sic]. The behaviours and competences invoked in the contexts of the home and community are thus freed from their dependence on evoking contexts and, through a process of recontextualizing, become generalizable and abstract. (MacDonald 167)

In other words, even though institutional forms of knowledge are informed by the everyday, the role of the latter in the production of formal knowledge is rarely acknowledged.

The point of these insights into the public/private, formal/informal forms of knowledge is, first, to acknowledge the constructed nature of their separation and, second, to examine the processes by which one constitutes the other. The pedagogical implications are far-reaching in that institutional knowledge is no longer seen as an abstract truth separate from everyday life and other

forms of knowledge. In other words, knowledge is no longer seen as causal or linear but, rather, as relational.

The significance of MacDonald's findings for my study of Benjamin lies in the educational consequences of traditional forms of knowledge production. The form of education that MacDonald describes and criticizes has as its goal reproduction; namely, the maintenance of the status quo. The issue is not the status of knowledge but its social organization -- the processes by which it is produced. If knowledge production is to be understood as taking place within both formal and informal settings, then public and private spheres must be looked at relationally rather than separately.

Personal genealogy, as it relates to Benjamin, seeks to make clear the interconnection between knowledge and social organization. It draws on feminist research that critiques knowledge based on the public/private split, and it elucidates the role of the latter in the cultural politics of understanding intellectual figures.

Breaking down the assumed boundaries between public and private necessitates, among other things, methodological considerations. To overcome the bifurcation of life and work, Moi proposes "that there can be no methodological distinction between 'life' and 'text'" (3-4) and "that every phenomenon may be read as a text" (7). My understanding of Moi's proposal does not presuppose a conflation of life and text that leads to the conclusion that everything is text; rather, Moi's methodological move allows life and text to be examined in conjunction with one another. It is a move that enables an examination not only of the processes by which meaning is determined, but, beyond that, of how knowledge is constructed. Thus numerous texts, from both work and life, intersect to "make" the person being analyzed. Moi deliberately chooses the verb "to make" to indicate, first of all, "the making of her [de Beauvoir] as an intellectual in the most literal way: by studying her education" (Moi 6). Thus the intellectual is understood as both a subject producing

knowledge and as an object of knowledge production. As well as using "make" in the sense of the institutional "making" of an intellectual figure, Moi uses it in the more general sense of emphasizing "the idea of production or construction, and thus to indicate that I see 'Simone de Beauvoir' as an extraordinary effect of a whole network of discourses" (6). Like Moi, I view the project of understanding what constitutes Benjamin as a social subject as an on-going process that must take into consideration his writings and his life as they unfolded within a specific historical and social context. Furthermore, the project must take into account attempts to make him change over time and according to different contexts.

Although Moi claims that she will examine how the institution produces de Beauvoir, she does not do so. Furthermore, it is not clear how she conceives of and analyzes the university as text. Her notion of institution as text is somewhat weak, particularly given her Freudian ideas concerning how texts are to be understood. A psychoanalytic theory developed to understand an individual's subjectivity loses much of its explanatory power when applied to an institution. Moreover, Moi seems to indicate that de Beauvoir's psychological life was the primary determinant of her career. As a consequence of emphasizing the psychoanalytical rather than the social in her analysis of the educational institutions in which de Beauvoir was involved, Moi ends up measuring her against Sartre -- something she had wished to avoid. I attempt to provide the institutional analysis that Moi claims, but fails, to provide. I do this by clearly specifying what is meant by discourse and by clearly emphasizing the social rather than the psychoanalytical.

With regard to avoiding presenting educational institutions as abstract entities, separate from both the knowledge they produce and the scholars who produce it, Kathryn Pyne Addelson's concept of "social world" is helpful. In her examination of the intersection of philosophical work and feminist epistemology, she states that "a social world consists of people who, over a period of time, perform some sort of collective action together" (Addelson 280). For the purposes of this

study, this social world consists of academics involved in the process of understanding the life, work, and significance of intellectual figures in general and of Walter Benjamin in particular. Although such "worlds" represent loosely defined and associated groups, they are based on a vital premise: "[w]hat is important in this notion of a social world is that we can ask detailed, empirical questions to specify what is done and who does it rather than talk abstractly about 'positions' or 'the patriarchy' or 'the ruling class'" (Addelson 281).

From this it follows that "*who* makes knowledge makes a difference. Making knowledge is a political act" (Addelson 267). This necessitates an analysis of the production of authorized knowledge and of how disciplines (and the individuals within them) participate in producing authorized readings (D. Smith, *Conceptual Practices of Power* 15). It should be noted here that the concept of "social world" is constituted by the social, geographical, and historical dimensions as well as individual dimensions such as race, class, and gender. It is for this reason that my analysis of Benjamin begins with his social world, focusing on those aspects of it that have, to date, not been examined: the social context of his familial situation, particularly his relationship with his wife (see Chapter 3).

A problematic aspect of Addelson's notion of social world is that it somehow occurs spontaneously (and only when a group communicates):

> The relationships among members of a social world are founded in communication, whether it be face-to-face activity with little talk, regular meetings, electronic mail, telephone calls, or form letters. For example, "the philosophy profession" and "feminist philosophy" name social worlds of related, quite complex sorts, held together by a multitude of communicative modes that includes department meetings, conferences, journals, and electronic media. (280-81)

Missing from this concept of the social world is any sense of accountability to the community of which one is a member, consciousness of one's membership in a particular community, and how and why that community came to be formed. These vital missing elements are to be found in the work of Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who offer an explanation of feminist genealogy. They stress the importance of "figuring out our communities of belonging, and therefore those communities to which we are accountable" (Alexander and Mohanty ix). These communities do not simply happen, as Addelson infers, but are consciously built. Such building is a task that first requires "accountability in envisioning, forming, and maintaining community" (ix). For if we, as scholars and educators, agree that knowledge formation is a political act, and if we engage in asking who does what, then it is also necessary to ask why; that is, in whose interest and to what ends does this process occur?

Much of the current "Benjamin industry" appears to have little accountability in Alexander's and Mohanty's sense. As Pierre Missac has suggested, "[t]he critics who swarm around an *oeuvre* that is becoming increasingly famous seem to want to flock to the scene of victory" (19). Although Missac could be accused of cynicism, one need not denigrate Benjamin scholarship in order to acknowledge that intellectual work, including this project, is motivated, to varying degrees, by one's desire to further one's career and by one's publisher's desire to make money. Benjamin's iconic status ensures interest in, and more publishing opportunities for, research dealing with this increasingly famous intellectual figure. Although it is seldom discussed, scholars, like other professionals, are interested in furthering their careers. In fact, they are under increasing pressure to do so ("publish or perish"). These circumstances do play a role in the production of knowledge and, as such, should not be ignored. This dimension of the production of knowledge needs to be seen within the larger context of the university as an institution; and the university as an institution needs to be seen within the larger context of society in general. In this way, we can more clearly

understand the success or failure of intellectuals, the interest or lack of interest in various objects of study.

It is in the sense of "making oneself important through Benjamin" (Missac 15) that I refer to a "Benjamin industry," in which the publication of ever more research virtually takes on a reproductive life of its own. This is certainly not to suggest that a moratorium should be placed on Benjamin research, or that all research should be based on pure selflessness, but, rather, that these dimensions of research should be acknowledged and that research itself should be accountable in a way that would satisfy Alexander and Mohanty. In other words, we need to ask: What are the researcher's responsibilities to Benjamin and to her own academic communities as she attempts to make sense of him and his work and to construct him as a subject? For example, by choosing this topic, I recognize that I, too, run the risk of becoming part of the Benjamin industry, as I am building one of the bases of my intellectual career on the investigation a "hot" subject that will have a good chance of "selling."

As Alexander and Mohanty have explained, accountability involves not only devising critical analytic tools and taking responsibility for them, but also taking on the challenge of crafting more nuanced and accurate ways of understanding the world in order to work towards a vision of social justice (ix-x). Alexander and Mohanty understand genealogy as a matter of commitment and as a matter of having a stake in a particular community -- elements missing from both Addelson's philosophy and Moi's personal genealogy.

Like Moi, I understand my subject to be an intersection of many personal and social dimensions -- dimensions that can be investigated by analyzing the discourses that explain and produce them. Moi explains her analysis of texts as follows:

> [A]ll sorts of texts (conversations, philosophical treatises, gossip, novels, educational institutions) will be considered elements participating in the same

> discursive network. The point is not to treat one text as the implicit meaning of another, but rather to read them all with and against each other in order to bring out the points of tension, contradictions and similarities. (5)

I will proceed in a similar manner, by reading different texts, both by and about Benjamin (such as essays and philosophical and autobiographical writings), with and against one another. I also assume, along with Moi, that life can be read as text and that, as such, it is both constituted by and constitutes various strands of discourse.

Moi's use of the terms "discourse" and "discursive network" is somewhat unclear. She conceives of de Beauvoir as "an extraordinary effect of a whole network of discourses or determinants" (6). In describing text as an overdetermined process, she lists the factors that exert pressure on that process as "'determinants,' 'discourses,' 'voices,' 'structures,' etc.," each one another "strand in the textual weave" (Moi 7). She follows this with a reference to a "strand ('discourse,' 'genre,' etc.) of philosophy" (Moi 7). She seems to equate all of these terms -- discourse, determinant, voice, structure, and strand -- in that she sees them as synonymous with the institutional production of the intellectual. In yet another variation, Moi describes factors that contribute to the making of de Beauvoir: "class, gender, religion, location as so many different social discourses" (37).

Moi sees these terms as equal in their power and as equal social determinants, all of which affect how de Beauvoir is made. It is difficult to know how structural interests function as social determinants, as these dimensions are treated as solely discursive. It is not clear how Moi accounts for class, religion, location, and gender as interests that play a role in how a person is made as a scholar. In fact, she renders material and structural determinations almost invisible and subordinates them to vague notions such as class, gender, and location, which she never defines. Thus she fails

to show how power works and she provides no evidence of its working (although she claims to provide such evidence).

Although "strands of a textual weave" is a descriptive and appealing metaphor that evokes the complexity and interconnectedness of various elements, it is perhaps too benign to grasp tensions and contradictions in the process of signification. Furthermore, it seems that the explication of the weave is the sole function of Moi's analysis. By this I mean that, when she identifies the different strands and explains how they are woven together, her task is complete. This precludes any examination of what the material results of such a weave might be (e.g., unequal power relations). For example, one could explain the complex interaction of individual and social factors that led to the rejection of Benjamin's habilitation. The question of success and failure, and of who decides what constitutes success or failure, would be an analysis of the "textual weave." However, it is important to go one step further and to take into account the real consequences of Benjamin's rejection: it added to his precarious financial situation and it placed additional responsibility on Dora (not only to tend to all domestic chores revolving around the household and child rearing, but also to provide the sole income for the family). Not being affiliated with the university gave Benjamin the time to travel wherever and whenever he chose, but not the financial means to do so. Being outside of academia afforded Benjamin an intellectual freedom he would not otherwise have had. There was no need for him to align himself with a particular discipline or even with a specific school of thought -- he could be equally critical of everyone and everything and take his research in directions that might not otherwise have been possible. He was also free from the time constraints of teaching and other responsibilities that he would have had as a member of the university community. In this complex interaction of factors, Benjamin's reality is shaped by many different discourses, as are his texts, but they are also formed by his material reality, as will be demonstrated in more detail in Chapter 5.

To return to Moi's analysis of de Beauvoir, it is the plurality of meaning that takes priority. Her personal genealogy is primarily concerned with signification and the process of arriving at multiple possible meanings. Moi demonstrates that meaning is always contested and in flux, but in my project I am more interested in the effects of that contestation and fluctuation on the making of Walter Benjamin. To take the investigation in this direction, it is necessary to define precisely what is meant by discourse, rather than simply to equate it with numerous other concepts, as Moi does. In order to adequately address the problems of power relations and materiality, I suggest an understanding of discourse that is more consistent with Moi's genealogical intentions; namely, discourse is an ever-changing process rather than an object, a means rather than an end. Here discourse amounts to an ideological use of language that privileges certain social groups and certain kinds of knowledge over others. Both privileged and marginal groups partake in discourse in order to support and/or contest meanings; however, their relative effectiveness is dependent on their position within social and institutional structures. The other concepts that Moi tends to equate with discourse -- voice, strand, genre, and structure -- can affect or be part of discourse, but they are not the same thing. Murdock further explains:

> the cultural field appears as the site of a continual struggle between competing discourses, each offering a particular way of looking at or speaking about the social world ... and engaged in a contest for visibility and legitimacy across a range of social institutions.... the radically unequal nature of discursive struggles aris[es] from the fact that some discourses are backed by greater material resources and have preferential access to the major means of publicity and policy-making. (63)

Discourse affects and is affected by the material, not only the ideational, world. The process of making meaning has material effects that vary from group to group and individual to individual. The production of meaning that occurs through discourse is not fixed in terms of process or

outcome, but is ever-challenged and ever-changing in historically and socially specific ways. This means that discourse is ambiguous, often contradictory, and never used in the same manner by all members of a social world. There is no simple equation regarding which discourse belongs to whom, as individuals are positioned differently in terms of their relative power and the material effects of the discourses in which they engage or from which they are excluded.

Understood in this way, discourse is neither reality nor a reflection of reality; rather, it is a social process that attempts to give reality meaning. And, in doing so, discourse is shaped by reality and, in turn, shapes the reality it attempts to understand. Stuart Hall describes the discursive as follows:

> My own view is that events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive; but that only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they or can they be constructed within meaning. Thus, while not wanting to expand the territorial claims of the discursive infinitely, how things are represented and the 'machineries' and regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive*, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation -- subjectivity, identity, politics -- a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life. ("New Ethnicities," 252-53; emphasis in original)

Engaging in discursive analysis is therefore not simply a way of understanding something once it is finished (such as looking back over Benjamin scholarship in order to produce an analysis of discursive processes and what they mean); rather, it is a way of contributing to the structures and processes that one is analyzing. Thus, my engagement with Walter Benjamin becomes part of the process of "making" him, not an analysis of something already made and completed. I am not only

putting words on the page and attempting to explain Walter Benjamin, I am actively taking part in constructing him.

Hall's notion of the constitutive aspect of discourse is important to my use of personal genealogy. What academics produce in attempting to understand the world is formed by, and in turn forms, reality. In other words, current canonical representations of Benjamin play a formative political role. It is for this reason that I take the issues of accountability seriously. As indicated earlier, Alexander and Mohanty, in their exploration of the genealogy of their own "intellectual neighbourhoods," have recognized that it is critically important to build and understand our intellectual communities and, therefore, to be accountable to them (ix).

Personal genealogy, as formulated by Moi, occurs at sites where conflicting discourses converge. "To approach Simone de Beauvoir is to find oneself enmeshed in a web of hotly disputed opinions and entrenched public myths, and in this situation 'Simone de Beauvoir' is not simply the name of a person who wrote novels, essays and memoirs, but a site of ideological and aesthetic conflict" (Moi 74). Similarly, Walter Benjamin is much more than a person who wrote extensively in many genres and fields. Ideological conflicts have shaped Benjamin scholarship, which has always been punctuated by glowing accolades and damning criticism. There are frequent heated and acrimonious debates concerning whether Benjamin is messianic or materialist; whether he is a literary or a cultural critic; whether his work is essentially aesthetic or political; or whether he occupies some middle ground between these opposing poles. As I have said, regardless of which of these arguments is put forward, they all have one underlying assumption: the intellectual is the sum of his work.[31] His "private" life remains quite separate.

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[31] I deliberately use "his," as the discussion of women intellectuals, if they are recognized as such at all, differs significantly from the discussion of male intellectuals. As Moi has observed, what a woman *is* becomes of paramount importance, and she is most often viewed through the lens of myths that cast her in predetermined roles, such as the unfeminine woman, the hysterical woman, or an imitator of her male

By conceptualizing Benjamin as a site of the intersection of numerous conflicting discourses, I am able to examine the interconnectedness of various social factors in certain instances of his life. I propose to accomplish this much the way Moi does with regard to de Beauvoir:

> To understand the social process that contributed to the making of Simone de Beauvoir as an intellectual woman, I have found it helpful to imagine these factors (class, gender, religion, location) as so many different social discourses, and to consider "Simone de Beauvoir" as a site where the various strands of the social text intersect. (37)

An analysis of the intersection of multiple points of interaction provides a way of avoiding the still prevalent tendency to theorize in polarities. It also allows for an understanding of the processes by which knowledge about intellectual figures is produced (rather than simply attempting to define such figures).

A closer look at four of the discourses listed by Moi -- class, gender, religion, location -- will elucidate the similarities and differences between her personal genealogy and mine. Much like Moi, I will analyze my subject as a site where various social texts and discourses intersect. Although I will focus on the discourse of gender, which has been the most neglected of the four, I will indicate where it intersects with religion and different kinds of European identity.

The discourse of class, in the case of Benjamin, is more complex than it would at first seem. His family was clearly of the middle-class, yet this was complicated by two things: (1) they were Jewish; and (2) their financial situation changed quite radically as a result of the economic upheaval in Germany during the early years of this century. As a result, Benjamin's class position was anything but obvious, especially during the last years of his life, while he was in exile and earned

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mentors. By contrast, what a man *does*: that is, his work in the so-called public sphere, is the focus of discussion.

a very meagre income. His early bourgeois upbringing and later financial destitution are often mentioned in Benjamin research; however, his socio-economic position has not yet been examined in conjunction with gender.

The discourse of religion clearly had the most devastating consequences for Benjamin. The obvious results of his being Jewish were his exile and death. For Dagmar Barnouw, Benjamin's life ended in this manner: "Seriously ill and in despair over an unredeemable cultural crisis, he could not muster the energy necessary for survival" (*Weimar Intellectuals* 152). The cultural crisis referred to is the rise of European, and especially German, fascism as the culmination of the "disintegration of a new and therefore threatening ideological pluralism into a polarization so intense that it caused the socially and culturally destructive desire for making total one particular ideology which would then bring about cultural redemption" (*Weimar Intellectuals* 4). Beyond his exile and suicide, Benjamin's Jewishness produced him as a man and an intellectual in numerous ways -- too numerous for a detailed analysis here.[32] However, I will attempt to indicate where the discourse of Judaism intersects with other dimensions. A more comprehensive analysis would be the stuff of future research.

The discourse of location, which is not static, provides both temporal and geographical contexts. With regard to temporal context, I refer to a specific historical constellation: the interwar years known in Germany as the Weimar Republic. Beyond this, temporal context also refers to the

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[32] Authors who deal specifically with Benjamin's Jewishness include: Anson Rabinbach, "Between Enlightenment and Apocalypse: Benjamin, Bloch and Modern German Messianism," *New German Critique* 34 (1985): 78-124; Gershom Scholem, "Walter Benjamin," *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*. Ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken, 1976) 172-197 and "Walter Benjamin and his Angel" *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*. Ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken, 1976) 198-236; Gary Smith, "'Das Jüdische versteht sich von selbst': Walter Benjamins frühe Auseinandersetzung mit dem Judentum," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 65.2 (1991): 318-34; and Irving Wohlfarth, "On Some Jewish Motifs in Benjamin," *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*. Ed. Andrew Benjamin (London/New York: Routledge, 1989) 157-215 and "'Männer aus der Fremde': Walter Benjamin and the 'German-Jewish Parnassus,'" *New German Critique* 70 (1997): 3-85. Basically, these articles analyze Benjamin's relationship with Judaism as an element of intellectual history.

non-linear, synchronic porosity of time, which enables past and present to be examined simultaneously. Benjamin practises this, for example, when he revisits his childhood and imbues his past with the knowledge he possesses in the present. He sees, for example, images of Capri and his relationship with Lacis in the surroundings of his childhood. I will explore these connections in detail in Chapter 5. With regard to geographical context, I refer not only to the places where Benjamin actually lived (Berlin, Capri, Moscow, Paris, etc.), but also to the fact that he lived in a Europe that was defined by exclusionary principles. The Europe in which he lived considered itself to be the pinnacle of civilization. How the colonial powers of Europe sought to assimilate the rest of the globe to their particular understanding of the world has been well documented.[33]

Postcolonial studies have demonstrated the various ways in which Europe and European identity have been constructed by colonialism and the juxtaposition of Europe/White/civilized with Africa/Black/uncivilized. Against this backdrop of colonial discourse what interests me is the German relationship to the "inferior" Europeans -- those who inhabit the southern or Mediterranean regions. The German discourses of the "other" Europeans are similar to what has been called new racism, which is "based not on ideas of innate biological superiority, but on the supposed incompatibility of cultural traditions" (Donald and Rattansi 2). Differences between various ethnic, cultural, and religious groups tend to be based primarily on cultural practices and values. "They" are lazy, dirty, slovenly, and tardy -- all the things that Germans are not. There are instances of such

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[33] See Gauri Viswanathan, "English Literary Study," "*Race*," *Culture and Difference*, Ed. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage, 1992) 149-170; Robert Young, "Colonialism and Humanism," "*Race*," *Culture and Difference*, Ed. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage, 1992) 243-51; Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature," "*Race*," *Culture and Difference*, Ed. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (London: Sage, 1992) 171-197; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1994); and Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 271-313.

discursive practices concerning Italians in many of Benjamin's "Denkbilder" [Thought Images], including "Naples," which he wrote with Lacis.

Woven through Chapters 3, 4, and 5 is the final social/political discourse identified by Moi -- namely, gender. One of the conflicts at the site of Benjamin, as both a life subject and a textual subject, concerns how masculinity and femininity are constructed and defined. In the studies summarized in Chapter 1, it is clear that the masculine is the taken for granted perspective for understanding Benjamin. Similarly, the vast majority of recently produced analyses of Benjamin lack any recognition of the discourse of gender. It would, of course, be a mistake to frame this debate solely in terms of "women versus men" or "feminism versus patriarchy." First, this would assume a binary split, and, second, it would assume that women and men form homogenous groups that are always pitted against each other. In fact, the dynamics of gender are far more complicated than this. My study assumes that: (1) all subjects are gendered and, therefore, that gender analysis is relevant to the construction of all forms of subjectivity; (2) gender should be analyzed along with other dimensions that comprise subjectivity; and (3) gender is an issue not only when analyzing women as subjects, but also when analyzing men as subjects.

My project contributes to the debate over how to reconceptualize the scholarly analysis of intellectual figures in view of feminist and postcolonial insights. Paula M.L. Moya has observed that

> it is primarily women who address gender issues, and primarily people of color who address racial issues. The unspoken assumption is that only women have gender and only people of color are racialized beings. This assumption reflects itself in the work of many male academics who only talk about gender when they are referring to women, and in the work of many white academics who only talk about race when they are referring to people of colour. (381)

In other words, critical scholarship moves beyond understandings that separate men and women and divide subjects into public and private selves.

Martin and Moi have shown how traditional scholarship reduces both Salomé and de Beauvoir, respectively, to their relationships with "great men" and measures them against the latter in order to find them lacking. As important as is the work of Martin and Moi, it once again associates the issue of gender solely with women. In my analysis of Benjamin, the questions become: what can be learned about gender if one looks at a life and work from the perspective of the privileged gender of that time? What has been missed by not paying attention to the private life of the person being studied? In other words, what has been missing is an analysis of the intersection of public and private when examining a privileged (masculine) rather than a marginalized (feminine) gender position. I believe that my choice of a male subject of analysis, an intellectual whose life and work has been left relatively unexplored by feminist analysis, brings a new and necessary critical dimension to studies of gender.

Chapter 3

Benjamin's Social and Familial Situation

In this chapter I examine the intersections of Benjamin's larger social context with his familial situation shortly before and during the time of his attempted habilitation. This examination takes a step towards reconceptualizing how intellectual figures are understood when institutions of formal learning are recognized as providing the only viable context for knowledge both about and by such figures. As discussed in previous chapters, such knowledge can be greatly expanded by including an analysis of the intersections of the public and private spheres.

Angela McRobbie 's criticism of Paul Willis' analysis of a working-class youth subculture makes these points clearly:

> The family is the obverse face of hard, working-class culture, the softer sphere in which fathers, sons and boyfriends expect to be, and are, emotionally serviced. It is this link between the lads' hard outer image and their private experiences -- relations with parents, siblings and girlfriends -- that still needs to be explored. Willis' emphasis on the cohesion of the tight-knit groups tends to blind us to the ways that the lads' immersion in and expression of working-class culture also takes place outside the public sphere. It happens as much around the breakfast table and in the bedroom as in the school and the workplace. (McRobbie, *Settling Accounts* 41)

With regard to the members of academic cultures, this means that an exploration of their class affiliations and family relationships will provide a fuller, less distorted, understanding of how they come to be constructed. In the case of Benjamin, this means exploring the specific links between his membership in a German-Jewish middle-class family and an intellectual community.

If one accepts, as I do, the assertion that knowledge is produced not only by individuals but also by the positions they inhabit, then the binary opposition of work/life can no longer be taken for granted; rather, it becomes necessary to examine its ideological underpinnings and the effects it has on scholarship, the production of knowledge, and the production of intellectual figures. An examination based on the preceding assumptions requires a new understanding both of what "counts" as intellectual work and the processes by which such work is produced. New questions need to be asked along with those directed at the textual products and their place within an intellectual tradition. Such questions include asking whether an intellectual is someone who cleans toilets and changes diapers. What does it mean to conduct research and to do scholarly work if an intellectual has the financial capability to hire domestic labour or procures such labour through marriage? From what standpoint and with which particular set of assumptions does such a person set about conducting his/her scholarship? How do societal and institutional structures and processes intersect with that individual situation? This chapter attempts to find preliminary answers to these questions by focusing on the nature and effects of assumptions concerning the public and the private as they relate to gender.

As pointed out in Chapter 2, the women in a "great" man's life tend to be placed within the private sphere, a move that obfuscates many issues. Most often this move is based on what a woman is (wife, mother, mistress) rather than on what she does, and it silences the dimensions of intellectual work that include social relations in the private sphere. Dora Benjamin is much more than an insignificant appendage of her husband, just as Asja Lacis is much more than Benjamin's lover.

Many of Benjamin's male friends and their particular intellectual positions have been discussed in great detail. Most of their reminiscences of him have been written, published, reprinted, translated, and analyzed. However, one person with whom he discussed his work and his reading,

and who helped him both directly and indirectly to write numerous works, has been virtually ignored because she has been pigeon-holed as his "wife." Her assistance to and maintenance of her husband, and later ex-husband, are taken for granted and subsumed within the discourse of the wife. Within this discourse, she is the one who scrubs the toilet, gives birth, cooks meals, and provides emotional support. In short, she engages in reproductive rather than in productive activities.

Leslie Roman provides an explanation of the inadequacies of the productivist logic that separates private-reproduction and public-production. This logic "holds that the labor women perform in the family, such as childbearing, parenting, domestic maintenance, consumption, and the emotional servicing of family members -- the so-called 'reproductive sphere' -- is outside the sphere of production"(Roman, "Intimacy, Labor, and Class" 144). Production, it should be noted, refers not only to goods, but also to cultural and intellectual production. Roman continues by citing a number of feminist relational analyses that "provide evidence that the rigid distinctions which productivists make between the public and the private spheres and among forms of labor are, in reality, blurred" (144). The advance made by relational analysis is that it does not subsume the necessary labour of the family under economic requirements (Roman 144). To this I would add that the work that is necessary to maintain the family and its members is also subsumed under a general notion of support -- often expressed as the "woman behind a great man." While this "support" contributes to cultural and intellectual production in concrete and specific ways, it is rarely examined. In the case of Benjamin, the discourse of the wife, based on productivist logic, leaves Dora's contributions unrecognized, which means that the intersection of her input and support with the other dimensions of her husband's life and work are, as yet, an unwritten chapter in our understanding of Walter Benjamin.

In addition to his relationship with his wife, Benjamin's own particular social situation within the wider German context also contributed to making him. As Marion Kaplan's research on

the Jewish-German middle-class has shown, the home played a particularly significant role for the Jewish middle-class at that time. Kaplan has found that the "home was where they experienced the ambivalences and contradictions inherent in the dual desires to maintain their family, Jewish community, and heritage, and to integrate into the social and cultural life with other Germans.... The home was the juncture at which gender, class, and ethnicity confronted one another" (Marion Kaplan 25). While not wishing to abandon their Jewishness, there was a strong desire among the majority of middle-class Jewish families to acculturate, and the site of much of this acculturation was the home. It was considered the mother's responsibility to teach appropriate behaviour (according to bourgeois criteria) and to provide the proper forms of music, literature, and social engagements. However, this was only made possible by the father's financial success (Marion Kaplan 25). As for most middle-class Jewish families, for the Benjamins the home was where "Jews absorbed the impact of their economic success and prepared to achieve the social status commensurate with it" (Marion Kaplan 25).

Benjamin's father, Emil, belonged to the new class of entrepreneurs and financial speculators who experienced a rapid growth in wealth, status, and power soon after the turn of the century -- a growth brought about by Germany's extremely swift economic expansion following unification in 1871. Benjamin's childhood was spent in the comfortable middle-class district of Charlottenburg in Berlin, where the family employed numerous domestic servants.[34] While nannies generally looked after Walter and his brother and sister, the children accompanied their mother on carefully routinized shopping expeditions, during which they engaged in the conspicuous consumption expected of the wife and children of a wealthy and successful man. Although the

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[34] Benjamin's childhood years are discussed in Brodersen (*Walter Benjamin* 1-36), Fuld (17-34), Puttnies and Smith (8-30), Tiedemann, Gödde and Lonitz (9-28), and Witte, (*Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 7-17).

women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were most often "not allowed to know the slightest thing about financial matters ... [they] remained important status symbols and were expected to assume consumption patterns which reflected the wealth and enhanced the prestige of their husbands and fathers" (Marion Kaplan 169).

Benjamin wrote about his mother's "consumption patterns" when he revisited his childhood, in some of his more autobiographic writings of the 1930s. He described how his mother "made the rounds" among the well-established, highly reputable Berlin firms. After purchasing specific items in particular prestigious stores, they completed their outing by drinking hot chocolate, always at the same establishment: "Es stand ebenso fest, daß bei solchen Gelegenheiten unsere Kinderanzüge bei Arnold Müller, Schuhe bei Stiller und Koffer bei Mädler gekauft wie daß am Ende aller dieser Veranstaltungen die Schokolade mit Sahne bei Hillbrich bestellt wurde"[sic] (*Berliner Chronik* 72) ["On such occasions it was as certain that our suits would be bought at Arnold Müller's, shoes at Stiller's, and suitcases at Mädler's, as that at the end of these commissions our hot chocolate with whipped cream would be ordered at Hillbrich's" ("A Berlin Chronicle" 36)].

The ritual of shopping, as Benjamin later recognized, was about being seen to be spending money in the right places. He also observed that it was his father's money that made these trips possible and that determined their form: "In jenen frühen Jahren lernte ich 'die Stadt' nur als den Schauplatz der 'Besorgungen' kennen, bei denen zum ersten Mal sich erwies, wie uns das väterliche Geld eine Gasse zwischen den Ladentischen und den Verkäufern und den Spiegeln und den Blicken der Mutter bahnte" (*Berliner Chronik* 79) ["In those early years I got to know the 'town' only as the theater of purchases, on which occasions it first became apparent how my father's money could cut a path for us between the shop counters and assistants and mirrors, and the appraising eyes of our mother ("A Berlin Chronicle" 40)]. It was Emil Benjamin's financial success and standing that opened the paths for Pauline Benjamin and her children.

Rather than enjoying the preferential treatment they received, Benjamin and his siblings found these outings to be unpleasant. They only began to feel comfortable when the purchases were completed and they reached the confectioner's: "[I]n der Konditorei erst wurde uns besser und wir fühlten dem Götzendienst uns entronnen, der unsere Mutter vor den Idolen erniedrigte" (*Berliner Chronik* 79). [(I)t was only in the confectioner's that our spirits rose with the feeling of having escaped the false worship that humiliated our mother" ("A Berlin Chronicle" 40). The special treatment Benjamin's mother received was, in hindsight, humiliating. It was a form of worship of the false god of money that altered the shopkeeper's behaviour and falsified social relations.

From his early childhood, Benjamin associated the city with consumption and commodification, a recurrent theme in his writing, particularly in his later work. His last unfinished work, the "Arcades Project," for example, was an examination of nineteenth-century Paris that paid close attention to the consumption of goods and the commodification of both goods and people -- processes that began in the nineteenth century and became hallmarks of modernity. In his attempt to make his childhood experiences meaningful from his perspective in later life, Benjamin described how he first came to know "the city" as the "Schauplatz der 'Besorgungen'" (*Berliner Chronik* 79) ["theater of purchases" ("A Berlin Chronicle" 40)]. He reconstructed his earliest impressions as follows: "Eine Reihe unerforschlicher Massive nein Höhlen von Waren - das war 'die Stadt'" (*Berliner Chronik* 80) ["An impenetrable chain of mountains, no, caverns of commodities -- that was the 'town'" ("A Berlin Chronicle" 40)]. In his writings about cities, Benjamin explored these cities as "theaters of purchase" (especially Naples) and "caverns of commodities" (especially Paris). In Chapter 5 I will return to the city as the site of consumption in Benjamin's writing, showing how it intersects with his relationship with Lacis and their time in Naples and Capri.

Although Benjamin was critical of the "false worship" of material wealth, for the most part he took the privilege and comfort it provided for him and his family for granted. His father's wealth

and social standing increased, and Benjamin spent his youth cushioned by his middle-class existence in the luxurious surroundings of the family's large villa in Grunewald, Berlin. He also travelled through much of Europe, beginning with a trip to Italy upon completing his secondary education ("Abitur"). He then spent 1912 to 1915 studying philosophy at the Universities of Freiburg and Berlin, and 1915 to 1917 at the University of Munich, after which he completed his doctorate in Bern, Switzerland, where he studied from 1917 to 1919.[35]

It was this combination of formal education and education through travel that provided access to the social elite known as the "Bildungsbürgertum" [educated bourgeoisie], a class predicated on material success in conjunction with higher education.[36] Wealthy acculturated Jewish families, like the Benjamins, particularly aspired to this social status, as it both coincided with a traditional Jewish veneration for education and aligned them with the most powerful groups in society.[37] This alignment was vital during the late 1800s as well as in the early years of the twentieth century, and Jewish middle-class families worked hard to become visibly and publicly as similar to German middle-class families as possible. Jews had only recently gained political emancipation in Germany,[38] and they lived in a society that could be characterized as generally conformist, highly competitive, and intolerant of differences, which made this alignment and assimilation necessary, at least outwardly (Marion Kaplan 31).

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[35] It was the usual practice at the time for the sons of wealthy German families to study at more than one university. Benjamin's university years are discussed in Brodersen (*Walter Benjamin* 37-78), Fuld (35-114), Tiedemann, Gödde and Lonitz (29-49), and Witte, (*Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 18-29).

[36] For a detailed discussion of the "Bildungsbürgertum," see Huerkamp, "Weibliche Konkurrenz auf den akademischen Arbeitsmärkten."

[37] At least they thought so until the 1930s, when they discovered, as Wiggershaus has observed, that no amount of conformity could secure their position in society (4).

[38] In 1867 the North German League annulled discriminatory residency laws; in 1869 religious discrimination was forbidden; the Citizenship Law of unified Germany, 1871, removed special conditions for Jewish applicants.

The conflict caused by this necessity, however, had to be dealt with in the private sphere, where Jewish traditions were practised and Jewish identity was nurtured. As various forms of Jewishness became increasingly privatized and relatively invisible in the public sphere, mediating between them and German bourgeois culture became an increasingly difficult task -- one that was performed primarily by mothers (Marion Kaplan 31). Due to the lack of attention to the private sphere in much of Benjamin scholarship, this dimension of his Jewishness and its relation to his home and mother (and wife) has not yet been examined.

Benjamin and most of his friends and associates belonged to this class, the educated bourgeoisie -- a class that, in the 1920s, began to lose both its highly privileged status and the cohesiveness provided by common wealth and education. Those were the years in which the lower classes and women began to gain increasing access to the universities. They were also the years in which the nature of university education began to change: rather than providing a general education, the institution now began providing specialized learning for particular professions (Huerkamp 275).

It was not only university education that changed in the 1920s, but also the financial situation of many members of the middle-class. While Benjamin's comfortable lifestyle[39] was easily maintained by his parents while he obtained his doctorate, their financial situation weakened after 1918. Although the First World War had bolstered the German economy, after 1918 reparations payments, coupled with the social and political struggles determining the future direction of the new democracy following the abdication of Emperor William II, contributed to economic instability in general and a large loss of wealth for the Benjamin family in particular.

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[39] His parents paid all of his expenses and financed the various apartments in which he lived (first alone and then with his wife, Dora, and son, Stefan). In the early years of his marriage, Benjamin continued to travel extensively with his new family and was also able to hire a live-in nanny. In other words, Benjamin continued to enjoy the privileged lifestyle in which he had grown up.

As a result, shortly after the completion of his doctoral dissertation in June 1919, Benjamin wrote to his friend Scholem that finances were one of his two crucial considerations: "Die Entscheidung [in der Schweiz oder anderswo weiterzustudieren], wenigstens die vorläufige, hängt nicht von Geldfragen allein (wenn auch sehr wesentlich) ab, sondern auch davon, wie sich die Arbeit an meiner Habilitationsschrift gestalten wird" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 68) ["The decision (to continue studying in Switzerland or elsewhere), at least the provisional one, depends not only (even if to a significant extent) on the question of money but also on how the work on my habilitation dissertation shapes up" (*Correspondence* 156)]. Until that time, cost had never been an issue for Benjamin.

Soon after the completion of his doctoral dissertation, when Benjamin's parents would no longer financially support him, he, Dora, and Stefan were forced to move into Pauline and Emil Benjamin's villa in Berlin. His parents' refusal to continue to assist him stemmed not only from their own diminished financial situation, but also from their conviction that it was time for their son to finally find gainful employment and support his own family -- a course of action he was extremely reluctant to follow. The constant bickering between the older and younger Benjamins is often referred to in letters dating from that period.

In references to this part of Benjamin's life it has generally not been noted that his younger siblings, his brother Georg and sister Dora, both also obtained university degrees.[40] Benjamin himself makes no reference to this fact in his letters, in which he describes what he considers to be an unfair and untenable situation -- at least from his perspective. He seemed to feel that his parents were behaving unfairly towards him by not permitting him to live and study in the manner to which he had grown accustomed. He felt the need to escape from his dependence on them, made all the

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[40] Georg received a degree in medicine; Dora in political economy.

worse by their "Kleinlichkeit und Herrschsucht" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 278) ["pettiness and need for control" (*Correspondence* 202)].

From Walter's perspective, the situation with his parents became unbearable, growing into an "alle Arbeitskraft und Lebenslust verschlingende Tortur" (*Briefe* Vol. 2 278). ["torture devouring all the energy I have to work and all my joy in life" (*Correspondence* 202)]. He and Dora soon moved in with their friends, the Gutkinds, as their own income from Walter's publications and Dora's part-time secretarial jobs was insufficient to support the family in an apartment of their own.[41]

After finally deciding to continue his studies at the University of Frankfurt, Benjamin attended some seminars there during the summer of 1923 and began his research. Yet by November he was experiencing difficulties that he blamed primarily on his difficult financial situation. In a letter to Scholem, he wrote:

> Ich sehe -- selbst mit Habilitation -- keine Möglichkeit meinen Aufgaben auch nur halbwegs ungeteilt mich zuwenden zu können. Wer in Deutschland ernsthaft geistig arbeitet ist vom Hunger in der ernsthaftesten Weise bedroht. Ich spreche noch nicht vom *Ver*hungern, aber immerhin aus Erichs und meiner (in dieser Hinsicht sehr verwandten Lage und) Erfahrung heraus. (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 370)

> [I do not see any possibility, even as far as my habilitation is concerned of devoting anything approximating my undivided attention to my endeavours. Hunger poses a most serious threat to anyone seriously engaged in intellectual pursuits in Germany. I am not yet talking about starving to death but what I am saying is

[41] Stefan remained with his grandparents because there was no room for him in the Gutkinds' apartment (Scholem, *Friendship* 89 and Brodersen, *Spinne im eigenen Netz* 120).

> nonetheless based on Erich's and on my (in this regard, very similar situations) and experiences. (*Correspondence* 216)][42]

The reference here is to Benjamin's friend Erich Gutkind, who, like Benjamin, was the son of a wealthy Jewish family and, unable to earn a living as an intellectual, resorted to becoming a "Stadtreisender für Margarine" [margarine salesman] (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 270; *Correspondence* 200). Both Gutkind and Benjamin had lost their parents' financial support. At the time Gutkind decided to earn a living as a salesman, Benjamin's father set him an ultimatum: "Mein Vater hatte vor einiger Zeit erklärt, jede weitere Unterstützung an die Bedingung zu binden, daß ich in eine Bank gehe" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 277) ["My father declared some time ago that any further support would be contingent upon my taking a job in a bank" (*Correspondence* 201)]. Benjamin flatly refused; however, with his father-in-law mediating between Emil and Walter, Walter finally agreed to the following: "für meinen Erwerb tatig zu sein, jedoch unter der doppelten Bedingung, daß dies erstens in einer Weise geschieht, die mir die künftige akademische Lautbahn nicht versperrt, ... zweitens, daß mein Vater mir sogleich ein Kapital auszahlt, mit dem ich mich an einem Antiquariat beteiligen kann" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 277) ["to earn my own living, but under two conditions: first, I would do so in such a way I would not be cut off from a future academic career, ... second, my father immediately gives me enough money to set up in a used bookstore" (*Correspondence* 201)].

After unsuccessfully attempting to buy and sell used books, Benjamin began to rely on selling his own wares -- his intellectual production -- in the form of journal articles. However, even at best, although his meagre earnings allowed him to make a few new purchases for his treasured library, they did little to pay for his family's living expenses. The astronomical level of inflation[43]

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[42] It should be noted that the first line of the English translation is slightly inaccurate. It should read: I do not see any possibility *even with* my habilitation... .

[43] In 1919 the value of the German mark was 8.9 to US$1; by August 1921 the value had dropped to 550 to $1; by May 1923, it was 54,300 to $1; and by November 1923, US$1 was worth 4.2 *billion* marks, its

coupled with an extremely high unemployment rate made for a precarious financial situation for even some of the wealthiest Germans at the time. As for the Benjamins, Dora had virtually no income at this point and Walter was involved in an ongoing battle with his publisher, Weißbach, for payment for his published essay on Baudelaire.

Yet one could ask, how bad were these early years of "poverty"? To what degree were Benjamin's complaints based on his changed situation -- a situation that no longer let him enjoy those things to which he had become accustomed? These questions attempt to re-examine the picture of Benjamin as the poor struggling genius, who is ostracized from a society that no longer values its intellectuals (if rejected by the university) and, ultimately becomes the victim of extreme racist persecution. There is certainly no doubt that Benjamin, because he was Jewish, bore the bunt of Nazi racist ideology, which, certainly, had very real and devastating consequences. However, the image of Benjamin's status as an outsider and his ever-increasing suffering and ostracism is, in part, questionable. It is, in particular, his outsider status that constitutes Benjamin's often iconic standing in cultural studies, where some, like McRobbie, have idealized him as a "model for the practice of being a cultural intellectual" (151). However, his position in German society was very complex. In fact, when one considers both his socio-economic standing and his gender, it is clear that Benjamin occupied a position of privilege.

Benjamin considered himself first and foremost an intellectual, a member of a social group that was beginning to undergo a change in its membership but that still remained composed primarily of men from wealthy families. In her analysis of the academic job market in Germany in the 1920s, Claudia Huerkamp has shown how the perceived financial suffering of intellectuals was in fact no more than that -- a widespread perception not based on fact. Comparing the purchasing

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lowest point. (Kaes, Jay and Dimendberg 765-68).

power of their salaries before the war to what it was in the late 1920s, shows that they had lost about 10 percent, whereas labourers had lost 15 percent to 25 percent. In a further salary comparison, before the war, a professor had earned three to four times as much as a worker, whereas in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he/she earned four to six times as much. These figures belie the complaints about the diminishing value of intellectuals in society, at least in economic terms. The educated class' belief in a much lamented, systematic discrimination directed specifically against them was their way of understanding the drop in their material standard of living. According to the members of the "Bildungsbürgertum," their class had been particularly burdened with the sacrifices demanded by the reparations payments required by the Treaty of Versailles.[14] In fact, intellectuals were one group that faired relatively well. There was no factual basis for the perceived diminishing gap between their incomes and the incomes of labourers; nonetheless, this perception was often understood by the educated middle-class as a devaluation of their work and social status (Huerkamp 274).

From this perspective, Benjamin's observation that to be an intellectual in Germany was to be seriously threatened by hunger proves to be somewhat exaggerated. To be sure, there were numerous under-employed and unemployed intellectuals; however, as a group, their situation was not as lamentable as Benjamin describes it. His own loss of financial support from his parents, combined with his perceived diminished status as an intellectual, both contributed to the making of Benjamin as an outsider and a victim of circumstances, when in fact he still occupied a relatively privileged social position. He could look for paid employment and, failing that, he had both friends and family to rely on for support. His occupational choices were limited by his own preferences as well as by what was available on the job market. He had already rejected the possibility of going

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[14] At the Paris Conference in January 1921, reparations were set at 269 billion gold marks payable over forty-two years. (Kaes, Jay and Dimendberg 766).

into business like his father, and, as with many men of his class, he would only accept a job commensurate with his social standing and education (Wierling 373). His attempt at selling books, for which his father provided some capital, was unsuccessful, and he felt that this left him with only two career choices: to be a university professor or an independent intellectual.

Benjamin's options were quite different than they would have been had he been a woman. First of all, middle-class women were not expected to go to university, as were their male counterparts. Their roles were understood to be those of housewives and mothers -- people who mediate between the public and private spheres, thus ensuring tranquillity and harmony in the home and presenting the family in an acceptable light. The maintenance of the appearance of achieved social standing was often accomplished at a high price. In the early years of this century, many middle-class women performed paid work in secret (e.g., doing laundry and painting porcelain) in order to earn sufficient money to pay their domestic servants (Marion Kaplan 30-33). For men, the choice was work commensurate with their standing and education; for women, the task was to ensure that at least the appearance of that standing remained intact.

The fact that Benjamin attended university is taken for granted; however, it should be remembered that the expectation that he would become an intellectual was gendered: it would not have been considered had be been a woman. That being said, once Benjamin decided to embark on an intellectual career, one possibility open to him was to obtain a position at a university. Yet, given the overabundance of academics and their relatively high unemployment rate, securing such a position (along with its relatively stable income) would be difficult. As a further complication, Benjamin was ambivalent about associating himself with a university for two reasons: (1) it would require him to conform, at least to some degree, to a particular organization and method of producing of knowledge; and (2) the time he would be required to devote to students would be time away from his research and writing. He was also cognizant of the fact that the anti-Semitism he was

already facing in his attempts to enter the academy would continue to affect him negatively if he became a lecturer or (perhaps later) a professor.[45]

Another possible career choice was freelance critic and writer, which, although it would have given him freedom, would have provided Benjamin with an uncertain and generally meagre income. He appears not to have considered a third possibility; namely, obtaining a job to ensure that at least some of the bills would be paid. Benjamin seems to have preferred to leave paying the bills to his parents, his wife, and, later, his friends. This is in keeping with the general expectations held by many young, university-educated, middle-class men at that time. Wierling, in her comparison of male and female university students in German in the early years of this century, has demonstrated that while women were generally expected to perform all manner of menial tasks to help support themselves and their families, the sons of these families typically refused, or accepted only as an absolute last resort a job they considered below their dignity and standing (372-374). This is evidenced by Benjamin's remarks concerning his friend Gutkind's job as a margarine salesman.

The "freedom" of the critical, freelance intellectual located outside the institution was, as Benjamin quickly learned, subject to the market forces of an increasingly dominant capitalism, the ability and inclination of the publisher to pay, and the particular ideological constellation of both the publishing house and the reviewers of his work. By choosing "independence" over being a member of the institution, Benjamin traded one set of restrictions and power structures for another (in which many similar processes and ideologies were at work).

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[45] Had he obtained a university position, like all Jewish professors and lecturers, he would have eventually been forced to leave. On 30 January 1933, Hitler was appointed chancellor. And on that same day the house where Benjamin's associate and director of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer, lived was occupied by the SA (storm troops). In April, the Reconstitution of the Professional Civil Service Act was implemented in order to remove all Communists, Social Democrats, and Jews from the civil service. In May, the institute, which had been full of all three targeted groups, was closed and searched, and everything that had been left there was seized. Horkheimer and the inner circle of the institute escaped arrest by moving to Geneva. In the following five years, 45 percent of all tenured academic positions in Germany were reappointed (Wiggershaus 127-29).

On two fronts -- the university and the publishing world (represented by one seemingly unscrupulous and/or ineffective publisher, Hans Weißbach)[47] -- Benjamin directly felt the effects of the material world on his intellectual production. At the same time as he experienced the structures of the university and its authorization processes, he also experienced similar processes in society at large. However, his understanding of his situation was limited because, when considering the construction of his work, he only took into account the effects of the public sphere. He considered what occurred in the private sphere only insofar as it distracted him from his intellectual work or made it more difficult. He repeatedly commented on his need for peace and quiet and on the double distractions of earning sufficient money to survive and of an ill wife and child.[48] Certainly these are very real considerations; however, they are understood by Benjamin and his critics as annoyances and distractions from, rather than as constitutive elements of, his work. They do not all acknowledge that it was through Dora's efforts that the family was able to survive financially and Walter was able to pursue his habilitation.[49]

The interesting contradiction is that both his writings and his life illustrate that the public and private are, in fact, interconnected and constitutive of one another. Walter was able to continue his studies due to Dora's work in both the public sphere of waged labour and in the private world of domestic, unpaid labour. In fact, as Marion Kaplan has noted, the "household was both a private and a public phenomenon, touched by and affecting the public sphere. In fact, it epitomized the interactions between the private and the public spheres" (4-5).

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[47] Benjamin received at least some of the small honorarium owed him. Others were paid nothing, and some were forced into financial ruin.

[48] At some point near his first birthday, Stefan became extremely ill, and for some time his survival was uncertain. Dora experienced ill health for many years, however, the exact nature of her illness is never addressed.

[49] This fact has been noted by Brodersen (*Walter Benjamin* 97), Tiedemann, Gödde and Lonitz (151), and Witte, (*Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 50).

Benjamin's position outside the academy, as well as parts of his work, focus attention on the violation of socially constructed boundaries and the contradictory subject positions resulting from such violations. In his examination of the concept of porosity, particularly in his and Lacis' essay "Naples," and the combination of public and private, which is prominent in "One Way Street" as well as in his writing about Moscow, Benjamin provides insights into how to conceptualize intersection rather than separation. I now pick up the strands of the intersection of Benjamin's married life with his work.

Dora Sophie Kellner/Pollak/Benjamin/Morser and the Discourse of the Wife [50]

> Walter has already started his work; mine will have to wait.
>
> Dora Benjamin

In contrast to the analysis of Walter's male friendships,[51] which are invariably linked to both his life and work, Benjamin scholarship has only just begun to recognize the importance of the women in Walter's life. For example, Puttneis and Smith dedicate a chapter of their biographical work to the Benjamins' marriage. It is entitled: "Benjamins ungeschriebenes Meisterwerk, seine 'Education sentimentale'" [Benjamin's unwritten masterpiece, his "éducation sentimentale"]. Although they have presented a great deal of previously unknown information about Dora and the Benjamin marriage, Puttneis and Smith's discussion of this information occurs solely within a

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[50] Dora's father, Leon Kellner, was a professor of English and a close associate of Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism. Dora's mother is not mentioned. When Dora and Walter first met and started their relationship, she was married to Max Pollak, who has been described as a wealthy philosophy student (Puttneis and Smith 136) and journalist (Witte, *Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 30). Her marriage to Morser is considered to have been a marriage of convenience, which allowed her to seek refuge in England with her son Stefan in 1939 (Tiedemann, Gödde, Lonitz 154). Her many names draw attention to the men in her life rather than to her as an individual and to her own accomplishments.

[51] While discussing Dora Benjamin, I will refer to both Benjamins by their first names in order to avoid any possible confusion.

traditional biographical context and, therefore, remains distinct from the analysis of Walter's work. Furthermore, the title of the chapter refers to Gustave Flaubert's novel of the same name, which takes as its theme learning about life and education through love. This reference places the Benjamins' relationship within the discourse of a particular understanding of love -- one that, for the man, serves an idealized function. The hero of the novel undergoes a "life education" when he experiences the romantic passion of unrequited love. In this tale, the woman is important only as an unobtainable love object, it is the man's idealized experience that is central. This idea of learning through unrequited love and romantic pursuit has little, if anything, in common with the Benjamins' marriage, in which Walter was able to pursue his desires only because Dora both earned a living and took responsibility for the domestic sphere. This extremely practical side of their marriage is not captured in the "sentimental" view of love.

In looking back at the institution of marriage in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century, one must remember that, among the middle-class, arranged marriages were the norm. As Marion Kaplan has noted, love as the foundation for marriage first received public attention with the development of the Romantic school in the nineteenth century. However, it took more than a hundred years before it became widely accepted (Marion Kaplan 86). In the early years of this century, the notion of romantic love was to be found in novels far more often than in people's lives. Kaplan's examination of Jewish middle-class marriages explains that

> [m]arriages were contracts between families: material factors were of primary importance.... The families saw their goal as providing young women with economic security and a socially acceptable role, that of wife. Women in turn had to provide for their own happiness by controlling their behavior and emotions so as not to interfere with their status and duties. (86)

Within this predominant understanding of marriage, it is both interesting and instructive to observe how the Benjamins' marriage both conformed to and differed from the norm.

The most striking deviation from the norm in the Benjamins' marriage is that they chose to marry for love rather than money. The significance Walter placed on love is evident. In his own estimation, the state of being in love and the woman/women with whom he was in love played a decisive role in making him who he was -- both as a man and as an intellectual. For example, in a letter to Scholem, Walter recounted a conversation with some friends concerning their experiences of love. During that conversation, Walter discovered:

> daß ich mich jedesmal, wenn eine große Liebe Gewalt über mich bekam, von Grund auf und so sehr verändert habe, daß ich sehr erstaunt war mir sagen zu müssen: der Mann, der so ganz unvermutbare Dinge sagte und ein so unvohergesehenes Verhalten annahm, der sei ich. Das beruht aber darauf, daß eine wirkliche Liebe mich der geliebten Frau ähnlich macht. ("Mai-Juni 1931" 427)
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> [that every time a great love overpowered me, I changed so completely, that I was astonished to have to say: the man, who said those totally unexpected things and who adopted such unforeseen behaviour, that was me. That is due to the fact that a true love causes me [to] become like the woman I love].

Although there were numerous women in Benjamin's life, by his own account, he loved only three.[52] "Ich habe drei verschiedene Frauen im Leben kennen gelernt und drei verschiedene Männer in mir. Meine Lebensgeschichte schreiben, hieße Aufbau und Verfall dieser drei Männer darstellen und den Kompromiß zwischen ihnen - man könnte auch sagen: das Triumvirat, das mein Leben jetzt

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[52] They were Jula Radt/Cohn, Dora Kellner/Pollak/Benjamin, and Asja Lacis.

darstellt" (Benjamin, "Mai-Juni 1931" 427) [During my life, I have become familiar with three different women and three different men in me. To write the story of my life is to portray the construction and the ruin of these three men and the compromise made between them -- one could also say: the triumvirate, that represents my life]. With these assertions, he tells us that, in order to understand him, we must also understand his love relationships and the role they played in his intellectual production.

The question of love and emotions, particularly with regard to their role in making knowledge, has, in the last two decades, increasingly become the focus of scholarly attention. Based on findings in a number of different fields, including philosophy, cultural anthropology, and psychology, Jaggar argues that the categories of cognition and affect are cultural constructions through which we understand ourselves and others and that the former is generally given priority over the latter. Emotions, however, are vital, as they are "ways in which we engage actively and even construct the world. They have both 'mental' and 'physical' aspects, each of which conditions the other; ... they presuppose language and a social order. Thus, they can be attributed only to what are sometimes called 'whole persons,' engaged in the ongoing activity of social life" (Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge" 391). From this, Jaggar argues that we must rethink "the relation between knowledge and emotion" in order to demonstrate "the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional relation between reason and emotion. Far from precluding the possibility of reliable knowledge, emotion ... is necessary to such knowledge" (Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge" 394).

In other words, emotions are vital to knowledge. Just as there is no knowledge without thought, so there is no knowledge without emotion. Our knowledge about Benjamin and how he arrived at forms of knowledge will be more accurate if we take into account the emotional dimension. This kind of analysis requires not only an examination of his experience of and construction of love, but also an examination of how love and emotions constructed him. For

"without love, without close interpersonal relationships, human beings ... cannot survive. ... The production of people is thus qualitatively different from the production of things" (Rose 83). Clearly, then, in a study such as this, which examines the processes by which an intellectual is "made," attention must be given to emotions.

Emotions are central to a recent study by Shoshana Felman, in which she reads "A Berlin Chronicle" together with "The Storyteller" and "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in order to provide an account of Benjamin's six years of silence after the beginning of the First World War and the suicide of his friend Heinle. In her relational reading of Benjamin's autobiographical and theoretical texts, she demonstrates how that "shocking, unnarratable" (Felman 223) trauma shaped Benjamin as a person and as an intellectual. Benjamin's silence is seen in the context of a general inability to tell stories, which occurred as a result of having been "struck dumb by the First World War" (205). It was a silence bound to grief and mourning. While Felman's analysis focuses on the relationship between intellectual work and trauma and how they shape one another, my analysis focuses on how love and passion are constitutive of intellectual work.

The Benjamins' love marriage seems not to have met the usual expectations of an arranged marriage. Dora was most certainly not provided with the financial security that middle-class women expected and depended upon.[53] On the contrary, her dowry and income supported the family's material needs. However, Dora's position was conflicted and often contradictory. Although they had married for love, and although Dora provided most of their income, she still had a traditional understanding of her role as a "good" wife. As previously noted, wives were supposed to control

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[53] Her parents did what they could in this regard. They refused to allow the marriage unless Walter signed a contract guaranteeing Dora the return of her dowry, another substantial payment ("Widerlage"), plus 300 marks per month if a future breakdown of the marriage should be his fault (Puttnies and Smith 153). This move by her parents is not surprising, given the tensions between an "idealistic" love marriage and a "responsible" money marriage. In addition, the divorce rates among Jewish families were high at the time, much higher than those among Christians, with the husband's adultery being the main cause for divorce (Marion Kaplan 101).

their behaviour and emotions for the sake of harmony within the family. This was a difficult task for someone like Dora, who was intelligent and seems to have known what she wanted and pursued it, even if it meant going against established norms.

One particular set of circumstances illustrates the conflicted nature of Dora's position. When Walter resumed a relationship with the first of his great loves, Jula Radt, Dora fell in love with Walter's friend of many years, Ernst Schoen. Although she left Walter for a time to be with Schoen, she decided to return to him, explaining in a letter to Scholem:

> Ich habe diese 9 Monate in einem ununterbrochenen Kampf gelebt um fromm sein und gut sein [sic]. Was er [Walter] nicht weiß ... ist, daß ich, wenn ich zurückkehre, wieder versuchen will, mit ihm zu leben wie früher. ... Ehe ist eine Forderung, ... das versuche ich ihm klarzumachen. (Puttneis and Smith 143–44)
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> [During these last 9 months I have lived in an uninterrupted battle to be pious and good. What he (Walter) doesn't know ... is that when I return I want to try to live with him as before ... Marriage is a challenge ... I'm tying to make that clear to him].

She tries to be "good," and is determined to go back and somehow keep their marriage intact. Her desire to be good is at odds with many of her actions and decisions. She was hardly being good by middle-class standards when she engaged in adultery first with Walter and later with Schoen. "Pious and good" would certainly not have been the adjectives that sprang to the lips of the members of the traditional middle-class when she frequented a lesbian night club in Berlin with a number of different male friends. Her stated reason for going there was simply: "[t]hese women are authentic" (Charlotte Wolff, *Hindsight* 75). This remark seems to indicate her desire for a less conflicted role

as a woman -- one in which the norms of her class and religion were not so often at odds with her own wishes and desires.

Yet Dora supported Walter and his work in every way she possibly could, much beyond what would be expected of a middle-class wife. "Du darfst nicht sagen, Gerhard, daß Dir seine geistige Entwicklung wichtiger ist als mir. Dazu habe ich zu lange meine ganze Existenz auf ihn gestellt," she wrote to Scholem (Puttneis and Smith 151). [Gerhard, you may not say that his intellectual development is more important to you than to me. I have devoted my whole existence to him for too long for that]. Dora is a complex and contradictory mixture of rebellion and conformity, self-sacrificing yet pleasure-loving. In spite of her complexity, Dora has, to date, been firmly positioned by the discourse of the wife. Observations concerning her are based on the assumption that a wife is supposed to take care of all domestic matters so as to allow her husband to devote his energies to his work all day, after which he relaxes in a well-run home.

My primary critiques of discourse of the private sphere and the position of the wife within it concern: (1) its productivist logic; (2) its inherent binarism (i.e., public/private, with the former being the privileged term); and (3) its assumption that worthwhile knowledge is only produced outside the domestic sphere. All of these concerns are both achieved by, and result in, separating the conditions of production from what is produced, theory from practice, and ideas from material reality. In the rest of this chapter, I will attempt to analyze the intersections of the domestic and public spheres in order to begin to reconceptualize intellectual work as the product of these intersections.

The aforementioned assumptions concerning the role and place of the wife were common to Walter's time and class; this was his childhood reality.[54] He grew up expecting that someone else

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[54] See Benjamin's writings based on his childhood: "Berliner Chronik"[Berlin Chronicle] and "Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert" [Berlin Childhood around 1900].

(mother, wife, domestic servants) would look after his material well-being and perform all domestic tasks for him. He admitted, at the age of forty, that "ich mir heute noch keine Tasse Kaffee kochen kann" (*Berliner Chronik* 11) [even today I am unable to make myself a cup of coffee]. During the years of their marriage, Dora provided these services, acted as his secretary, and raised their son.

After their divorce in 1930, when Walter no longer had unrestricted access to Dora's services, he turned to his sister to fulfill these functions. Siegfried Unseld recalls a visit to Walter, who gave him to understand that he was living with a woman: "[E]r ... sagte, er wohne hier nicht allein, so daß man annehmen mußte, er wohne mit einer Frau zusammen. Zufällig habe ich viele Jahre später erfahren, daß diese Frau seine Schwester war" (Unseld 68) [He said ... he did not live here alone, and in such a way that one had to assume that he was living together with a woman. By coincidence, I found out years later that this woman was his sister]. Walter kept his sister's presence a secret even from his Paris friends and acquaintances. Benjamin's first biographer, Fuld, assumes that Benjamin was so secretive because he did not want anyone to know the extent of his dire financial straits (22). While this is possible, it is certainly unlikely, as he constantly complained to everyone he knew about the dire nature of his financial situation, and he received financial support from many sources during his years in Paris: his ex-wife Dora, Theodor Adorno and his family, Gretel Karplus,[55] and Bertolt Brecht, to name only a few.

Walter needed his younger sister, whose name was also Dora, not only because he was unable to pay his rent, but also to perform the household and secretarial duties. For a brother to seek his sister's assistance was not uncommon in Jewish middle-class families, in which women often worked in, or even ran, their husbands' or fathers' business, without receiving either a salary

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[55] Karplus was a common friend of Benjamin's and Adorno's, who later became Adorno's wife.

or recognition.[56] Although she had been employed in the field of social welfare in Germany, it was difficult for Walter's sister to find employment in Paris, and this was compounded by the fact that she was ill and, most likely, unable to hold a steady job.[57] She lived off a small sum of invested money she had inherited when their mother died, which she then shared with her brother when he joined her in Paris (Witte, *Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 124). At the time, Walter was being paid only 500 francs per month as an associate of the Institute for Social Research, which was well below what he would have needed to live on his own (Witte, *Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 106). In order to survive he borrowed money from friends and, alternately, lived with his sister in Paris, Brecht in Denmark, and in his ex-wife's boarding house in Italy.

Although Dora was no longer there to support him in his daily life, Walter could clearly still count on her assistance. As Brodersen's research has shown, "during Benjamin's exile Dora Kellner was one of the few people who really supported him" (*Walter Benjamin* 175). Charlotte Wolff, a friend of the Benjamins during the early years of their marriage, observed that Dora not only always believed in Walter's work, she was also "aware of the significance of her husband's work, but felt herself repressed by his compulsive behaviour" (*On the Way to Myself* 205). Again, this comment reveals the conflicted nature of Dora's situation. She seems to have wanted to support Walter and his work; however, in the traditional role of a wife, she was too bound, both by the role itself and by Walter.

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[56] For further discussion, see Marion Kaplan, especially Chapter 6, "Double Barriers, Double Burdens: Women's Employment."

[57] According to Fuld, Dora Benjamin suffered from a debilitating form of chronic spinal rheumatism (21).

Even though Walter's initial attraction to Dora seems to have been connected to her intelligence and her *engagement* in the Free Students' Union,[58] once she becomes his wife, different expectations come into play and gradually come to dominate. Not only Walter himself, but also scholars who attempt to understand him, participate in the discourse of the wife, thus leaving numerous assumptions intact and thereby obscuring many dimensions that would help us to gain a clearer picture. As Charlotte Wolff observed, "Behind his work had always stood a person he loved" (*Hindsight* 67). What did this mean in the case of Dora?

In their biographical study, Puttneis and Smith attempt to piece together the story of Walter and Dora Benjamin's marriage. They make the claim that one of the major problems with the relationship was the fact that they were "zwei gleich starke und intelligente Menschen" [two people of equal strength and intelligence], which made it extremely difficult for them to share "den ganzen Alltag" [all of everyday life] (Puttneis and Smith 135). Scholem's observations on his visits to the newly married couple in Switzerland would seem to confirm this difficulty. He found that "they were incomparably tender toward each other and unabashedly affectionate in my presence," however, he also "became an involuntary witness to noisy scenes" (*Friendship* 55).

While their day-to-day relations were often difficult, in retrospect Dora described their marriage as one of "mutual interests," as Walter needed someone to prevent him from committing suicide and she needed someone to give her life meaning (Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin* 96). Walter did contemplate suicide on a number of occasions, and by 1931, after their divorce, he was strongly aware of the "wachsende Bereitschaft ... mir das Leben zu nehmen" ("Mai-Juni 1931" 423) [increasing readiness ... to take my life]. Shortly after this diary entry, Walter not only wrote farewell letters to a number of his friends, but he also completed his will (Scholem, *Friendship* 187-

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[58] The Free Students' Union was a group within the larger Student Reform Movement that followed the ideas of educational reformer Gustav Wyneken.

88). He planned to commit suicide on his fortieth birthday but did not actually do so until he was stopped at the French-Spanish border in 1940, eight years later (Benjamin/Scholem, *Briefwechsel* 19).

While the various stations of Walter's life are well known, it is only recently that any attention has been paid to Dora -- and then only as a biographical footnote to Walter. What is known of her is limited, especially with regard to her life before she met Walter.[59] Puttneis and Smith come to the conclusion that "[s]ie selbst war schon früh einem eigenen Weg gefolgt" (136) [already at an early age she went her own way]. Brodersen summarizes the portraits of her personality: they "depict Dora as an engaging, socially confident, intellectual, musically talented and exceptionally beautiful woman" (97). Wolff describes her as a "beautiful, sensuous, and hypersensitive woman, an intelligent journalist" (*On the Way to Myself* 205). "She had striking looks which alone gave her a 'presence.' But there was more to her than that. A blonde Jewess with slightly protruding eyes, a heart-shaped mouth with full red lips, she exuded vitality and *joie de vivre*. Dora seduced one through her very being" (*Hindsight* 66). At least in her physical presence, she appears to have been quite the opposite of Walter, who has been described as aloof, withdrawn, lacking vitality, not attractive to women, and "so to speak, incorporeal" (Scholem, *Friendship* 95).

As a young woman, Dora was actively involved in the "Freie Studentschaft" [Free Students' Union], where she met both of her husbands. She was extremely impressed by Walter's inaugural speech as the chair of the group and wrote to Herbert Blumenthal (later Belmore), then a common friend of theirs: "Benjamins Rede -- Du kennst ihn. Es war wie eine Erlösung. Man atmete kaum" (Puttneis and Smith 136) [Benjamin's speech -- you know him. It was like salvation. Everyone

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[59] Attempting to understand Dora in the context of Walter's life and work is made all the more difficult by the fact that many of her letters have not been published. Most of them are to be found either in the Walter Benjamin Archive in Jerusalem or the Walter Benjamin Estate that is housed, in part, in the literature archive of the *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin as well as in the Adorno Archive in Frankfurt.

hardly breathed]. In fact, she was so impressed that she presented him with roses, a gesture that strongly affected Walter: "Dora brachte mir Rosen, weil meine Freundin nicht in Berlin sei. Nun ist es wahr: noch niemals haben mich Blumen so beglückt, wie diese, die Dora ... brachte" (*Briefe* Vol. 1, 216) ["Dora brought me roses because my girlfriend was not in Berlin. It is true that flowers have never made me as happy as these, which Dora ... brought" (*Correspondence* 60)].

They continued to see each other and shared a passion for their work in the Free Students' Union, in which Dora's husband, Max Pollak, was also active.[60] Dora was particularly involved in the group's discussion meetings, where she often initiated discussion topics and was an enthusiastic participant.[61] After one long discussion between Dora and Walter, "vom Sprechsaal, von Dr. Wyneken, objektivem Geist und Religion" ["about the Discussion Hall, Dr. Wyneken, objective spirit and religion"] Walter confided to Blumenthal that he knew they were in agreement with one another: "daher weiß ich, daß wir übereinstimmen" (*Briefe* Vol. 1, 222) ["therefore I know that we are of one mind" (*Correspondence* 63)]. Their common interests in educational reform seem to have been the basis for their agreement with one another.

Dora and Walter married in 1917, and, as Brodersen notes, she protected "her husband from the adversities of daily life and above all provided him with assistance in practical matters" (97). One of her first accomplishments of this nature was to enable Walter's avoidance of conscription, as he was totally opposed to the war. At that time he broke off his association with the entire Student Reform Movement and one of its prominent leaders, Gustav Wyneken, when the latter and his followers (primarily in the Free Students' Union) enthusiastically supported the war.

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[60] Walter was engaged to Grete Radt at the time -- and still was when he married Dora.

[61] Contrary to Fuld's assertion that Dora's involvement with the youth movement consisted solely of her participation in its social life (79), Walter's letters provide evidence of her intellectual participation. See, for example, *Briefe* Vol. 1, 216 and 222; *Correspondence* 60 and 63.

With Dora's assistance, Walter was able to feign symptoms of sciatica, which allowed his family doctor to certify him unfit for military service. He was exempt from service for a number of months, after which he obtained further medical certification that allowed him to travel to a sanatorium in Switzerland. Once in Switzerland, he registered at the University of Bern and completed his doctoral studies. There, Dora's own writing waited while Walter completed his doctorate, and, in 1918, before its completion, their son Stefan was born.

Dora provided for the material existence of her family primarily through her work as a translator, journalist, and foreign language secretary. Like many young women who had to work to finance their own studies, she took secretarial work to feed her family and to finance her husband's studies. Her income was vital, as she was often paid in foreign currency, which somewhat reduced the worst effects of the skyrocketing inflation of the time (Tiedemann, Gödde, Lonitz 151). There was, however, little security in her income, as her secretarial jobs were usually only short-term positions. In addition to those jobs, she also wrote numerous "kleinere Feuilletons" [smaller literary works] (Tiedemann, Gödde, Lonitz 152) and worked for Berlin radio.

Dora later became a bilingual secretary for an English company[62] and worked as a translator and journalist. In 1927 she became the editor of a well-known magazine, and she also achieved "ein gewisses Renommée" (Tiedemann, Gödde, Lonitz 152) [a certain name for herself] as a translator and writer under the first of her many names: Dora Sophie Kellner. Although she earned her living by writing, Puttneis and Smith, true to the discourse of the wife, seem surprised that she was actually able to write well: "Mehr noch: Dora schreibt gut" (139) [More yet: Dora writes well].

In addition to translating numerous novels from English into German and writing articles and book reviews for various journals, in 1930 Dora also wrote a novel, *Gas gegen Gas* [Gas

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[62] She was fluent in English, having spent some time living in England as a child -- a stay probably due to her father being a scholar of English literature.

Against Gas]. Tiedemann, Gödde, and Lonitz describe her book as "ein ansehnliches Stück Trivialliteratur" (152) [a respectable piece of trivial literature].[63] The social context to which her title refers, however, is anything but trivial: the use of gas as a weapon of war. Her choice of title indicates that the danger of using gas as a weapon is not the background to a trivial story but, rather, a central motif. Dora's novel prefigures many of the arguments utilized in the debate concerning the employment of gas and, by extension, in the current debate concerning the employment of chemical and biological weapons.

One of Walter's earlier newspaper articles, "Die Waffen von Morgen" [Weapons of Tomorrow], foresaw the possibility of the employment of gas in the Second World War. Based on this article, Tiedemann, Gödde, and Lonitz ask whether or not Walter had anything to do with Dora's novel (153). This is certainly conceivable, as they discussed many issues -- both literary and political -- particularly during the earlier years of their marriage.[64] Walter took Dora's opinions seriously, as can be seen from his discussion of a controversial essay by his friend, Florens Rang: "ich [sage] Dir kurz, wie ich und wie Dora zu dieser Arbeit stehen" ["I will briefly summarize how Dora and I view it"]. He followed with a critique of both the form and content of the essay and concluded his comments by stating that, although he and Dora generally agreed on these critiques, they differed in one respect: "[Sie] schränkt die Anerkennung des Positiven, die ich darin gebe, sehr ein"(*Briefe* Vol 2, 200-01) ["(She) is much less enthusiastic about what I see as the essay's positive values" (*Correspondence* 189-90)]. It is clear from this letter that they discussed the essay in some

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[63] As the novel in its entirety is unavailable in North America, I am unable to comment on it as a whole. It is very likely, however, that the label "trivial literature" or "light reading" has been assigned to Dora's work because it deals with interpersonal relationships -- matters that may be deemed trivial only when one attempts to categorize according to the binary oppositions of public/private, high culture/popular culture.

[64] See, for example, *Briefe* Vol. 1, 402, 463, 488; Vol. 2, 147; *Correspondence* 103, 129, 136, 178.

detail and that Walter acknowledged both their agreements and their disagreements. In other words, Dora had a mind and opinion of her own, and did not merely echo her husband.

The possibility of deploying gas as a weapon may well have been one of the Benjamins' ongoing topics of discussion. In 1924, Walter was already concerned about the possibility of another war, and he takes notice of an item in the paper concerning the potential deployment of gas, chemical, and bacteriological weapons (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 470). However, the manner in which Tiedemann, Gödde, and Lonitz formulate their question concerning Walter's influence on Dora's novel reveals something important. It is a question that is only viable within a framework that seeks the origin of an idea in an individual and then attempts to establish the causal influence of one individual on another within an assumed "tradition." And much of academic discourse, as Moi and Martin point out, generally places women in marginal positions from which, by definition, they can only produce "derivative" work. Furthermore, the discourse of the wife assumes that it is the wife's role to support, thus she is only capable of engaging in "reproductive" work. All of these assumptions preclude the examination of Dora as an influence on, or contributor to, Walter's work. Brodersen sums up the current view of Dora as follows: "Dora Sophie Kellner did not exert a profound influence on her husband's thinking and creative output" (*Walter Benjamin: A Biography* 96). However, as Brodersen himself discovered, Dora, not Walter, authored at least one article, "Die Waffen von morgen" ["Weapons of Tomorrow"]. Although the manuscript was signed with her initials, Brodersen determines that Walter must have been the author because the title appears in a list of his publications (*Walter Benjamin* 279-80). It is no longer surprising to discover that works attributed to well-known men were, in fact, completed, all or in part, by the women in their lives. It seems highly likely, given Dora's initials on the manuscript and the fact that her novel explored the issues it raises, that she was the author of that essay.

What I am concerned with is not individual authorship per se but, rather, the complex ways in which convergent interests intersect and the way in which intellectual production occurs at these intersections. Dora not only discussed many issues with Walter, but he also often dictated his work to her, and she often recopied his writings into neat versions ("Reinschrift"). It is highly unlikely that someone as intelligent and strong-minded as Dora, who had many of the same intellectual interests as did Walter, would have simply copied or transcribed without making any comments or suggestions. It has been established that she wrote part of at least one more of Walter's essays, "Leben und Gewalt" [Life and Violence] (Tiedemann, Gödde, Lonitz 149). Closer examination of the various archives of both Walter's and Dora's work and correspondence is needed to determine which of his other works were, at least to some degree, co-authored by Dora. Again, this must be done not in order to establish a causal relationship or to attempt to discover the individual origin of an idea, but, rather, to illustrate the complexity of the production of knowledge.

Although, on the one hand, Walter appears to have taken Dora's opinions seriously and discussed many matters with her, on the other hand, he had an extremely low opinion of women's intellectual capabilities. While researching his doctoral dissertation, for example, he came across an academic work concerning German Romanticism written by a woman. His response was: "Das Grausen das einen überkommt wenn Frauen in diesen Dingen entscheidend mitreden wollen ist unbeschreiblich" (*Briefe* Vol. 1, 468) ["The horror that grips you when women want to play a crucial role in discussing such matters is indescribable" (*Correspondence* 133)]. In a later book review he dismissed the work as "eine typische Frauenarbeit" [a typical work by a woman] ("Eva Feisel, Die Sprachphilosophie der deutschen Romantik" 96). The book was a revised version of a doctoral dissertation that Walter first praised for being far above average, yet he then attacked the author for being a woman. According to his review, Eva Feisel lacked "innere Souveränität" [inner sovereignty] and had neither a deep interest in, nor any real insight into, her subject matter. Further,

he found that although it was "eine tüchtige Arbeit" [an industrious piece of work], it was also typical in its limitations: "typisch für einen unmännlichen Historizismus" [typical for an unmanly historicism] ("Eva Feisel, Die Sprachphilosophie der deutschen Romantik" 96-97). There is almost no mention of the actual content of the book, and the review concludes by censuring its author for being "unerzogen" [ill-bred] because she failed to cite her sources adequately. Although critiquing an academic work for failing to include a bibliography is certainly justifiable, Walter does this in a manner that is reminiscent of a father scolding a naughty child.[65] The reader of the review ends up knowing virtually nothing about the content of the book -- only that its formal aspects are lacking and that it cannot possibly be worth reading because its author was a woman.

This kind of patronizing hostility towards women in the academy was prevalent in Walter's time. In Walter's case, both the German and Jewish traditions considered too much education "unfeminine," and such views were reinforced by the attitudes towards women within the academy.[66] These attitudes concerning the intellectual inferiority of women and the belief that women were naturally destined to be mothers and nurturing helpmates were all seemingly taken for granted by Walter, even though his lived reality contradicted them. Dora was an intellectually capable partner with a university education -- a person with whom, at least in the early years of their relationship, he discussed his thoughts and ideas. However, Walter accepted the dominant gendered division of labour, and he expected his wife to perform all manner of secretarial and domestic work for him. A telling example of his expectations occurred when they visited Dora's aunt's spa in 1919,

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[65] The reviews ends as follows: "Wer eingeladen ist und die Tür, durch die er eintrat, hinter sich zuschlägt, verfährt nicht anders als wer über die "Sprachphilosophie der deutschen Romantik" ein Buch ohne Literaturangaben verfaßt. Nämlich unerzogen" ("Eva Feisel, Die Sprachphilosophie der deutschen Romantik" 97). [Whoever is invited in and then slams the door through which he entered behaves no differently than the person who wrote "Philosophy of Language of German Romanticism" without a bibliography. Namely ill-bred].

[66] For a detailed analysis of the "scientific" arguments used against women in higher education, see Glaser, Huerkamp, Wierling, and Marion Kaplan, especially her chapter "Jewish Women Confront Academia."

shortly after he had completed his doctoral dissertation. The reason for the trip was to allow them both some time to relax and recuperate from the stressful years they had just gone through. There were some difficulties with their luggage, and although Dora was in ill health, she, not Walter, was the one who had to travel to Vienna to straighten things out.[67]

Beyond the question of Dora's direct participation in Walter's work, there is the issue of her indirect participation. As has been shown, it was Dora who, in numerous ways, supplied the material conditions that enabled Walter to continue to pursue his studies. How crucial her income was becomes clear in a letter to Schoen: "In Bern ist mir, ganz wider mein kühnstes Erwarten, Aussicht auf eine Habilitation eröffnet worden. Nun ist dies unannehmbar, wenn nicht eine nach Art und Gehalt angemessene Stellung für meine Frau sich findet die uns den Aufenthalt in der Schweiz ermöglicht" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 63) ["Contrary to my wildest expectations, the prospect of an opportunity to work for my habilitation has opened up for me in Bern. But I will not be able to accept such an opportunity unless my wife finds a position that is appropriate in terms of the nature of the work and the salary and would enable us to stay on in Switzerland" (*Correspondence* 154)]. As Walter's parents were both unwilling and unable to provide him with continued financial support, his ability to remain in Switzerland depended on Dora's ability to earn a sufficient income.

The tensions of the contradictory positions she occupied, together with the demands of both her paid and unpaid work, compounded the physical toll of childbirth on Dora's health.[68] This is evident in Walter's numerous references to her ill health, beginning shortly after Stefan's birth on

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[67] After arriving at the spa he writes to Hüne Caro: "Dem Kinde geht es gut, meiner Frau nicht. ... Meine Frau [ist] freilich gegenwärtig in Wien, wo sie sich bemüht unser Gepäck zu erhalten" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 52-53). ["My son is well, my wife is not ... My wife is in Vienna at the moment, where she is making an effort to get our luggage."(*Correspondence* 150)].

[68] Childbirth was (and still often is) erroneously believed to be a natural event that is unproblematic for most women. Usborne refers to "an unsatisfactory record of maternal mortality or morbidity" in Germany during the Weimar Republic (20). Her chapter "Maternity," 31-68, discusses the triple burden of wage labour, maternity and housework that many women shouldered.

11 April 1918: "Meine Frau liegt an der Grippe krank" (*Briefe* Vol. 1, 484) ["My wife is ill with the flu" (*Correspondence* 135)]. In July 1919 he wrote: "Meine Frau leidet unter schwersten monatelang gehäuften Anstrengungen, auf die sie die erhoffte Erholung jetzt nun nicht findet, schwer; Blutarmut und schlimme Gewichtsabnahme" *Briefe* Vol. 2, 33) ["My wife is suffering terribly as a result of the pressure she has been under for months, in addition to not getting the rest we hoped for; anaemia and severe weight loss" (*Correspondence* 143)]. By the end of the following year, her health seemed to be improving somewhat: "Dora scheint es nur sehr langsam besser gehen zu wollen. Auf ihr gegenwärtiges Aussehen möchte sie sich nicht festlegen lassen" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 107) ["Dora seems to be improving only very slowly. She would rather that there not be a record of the way she has been looking of late" (*Correspondence* 167)]. However, she is not working, as Walter wrote to Scholem soon after: "Dora geht vorläufig nicht ins Büro und erholt sich allmählich. Sicher nicht zum wenigsten durch die freiere Aussicht [auf Einkommen von einer Veröffentlichung]" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 120) ["Dora is not going to the office for the time being and is gradually recovering. Certainly not least because of our better prospects (of income from having something published)" (*Correspondence* 171)]. By the end of the following summer we learn: "Dora geht es -- zum mindesten gesundheitlich -- noch nicht gut. Die Operation ist nicht ganz glatt verlaufen und macht eine häuslich Nachkur notwendig" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 195) ["Things are still not going right for Dora -- at least as far as her health is concerned. The operation was not entirely without complications, which made it necessary for her to recuperate at home" (*Correspondence* 188)]. The exact nature of the operation is not known. Nor is it known who cared for her and the family during that recovery period, as the work of looking after ill or convalescent family members was almost always done by the women in the family (with the assistance of paid nurses, if finances allowed).

Dora's health did not improve after the surgery. Two years later Walter wrote to his friend Florens Christian Rang: "Doras Gesundheit hält mich unablässig in Atem. Sie will von Schonung im Augenblick, da unsere wirtschaftliche Existenz auf ihrer Stellung steht, im Augenblick nichts wissen" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 362) ["Dora's health keeps me in a constant state of suspense. At the moment she does not want to hear anything about taking it easy because we are financially dependent on her job" (*Correspondence* 212)].

The previously mentioned tensions and demands, the physical burdens of childbirth, her concerns for her son's health during his long illness, and the pressure to keep working outside the home all contributed to Dora's poor health. She took on the expected role of sacrificing her own concerns, desires, and well-being to those of her husband and family; and Walter accepted this. Walter's expectations of his wife were typical of the time, even though he did not fill his half of the marriage bargain by providing financial security.

Dora completed numerous secretarial tasks in addition to typing many of Walter's manuscripts. For example, Walter wrote to Scholem about an address that Dora was attempting to find for him, even though it would have been easier for him to get it himself. When Walter needed to catalogue his library because he had to sell it, he remarked: "Im übrigen bin ich mit dem Katalog meines kleinen Bücherlagers beschäftigt, den ich in Gemeinschaft mit meiner Frau verfertige" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 327) [By the way, I'm busy completing a catalogue of my small collection of books together with my wife].[69] After the books were sold without having been completely catalogued, Walter expressed his relief, as otherwise Dora would have had a great deal of work: "Dora hätte sich beim Verkauf die Finger lahm schreiben müssen" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 335) [For the sale Dora would have had to write her fingers lame].

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[69] This and the two following cited letters are not included in the volume of Benjamin's translated letters.

Furthermore, Dora was responsible for social niceties, such as returning invitations, as is seen in her letter to Walter's friend Rang: "auch ich danke Ihnen beide auf's [sic] herzlichste für Ihre liebevolle Gastfreundschaft Walter gegenüber. Hoffentlich kann ich sie in nicht zu ferner Zeit erwidern" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 306) [I, too, would like to express my heartfelt thanks for your kind hospitality to Walter. Hopefully I will be able to reciprocate in the not too distant future].

As a wife, Dora was expected to enable and nurture, quietly and without recognition. The traditional role of the wife is to be in the background, behind "the great man," and to perform the unacknowledged maintenance work (and, in this case, to supply the income as well). As Martin has observed in the case of Salomé, any of her accomplishments that contributed to, or may have diminished, his greatness are simply ignored.

Benjamin's acceptance of the gendered division of the discourse of the wife is not surprising, considering his socio-economic position and its privileges. He was made by male institutions that were generally unwelcoming to women. His early schooling took place in an all-male environment, and his early mentor, Wyneken, propagated an educational ideal in which an elite group of superior students (though it was not explicitly stated, they were all male) would be educated in such a way as to enable them to transform bourgeois society once they took up the reins of power as adults.[70]

The universities Benjamin attended had some women students, but not very many.[71] It is highly unlikely that he ever came in contact with a woman professor. His immediate world was clearly male-oriented, and he accepted the advantages and privileges it offered him. The strength

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[70] A major contradiction within the group most strongly influenced by and supportive of Wyneken -- and one that requires further investigation -- is that, in spite of Wyneken's fairly overt anti-Semitism, like Benjamin, most of his followers were Jewish.

[71] Between 1918 and 1925 the largest number of women students at German universities at one time amounted to only 11.4 percent of the total number of students (Wierling 368).

of the dominant discourses and practices of the time, together with the fact that Walter clearly benefited from them, is interesting in that it contradicted not only his lived reality, but also his theorizing. I refer here especially to his concept of porosity -- a concept with which he attempts to dismantle established boundaries, such as public/private and academic life/everyday life. In spite of seeing the necessity of dismantling those boundaries, Benjamin maintained gender boundaries that enabled him to continue to occupy a privileged, male position within his marriage and society

Before further elucidating Benjamin's concept of porosity, I will examine how he was made by the university. Chapter 4 focuses on this process, particularly as it occurred during the years of his attempted habilitation

Chapter 4

Boundaries of Knowledge: Benjamin as a "Failure"

Authorized voices authorize themselves to be heard.
Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red*

Benjamin began attending lectures and seminars at the University of Frankfurt in preparation for writing his habilitation dissertation in the summer semester of 1923. This year marks the beginning of his failure to attain a traditional university career as well as of his association with future prominent members of the Institute for Social Research, particularly Max Horkheimer and Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno (later Adorno).[72] When Benjamin went to Frankfurt, Adorno was preparing for his doctorate, which he received in 1924, and Horkheimer, who became the director of the Institute in 1930, obtained his doctorate in the year Benjamin arrived. Both Adorno and Horkheimer were working under the supervision of Hans Cornelius, who also played a decisive role in Benjamin's failed habilitation attempt.

Cornelius, the only full professor of philosophy at the University of Frankfurt from 1914 to 1929, was in a position to shape the future of his discipline, at least at his institution, and he played a significant role in the future careers of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Benjamin.[73] He not only supervised Horkheimer's doctorate, but also, in 1925, his successful habilitation dissertation. This was the same year that he decided, with Horkheimer's support, that Benjamin's habilitation dissertation was unacceptable. Two years later, Adorno applied for habilitation, also under the

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[72] The Institute has become more commonly known as the Frankfurt School.

[73] In his work, Cornelius supported a variant of neo-Kantianism that emphasized the role of perceptual experience and maintained that only the clarity of knowledge resulting from the study of previous "greats" would deliver society from its problems. This knowledge, however, was distanced from everyday social problems, such as the poverty of the post-war period, and it provided no clear response to them (Wiggershaus 45).

supervision of Cornelius, and, like Benjamin, was forced to withdraw his application on the basis of Cornelius' evaluation of his submitted work.

In this chapter I will examine the social organization of knowledge at the University of Frankfurt during Benjamin's failed attempt at habilitation in order to elucidate the ways in which the processes and politics of the production of knowledge worked to exclude him. Specifically, I look at the disciplines of philosophy and philology, which Benjamin attempted to enter professionally when he decided to apply for habilitation. Exclusionary practices are also evident in how these events have been subsequently analyzed. Although recent analyses have attempted to "rehabilitate" Benjamin and refer to those past events as "scandalous" (Lindner 147), they employ similar exclusionary processes in that they condemn the professors involved as flawed individuals, without examining the social and institutional dimensions that affected them. In these studies the blame is placed squarely on the shoulders of Benjamin's supervisor, Franz Schultz, who is alternately too political, too conservative, or too unintelligent to understand Benjamin's genius.

The questions I pose are not formulated around notions of good or evil, or the competence or incompetence of the individuals making the decisions and acting in particular ways; rather, I investigate the intersection of individual actions with the institutional and disciplinary frameworks that authorize specific forms of knowledge. In so doing, I shift the emphasis from the situated imperfections of the knower to the status of knowledge as it is socially and materially organized. Knowledge is produced by individuals in specific settings and is, therefore, both organized by and participant in social relations. Thus the social organization and accomplishment of knowledge itself is the focus of enquiry (D. Smith, *Conceptual Practices of Power* 62). By examining how institutional forms of social organization and the strategies they mobilize were responsible for Benjamin's "failure," one can begin to understand, first, how he was made a failure, and, second,

how frames of reference inherent within the traditional practices of literary criticism and social theory reproduced certain methods, ideologies, and kinds of knowledge.

To work towards the goals of changing forms of knowledge and educational practices, as is the desire of critical pedagogy and cultural studies, it is necessary: (1) to understand the processes by which knowledge is made; (2) to remain aware of these processes, and (3) to find the appropriate points of intervention so that certain social groups (such as women or Jews) and some forms of knowledge (such as private, emotional, or personal knowledge) are not marginalized.

Burkhardt Lindner's examination of Benjamin's file at the University of Frankfurt provides valuable information and insights into how Benjamin was made by that institution and its members. However, his study is weakened because he frames Benjamin's life in terms of breaks and binary oppositions. According to Lindner, the first such fissure occurred with the breakdown of Benjamin's marriage and his affair with Lacis, which he claims was accompanied by a change in Benjamin's writing. Lindner describes the habilitation, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, as an academic form of writing, written under the sign of Dora.[74] This is contrasted to "One-Way Street," written under the sign of Lacis, which Lindner posits as representing the possibility for Benjamin of writing as an independent writer and thinker. In Lindner's view, "One-Way Street" constitutes "einen definitiven Bruch mit der Institution Universität" [a definitive break with the institution of the university] that accompanies "biographischen Zäsuren" [biographical caesurae] (147).

Although Lindner attempts to link private and public spheres, he does so in a somewhat simplistic manner by categorizing Benjamin's life and work in terms of either/or: he was either under the influence of Dora Benjamin or Asja Lacis; his writing was either academic or non-

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[74] This assertion is inaccurate in that Benjamin wrote much of the habilitation in Capri, where he first met and spent much time with Lacis and was "under her influence."

academic. Furthermore, although Lindner refers to the connections between Dora and Lacis and the changes in Benjamin's writing, the reader is left to imagine just what those connections might be. Basically, Lindner's argument is: troubled marriage plus being in the academy equals Benjamin's academic (i.e., restricted) work, while erotic adventure plus being outside the academy equals Benjamin's true (i.e., free-thinking) work.

The biographical and the professional converge in Lindner's analysis, neither to demonstrate how their various dimensions intersect nor to explore the relational aspects between the two, but rather to produce Benjamin as a unified subject. This reduction precludes any tensions or contradictions, and it also obliterates traces of what Benjamin was before any alleged change. Thus, in Lindner's teleological tale, Benjamin's past disappears as he takes each new step on the path to his "true" self.

To understand the interweaving of the various institutional processes and power structures that resulted in Benjamin's failure, it is not sufficient to observe, as Lindner does: "So ist die paradoxe Situation entstanden, daß eine Abhandlung, die damals als 'weit unter Habilitationsniveau' abgefertigt wurde, selbst zum Gegenstand von Promotionen und Habilitationen 'aufgerückt' ist" (Lindner 164) [Thus the paradoxical situation arose in which a dissertation, that at the time was dismissed as 'far beneath the niveau of a habilitation,' was 'promoted' to the object of doctoral and habilitation dissertations]. While Lindner's comment suggests that Benjamin's failure and success arose out of an interesting quirk of fate due to circumstances beyond his control, I question how and why this occurred rather than merely accepting it as an unusual paradoxical situation. Benjamin's motivations and desires converge with the social and institutional processes that I investigate. On the one hand, Benjamin was extremely critical of the institution of the university and the means by which it produced knowledge; on the other hand, he had various reasons for wanting to become a member of such an institution.

Witte understands Benjamin's wish to find acceptance for his habilitation as hinging on his desire to gain some kind of official recognition of his work, which, in turn, would pressure his parents to continue to support him:

> Benjamin suchte die venia legendi nicht, weil er eine Universitätskarriere einschlagen wollte, sondern als Bestätigung seines sozialen Status als Privatgelehrter. Außerdem sah er seinen Eltern gegenüber in ihr einen "Ausweis öffentlicher Anerkennung, der sie zur Ordnung ruft". Offensichtlich war er der Meinung, daß sie nach einer Habilitation moralisch verpflichtet seien, ihn finanziell stärker zu unterstützen. (Witte, *Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 50)
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> [Benjamin did not seek the authorization to lecture because he wanted to follow a university career, but rather as an affirmation of his social status as an independent scholar. Moreover, in relation to his parents, he viewed it as a "evidence of a public acknowledgement, that would keep them in line." Obviously he was of the opinion that they would be morally obligated to provide him with stronger financial support after his habilitation].

Obtaining a position at a university was, in Witte's view, not the reason Benjamin sought to continue his education; rather, it was a means of pressuring his parents into giving him further support, which would enable him to continue his intellectual pursuits without having to consider financial matters. Given the important role and function of education, particularly in Jewish middle-class families, this tactic could have been successful. However, Benjamin's understanding of the situation was limited by his own self-interest. He felt that he was being treated unfairly by his "petty

and controlling" parents, and he failed to consider either his parents' situation or the fact that his siblings also wished to enjoy the privilege of studying at university.

When Benjamin withdrew his habilitation in order to avoid the embarrassment of having it rejected, his parents made it very clear that they would not provide him with any kind of financial support. In this way, his situation differed from that of Adorno, whose parents were both willing and able to continue supporting him financially while he worked as a music critic and attempted to become a musician and composer (Wiggershaus 82). Like Adorno, Benjamin seems to have had little desire to actually follow an academic career. As has been mentioned, he was very concerned about the amount of time that teaching and dealing with students would take away from what he considered to be his real work: reading, thinking, and writing. In a letter to Scholem, Benjamin asserts: "Vor fast allem, was mit dem glücklichen Ausgang gegeben wäre, graust mir: Frankfurt voran, dann Vorlesungen, Schüler etc - Dinge, die die Zeit mörderisch angreifen, da ohnehin ihre Ökonomie nicht meine starke Seite ist" (*Briefe* Vol. 3, 15) ["I dread almost everything that would result from a positive resolution to all of this [application for habilitation]: I dread Frankfurt above all, the students, lectures, etc. Things that take a murderous toll on time, especially since the economical use of time is not my long suit" (*Correspondence* 261)]. At this point, he was having difficulty finding sufficient time to deal with publishers and to conduct research. Adding teaching to his workload would have been almost impossible.

Furthermore, as previously discussed, the perceived "Not der geistigen Arbeiter"[75] [the affliction of the intellectual worker] during the Weimar Republic made the academic professions economically unappealing. The concomitant devaluation of the academic professions due both to

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[75] This was the title of a work published by Alfred Weber in 1923, which erroneously attempted to demonstrate that academics' incomes had been reduced from four to seven times as much as had those of unskilled workers before the war and twice as much after the war (Huerkamp 273).

the perceived inadequate remuneration and the entrance of women and the lower classes into the university also made them less attractive to their usual members.[76] This "undervaluing of intellectuals" in German society was one of the reasons Benjamin later sought a new life and new work in Moscow. He hoped that intellectuals would be better appreciated and more needed in the revolutionary new Russian communist society than they were in the German republic.

As a result, during the 1920s, of more groups gaining access to the university and more members of the middle-class seeking to enter the class of the educated bourgeoisie, the number of students at German universities climbed rapidly, causing what has been referred to as a glut of academics ("Akademikerschwemme"). This, occurring in conjunction with a shrinking job market, left many graduates either unemployed or in the position of having to take jobs they considered far below what their level of education warranted (Huerkamp 274). Benjamin was clearly aware of these problems, as he and his friend Gutkind both suffered from them. As a result of the high unemployment rate, there was open discrimination against the hiring of any minority groups, which included women and Jews. There was an increasing anti-woman and anti-Jewish sentiment at the universities, as young middle-class men were forced to compete with these "others" for fewer jobs. Increasingly, women and Jews were accused of being responsible for the high level of unemployment among university graduates. This flawed logic was reinforced by the national chauvinism that was on the rise during the First World War and further intensified during the years of the Weimar Republic.

Benjamin's strong distaste for the academy is understandable, not only because the institution was rigid, hierarchical, and imbued with power politics, but also because it was anti-Semitic. Marion Kaplan has found that, while anti-Semitism at German universities was pronounced

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[76] Women obtained the right to university study between 1900 and 1909, depending in which federal state the university was located.

in the 1920s, it was by no means a new phenomenon. During the 1890s, anti-Semitic pamphlets were circulated "denouncing the intellectual domination of Germans by Jews" (Marion Kaplan 148). One of the fathers of modern political anti-Semitism, Adolf Stöcker, "decried the disproportionate onslaught on institutions of higher education by Jews" (Marion Kaplan 148). More and more fraternities excluded Jews as members, and, by the end of the 1890s, the organized student body was predominantly anti-Semitic, resulting in (male) Jewish students forming their own fraternities and student groups. Anti-Semitism was the social norm on campuses, and, particularly during the 1880s when there was also a severe shortage of academic positions, non-Jewish students complained of having to compete with Jews: "Jewish doctors push out Christians, Jewish mouths disproportionately emit jurisdiction and law" (Marion Kaplan 149).

In spite of these numerous problems, and against his own "deep inner resistance" (Scholem, *Friendship* 126), Benjamin went through the motions of habilitating (1) to appease his parents so that they would continue to support him financially and (2) to obtain the necessary "stamp of approval" on his intellectual career. He breathed a sigh of relief when it was all over and he could continue with his work. Witte's analysis supports this interpretation:

> Die Skepsis, mit der Benjamin von Anfang an der Frankfurter Unternehmung gegenübergestanden hatte, war vor allem in dem Wissen begründet, wie wenig geeignet und willens er unter den gegebenen Umständen war, die Tätigkeit eines Universitätslehrers auszuüben. Die Gründe für diese Abwehrhaltung liegen nicht bei der Universität allein, deren schnödes Verhalten und trostlose geistige Verfassung Benjamin zurecht beklagt. Ihm selbst war seine Einsamkeit als Intellektueller, die allein ihm ein unabhängiges kritisches Urteil zu gewährleisten schien, wichtiger als die institutionelle Einbindung und Absicherung. (*Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 62)

> [From the beginning, the scepticism with which Benjamin approached his Frankfurt undertaking was based primarily on the knowledge of how unsuited and unwilling he was to pursue the profession of university lecturer under the given circumstances. The reasons for this resistance do not lie solely with the university, whose disgraceful behaviour and hopeless intellectual disposition Benjamin justifiably complained about. For him his solitude as an intellectual, which appeared to him to guarantee his own independent critical views, was more important than security and being bound to an institution].

Benjamin was sceptical about being affiliated with the university for two reasons: (1) he was critical of the kind of knowledge it produced and how it produced it and (2) the security of a university position would compromise his ability to be a critical intellectual. Once bound to an institution, he would inevitably be influenced by its power politics.

In order to avoid explaining Benjamin's failure as a one-sided, unidirectional process that pits the "bad," exclusionary institution against the "mistreated, misrecognized, misunderstood, visionary victim," it is important to remember his own reluctance and the tenor of the times. If one does not do this, then one runs the risk of embracing an oversimplified view of Benjamin as an outsider *par excellence* -- as someone who is able to provide us with superior insights solely by virtue of being an outsider.

Now I will examine the processes by which Benjamin was excluded from the academy. Dorothy Smith observes that "investigating the actual social organization of knowledge brings the social relations organizing power into the light. If we don't examine and explicate the boundaries set by the textual realities of the relations of ruling, their invisible determinations will continue to confine us" (*Conceptual Practices of Power* 65). The "relations of ruling" to which Smith refers include the total complex of activities by which a society is ruled, managed, and administered. The

university as an institution, as well as the professions and disciplines within it, play a formative role in these activities (D. Smith, *Conceptual Practices of Power* 14). Smith speaks of a "sort of conceptual imperialism" in which members of a discipline are trained to "confine and focus [their] insights within the conceptual frameworks and relevances of the discipline" (*Conceptual Practices of Power* 15). The result of this is that "boundaries of inquiry are thus set within the framework of what is already established" (D. Smith, *Conceptual Practices of Power* 16), regardless of what issues and knowledge that framework marginalizes or ignores. These processes were not only at work in the making of Benjamin during his lifetime, but also in subsequent attempts to understand him, his work, and his significance as an intellectual.

As previously mentioned, one of the university's exclusionary dimensions was anti-Semitism[77] that would have made Benjamin's habilitation at the University of Heidelberg all but impossible. After a trip to Heidelberg to assess the possibility of continuing his studies there, he wrote to Scholem: "Die Habilitationsaussichten sind auch dadurch erschwert, daß ein Jude, namens Mannheim, sich dort ... vermutlich habilitieren wird" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 299) ["The prospects of doing my habilitation dissertation there have also become less likely because a Jew by the name of [Karl] Mannheim will apparently do his habilitation there" (*Correspondence* 204).] While the presence of another Jewish student seeking habilitation diminished Benjamin's chances of being accepted in Heidelberg, in Frankfurt, which had the highest percentage of Jews and the second largest Jewish community in Germany, his acceptance was much more likely (Wiggershaus 17).

This is not to say that the University of Frankfurt was free of anti-Semitism. While working on his dissertation, Benjamin purposefully avoided addressing issues that touched on the position of Jews in Germany. In a letter to his friend Rang, Benjamin explained:

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[77] See also Witte, *Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* and Niewyk 68.

> Die Judenfrage etwa dabei zu berühren wäre gelinde gesagt mal à propos. Ein Hauptbedenken das ich ... zu berücksichtigen hatte, war meine schwebende Frankfurter Habilitationsangelegenheit. Die Empfindsamkeit einzelner Fakultätsmitglieder in den in Rede stehenden Dingen kann kaum überschätzt werden. (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 377)
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> [To put it mildly, it would be inappropriate to touch, for example, on the Jewish question ... A major concern I had to consider ... was the unsettled matter of my habilitation in Frankfurt. The sensitivity of some faculty members regarding the matter under discussion cannot be exaggerated. (*Correspondence* 219)]

However, Benjamin's habilitation was at least feasible in a city where the members of the large, influential, mainly middle-class Jewish community were associated with the university either as patrons or, as was the case with Benjamin's family, as members of the academic community. His mother's uncle, Arthur Moritz Schoenflies, was professor emeritus at the time, and as a founding father and former president of the university he undoubtably possessed the "necessary influence and contacts to give his great-nephew's project appropriate support" (Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin* 133).

Yet while Benjamin's link to Schoenflies was certainly helpful, it was his acquaintance with Gottfried Salomon-Delatour, through their mutual friend, Erich Gutkind, that appears to have been instrumental in his admission to the University of Frankfurt. Salomon was a professor of sociology, and he initially advised Benjamin and intervened on his behalf to convince Dean Franz Schultz, a historian of literature ("Literaturhistoriker"), to accept him as a student. In Scholem's estimation, Salomon was highly influential and would be of great assistance in Benjamin's application for habilitation. He recalls visiting Salomon together with Benjamin: "Das letzte Mal war ich mit ihm

bei einem Dr. Gottfried Salomon zusammen, einem höchst einflußreichen hiesigen Privatdozenten, der ihn mit allen Mitteln protegiert und zur Habilitation bringen will und wohl auch wird" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 338) [Last time I went with him to visit a highly influential local lecturer, who has taken him under his wing, and is using every means within his power to bring about his successful habilitation, and will probably do so].

It was on Salomon's advice that Benjamin switched from the discipline of philosophy, in which he had written his doctoral dissertation, to the discipline of philology in order to improve his chances of success. Benjamin then accepted Schultz's suggestion to research German Baroque literature, the latter's own area of specialty and a field that had just opened (Lindner 150). Habilitation on the basis of his already published works was denied, though this was not an uncommon practice at the time.

From the outset, Benjamin anticipated difficulties and attempted, in vain, to obtain some form of binding commitment from the faculty (Kambas 601-02). While the situation looked promising during the first stages of his work, Benjamin knew that his deviation from accepted forms of scholarship would cause him difficulties. Lacis, who was beginning to play an increasingly important role in Benjamin's life and work, summarized how Benjamin explained one of his primary difficulties: "Da er in vielen Punkten von den traditionellen Dogmen abweiche und indirekt gegen Johannes Volkelt, den Papst der Ästhetik, polemisiere, werde er Schwierigkeiten haben, und er werde diplomatisch vorgehen müssen" (Lacis, *Revolutionär im Beruf* 44-45) [As he strayed from traditional dogma on many points and indirectly polemicized against Johannes Volkelt, the pope of aesthetics, he would have difficulties and would have to proceed diplomatically].

These difficulties became apparent after Benjamin presented Schultz with the first part of the habilitation. Schultz became "very cool" about the project and suggested that Benjamin change from literary history ("Literaturgeschichte") to aesthetics ("Ästhetik"). At this point, it appears that

Schultz no longer felt responsible for Benjamin's work and was attempting to pass him on to Hans Cornelius (Lindner 151). Benjamin's analysis of the situation and of Schultz's position in it was as follows:

> Als ich eine Woche nach Einlieferung des ersten Teils den zweiten ihm übergab, fand ich ihn kühl und heikel ... Danach reiste ich hierher und indessen ist er, sei es selbst verreist, sei es in eine vorsichtige Verborgenheit getaucht, aus der ihn mein Manager Salomon nicht aufzuspüren vermochte. -- Wenn er ... mir die sehr genaue Hoffnung gab ... auf Grund einer neuen dementsprechenden Arbeit meine Habilitation für Literaturgeschichte zu befürworten, so zog er jetzt ... zurück und plädierte für Ästhetik, bei welcher die Sachlage natürlich nicht ganz so maßgebend bleibt. Wie dem nun sei -- von einer Habilitation kann nur die Rede sein, wenn er mit größter Verve für mich eintritt ... ich [kann] das mit Gewißheit nicht erwarten. Denn schließlich spielt tausenderlei hinein, und auch Ressentiment. Wie er denn zu Salomon, sogar mit anständiger Selbstronie äußerte, das einzige, was er gegen mich habe, wäre, daß ich nicht sein Schüler sei. (*Briefe* Vol. 3, 25-26)

> [When I gave him the second part a week after having submitted the first part, I found him cool and critical ... After that I came here, and meanwhile he has either been away as well or has been immersed in wary seclusion out of which not even Salomon is able to ferret him. Although he gave me clear cause to hope ... that he would endorse my receiving the habilitation in the field of literary history if I produced an original and suitable habilitation dissertation, he has now backed away from this ... and is pushing me to get my habilitation in aesthetics. Of course, if that is how it goes, his vote will not have quite the same authority. Be that as it may,

> there is no question of my getting my habilitation unless he most vigorously supports me.... I am not assured of that kind of support, for in the final analysis, thousands of factors play a role, including resentment. As he said to Salomon, and with fitting self-irony, the only thing he has against me is that I am not his student. (*Correspondence* 263-64)]

There are many reasons -- both at an individual and an institutional level -- for Schultz's urging Benjamin to change departments and supervisors. One reason to which Benjamin refers concerns resentment. Schultz experiences resentment at being expected to champion a student he hardly knows and he experiences resentment (in Wohlfarth's sense of resentment as a reactionary force) when he recognizes the "threat Benjamin's work poses to the academic establishment" ("Resentment Begins at Home" 232). Schultz attempts to maintain the tension between opposing forces (change versus status quo) for as long as possible before decisively rejecting the non-conformist, in this case Benjamin, who fails to recognize the authority of those in power and of the traditions of scholarly production.

In his analysis of Benjamin's relationship to the university, Irving Wohlfarth convincingly characterizes Schultz as a "political animal who knew how to change his tack, blow hot and cold, keep a low profile, stay out of trouble, pass the buck, play by the rules, etc." ("Resentment Begins at Home" 230). According to Wohlfarth, Schultz's "calculated duplicity toward an exceptional candidate who might, if admitted to the profession, refuse to play the game" is a "tactical response to two contradictory pressures -- the old-boy network which administers the status quo and the candidate's appeal to the standards by which the academic institution legitimizes itself" ("Resentment Begins at Home" 231). Wohlfarth has identified what Schultz was in his position as dean: a master of the political game who attempted to maximize his own position while preserving

the status quo. Schultz's behaviour and actions exemplify the usually unarticulated and generally unexamined subtext underlying the production of knowledge within the institution of the university.

Schultz's old-boy network was certainly almost exclusively all "boys"; the total number of women who became lecturers or assistant professors between 1908 until 1925 in all of Germany was only twenty-eight, making the university a truly male-defined institution.[78] Schultz's network was also positioned on the right of the political spectrum, a stance that gradually became pro-fascist. Benjamin himself makes reference to the fact that Schultz "*weit* rechts steht" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 377; emphasis in original) ["is on the *far* right" (*Correspondence* 219; emphasis in original)]. An eye-witness account has Schultz, wearing his academic gown, participating in a Nazi book burning in Frankfurt in 1933.[79] He further demonstrated his support for the fascist regime by delivering a lecture in which he welcomes Hitler's seizure of power ("Machtergreifung") as an act of providence (Lindner 152).

In various ways, Schultz aligned himself, both personally and professionally, with the powers and ideologies of the far right. This meant that it was problematic for him to be associated with a Jew or to accept the work of a Jewish student. Schultz's rejection of Benjamin can be understood, in part, as anti-Semitic, as he was a member of a larger social movement that constructed Jews not only as inferior, but also as a threat to German society and its institutions -- including the university.

Certainly, as Lindner points out, Schultz had other personal motives for rejecting Benjamin. The potentially outstanding work that Benjamin might produce tempted him, as it would have boosted his own reputation to have his name attached to a particularly good habilitation.[80]

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[78] Before 1908 there is only one recorded woman professor -- in 1554 (Boedeker Vol. 1, LXXX).
[79] This incident is cited in Fuld (161), further explored by Lindner (152), and cited in Kambas (602).
[80] This is likely, given that, apparently, he himself was not a particularly stellar scholar (Lindner 150).

However, as dean, and, therefore, in his capacity as gatekeeper to the faculty, Schultz could not authorize a contribution that did not conform to "the conceptual frameworks and relevances of the discipline" (D. Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power* 15). Schultz was very much involved in making decisions that authorized the production of only certain kinds of knowledge. His position required him to balance traditional frameworks with the need for the injection of new ideas: but these ideas were not to stray too far from, and were certainly not to challenge, the existing normative structures.[81] Thus he advised Benjamin to withdraw his application.

Seen against these determinants of success and failure, questions about the quality of Benjamin's work and attempts to situate it within a particular discipline are misleading, for they obscure the fact that boundaries of knowledge are set within both the institution and the disciplines themselves. Even in new areas of study, such as German Baroque literature studies, one can observe a normative disciplinary effect. Benjamin's work obviously did not conform to the disciplinary norms that Schultz, one of the first members of this field of study, was attempting to establish. As a founding father of German Baroque literature, for many years Schultz was in a position to determine its form and content.[82] As Michel Foucault has observed, judgement, which is passed by individuals within a specific framework and within particular relations of power, punishes non-conformity (Foucault, "The Means of Correct Training" 195). In this case the punishment is exclusion -- ostracism from academic life. Although Foucault understands this process as an effect of the interplay of power and structures, with the individual players being interchangeable ("What matter who's speaking?" [Foucault, "History, Discourse and Continuity"

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[81] One year later, under similar circumstances, Schultz rejected the habilitation of another promising Jewish scholar, Leo Lowenthal. Lowenthal later became a member of the Institute of Social Research and managing editor of its journal, in which Benjamin published during his later years.

[82] To this day, Benjamin is kept at a respectful distance by many researchers of the Baroque period, although, as Lindner has observed, his work on the emblem and allegory is truly groundbreaking (and not confined to his analysis of that particular historical period) (163).

138]), Dorothy Smith, among others, has shown that, in fact, the individual and where she/he is positioned matters a great deal. It is not only the individual or only the structures that determine events, but rather the intersection of the two.

One instance in which this intersection can be clearly seen involves the question of reproduction. Dissertation supervision is institutionally understood, in part, as a reproduction of the supervisor's intellectual self. This is in keeping with the traditional reproductive model of tracing intellectual lineage. "Great" scholars are influenced by other "greats," and, within the educational context, graduate students are expected to produce similar work and to go on to obtain jobs like their professors. If they do not, then they are considered to be failures.[83]

This is particularly pronounced in the habilitation process of German universities. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the habilitation was introduced, in addition to the doctorate, as further proof of one's qualification for an academic career. Without habilitation, the career path to professorship is closed. Thus the habilitation serves to ensure limited access to professorships: "Sie [die Habilitation] steigert.... die Exklusivität der universitär gebildeten akademischen Elite.... Mit der Habilitation wird zum einen der Nachweis der personlichen wissenschaftlichen Qualifikation erbracht, zugleich ist es ein Mittel der Selbsterganzung (Kooptation) des Lehrkorpers (Wobbe 344) [It (the habilitation) heightens the exclusivity of the university educated academic elite.... Firstly, the habilitation furnishes proof of personal scholarly qualifications, while at the same time it is a means of self-replenishment (cooption) of the teaching body]. Each university and each faculty has the right to replenish itself according to its own standards and procedures. One function of the habilitation is, thus, to serve as a "Kooptations- und Sozialisationsprozeß" [a process of cooption

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[83] Although occurring within a different context, this particular issue remains central in the discussion of graduate education to the present day, as can be seen from Showalter's suggestion that "we need to stop aiming solely to clone ourselves" (*MLA Newsletter* 3).

and socialization] that restricts access, particularly for women and members of socially marginal groups. The habilitation process "erhöht institutionelle, kognitive und kulturell-symbolische Hürde" (Wobbe 344) [raises institutional, cognitive and cultural-symbolic hurdles].

This function of the habilitation can be understood as standing in contradiction to the productivist logic that separates public and private spheres with regard to productive versus reproductive work. As previously discussed, by demonstrating the ways in which the private is necessary for production in the public sphere, the boundaries between the two spheres and different forms of work come to be blurred. In the case of the habilitation, it can further be seen that activities in the public sphere are not without reproductive components, as one of the main functions in the public sphere of the university is its own reproduction.

For Schultz, this reproductive aspect of the university, coupled with his relationship with Benjamin, was problematic on numerous counts. First of all, Benjamin's work did not conform to the disciplinary boundaries within which Schultz worked. Second, in Schultz's understanding of the world, Benjamin's Jewishness meant that his work could not become a part of this reproductive knowledge, as it was, by definition, inferior. Schultz ultimately decided to deal with this complicated situation by sending Benjamin to a different discipline -- aesthetics -- and to a different supervisor -- Hans Cornelius -- who had earlier declined to take Benjamin on as a graduate student. When Benjamin made his first contact with the University of Frankfurt, he was still not certain in which field he would write his habilitation. A few months later, after contacting both Schultz and Cornelius (on Salomon's advice), Benjamin wrote to Salomon: "Und da Cornelius mich bei sich nicht habilitieren will, so liegt alles bei Schultz" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 345) [And because Cornelius does not want to supervise my habilitation, everything is up to Schultz].

After the habilitation had been written and Schultz had refused to accept Benjamin in literary history, it became Cornelius' responsibility to accept or reject his work. Cornelius' formal appraisal

of the habilitation states that "[t]he work of Dr. Benjamin is extremely difficult to read ... In spite of repeated strenuous efforts it was not possible for me to make any sense of the work" (Cornelius, *Gutachten*, 1925, published in Lindner 155-56).[84] For this assessment, he consulted with his graduate student, Max Horkheimer, who, after reading an abstract that Benjamin had prepared at Cornelius' request, determined that Benjamin's dissertation was "incomprehensible" (Lindner 158). It is at this juncture that the paths of the future Frankfurt School members cross in a number of complex ways.

Cornelius supervised both Horkheimer's and Adorno's doctoral and habilitation dissertations. Horkheimer was successful in both cases, whereas Adorno's habilitation attempt failed, ostensibly because it contained too much material taken from Cornelius' lectures and books. Adorno knew that Schultz had rejected Benjamin's habilitation, in part, because it was not enough like his supervisor's work. Furthermore, Adorno also knew that Cornelius had rejected Benjamin's work because he found it incomprehensible. Strategically, Adorno chose to stay close to Cornelius' work in transcendental philosophy -- too close, as it turned out. Like Benjamin two years before, Adorno was forced to withdraw his application in order to avoid the outright rejection of his habilitation. In 1931, after Cornelius' retirement, Adorno made a second, this time successful, attempt at habilitation with Paul Tillich, who now occupied Cornelius' chair of philosophy, as his supervisor and Horkheimer as one of his examiners.

The fact that Adorno's failed habilitation attempt is rarely mentioned, and that it involved almost the same cast of characters as did Benjamin's, indicates something about the process by which intellectuals are made. Painted in admittedly broad strokes, Adorno's story is one of success -- of overcoming the tragedy of exile -- with failures along the way being viewed as insignificant.

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[84] That work, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*), became, in 1928, one of Benjamin's first major publications.

Benjamin's story, however, is one of failure and posthumous success. Given Benjamin's tragic death, casting him as a (tragic) failure serves, in many ways, to make a clean and neat narrative out of a complex and often contradictory life and body of work. This narrative provides a line that strings together a series of failures throughout his life, culminating in the ultimate tragedy of his death: he failed at a university career, he failed as an intellectual and academic, he failed at marriage, he failed at maintaining friendships, and he failed to leave Europe soon enough to save his life. In this account the rejected habilitation assumes a key role. For Mayer, for example, academic failure constituted an essential aspect of Benjamin; it was a blow from which he never recovered. In view of his posthumous success, it is that same failure, together with his marginalization as a Jew in Nazi Germany, that has endowed him with the outsider status that has made this success possible. This clearly underscores the constructed nature of success and failure.

Benjamin himself was well aware of the potential difficulties he would confront in obtaining habilitation. In addition to having no direct contact with the professors with whom he was to work, there was a second, and more decisive, difficulty. This is summed up as follows by Chryssoula Kambas in her examination of the Benjamin/Salomon correspondence: "auch gingen seine methodischen Vorstellungen in der Frankfurter akademischen Fächereinteilung nicht auf" (601) [his notions concerning method did not match the division of academic departments in Frankfurt]. As a result of this, he was shunted from department to department, his supervisors neither willing nor able to accept work that failed to conform to their "procedures for mastery" (Foucault, "The Order of Discourse" 49).

The discourse of Benjamin's failure as an academic is not only comprehensible as the story of a student who failed to conform to "procedures for mastery," it is also, as Françoise Meltzer has observed, clearly gendered. Meltzer makes two important observations in this regard. The first is that the gendering of failure in both Adorno's and Arendt's discussion of Benjamin is achieved by

means of a "tone and rhetoric [that]... subtly castrate[s] his importance by casting his style and life in feminized tropes" (150). Meltzer illustrates how both Adorno and Arendt portray Benjamin as one of his own characters, the flâneur, who strolls aimlessly about and accomplishes nothing. In their characterization of Benjamin's life and work as both slothful and melancholic, they underpin their argument with a polarization of characteristics in which all negative traits -- laziness, lack of linearity, sluggishness, weakness -- are feminized, while all positive and normative traits -- industriousness, linearity, energy, strength -- are masculinized.

Meltzer's second observation is that Adorno's and Arendt's assessment of Benjamin is sustained by an understanding of the work ethic as a bourgeois given, with work being closely tied to the notion of identity. Work is, of course, gendered and defined in terms of production; that is, it is linked to the public sphere and undertaken by men (155-56). This work is valued and remunerated, and it provides the worker with a positive identity. Domestic and caregiving work (i.e., women's work, which is usually performed in the private sphere), being supportive and reproductive, is not considered to be true work. Meltzer's critiques are similar to those of Roman, which were discussed earlier. Meltzer critiques a productivist economy that allows women no identity (identity being a product of work). A woman's identity in this economy can only be derived in relation to her working male -- father, brother, or husband. Adorno's and Arendt's feminization of Benjamin's work thus denigrates him, producing him as feminine and, therefore, as a failure.

Meltzer's analysis illustrates one of the ways in which moral and economic ideologies converge. The moral ideology that underlies the bourgeois work ethic makes those who fail (i.e., those who engage in feminized forms of work) morally reprehensible. This provides a further dimension to the production of Benjamin as a failure: his failure is a moral condemnation on the part of what Meltzer identifies as a misogynist economy and a bourgeois, Christian (both Protestant and Catholic) work ethic (158-159).

While Meltzer provides a convincing analysis of how Benjamin has been constructed as a failure at the intersection of discourses of gender and class, one weak point in her argument is her condemnation of what she understands to be the "conflation" of the personal with the professional Benjamin. According to her, he may very well have been slothful in his personal life, but that should not be held against him in his professional life. This perpetuation of the split between public and private, a split that she herself finds problematic in her analysis of the gendering of work, renders her argument less convincing. Nonetheless, Meltzer's study, and others previously discussed, clearly show that the forces of exclusion and their underlying ideologies not only construct Benjamin as a failure, but also allow interpreters of his work to pass upon him an implicitly negative moral judgement.

At this point, I will revisit the constellation at the University of Frankfurt at the time that Benjamin attempted to habilitate. As already discussed, it is clear that Schultz, both as an individual and as a dean, made decisions that quite effectively excluded Benjamin from the university community. Cornelius and Horkheimer also played roles in these processes, as did Benjamin's own position vis-à-vis the university. Having looked at this, I would now like to look at an as yet little-explored dimension of the constellation that made up Benjamin's habilitation: namely, Benjamin's relationship with Gottfried Salomon-Latour.

As Salomon was almost the only faculty member at the University of Frankfurt with whom Benjamin had direct contact, and as he was probably the only professor who read his whole habilitation, the examination of their relationship is highly relevant to understanding what occurred at Frankfurt. The correspondence between Salomon and Benjamin between the years 1922 and 1926 provides documentation concerning both the process involved in Benjamin's unsuccessful attempt at habilitation and the relationship between the two men. With the exception of Kambas' study, the correspondence with Salomon has received scant, if any, attention in Benjamin

scholarship.[85] The result of this is the loss of one dimension of this intellectual figure and of the process by which he has been made.

As has been said, the processes that make intellectuals tend to involve tracing a generally male lineage that, for the most part, excludes the friendship, mentoring, and community that occur within the private sphere and that, therefore, are not usually considered to be part of "productive" work. In tracing intellectual lineage, not only are the private dimensions of Benjamin silenced, but his body of writing and thought is reduced to being explained solely in relation to that of other "great" thinkers. As Susan Buck-Morss has observed, "the convention of academic hermeneutics that defines the theories of one thinker in terms of the theories of another" is problematic because "such a method ensures that the whole intellectual project becomes self-referential and idealist, hermetically sealed with precisely those musty corridors of academia from which Benjamin's work attempts to escape" (*Dialectics of Seeing* 6). The kind of analysis Buck-Morss criticizes runs the risk of not being able to see beyond its own limitations and, thus, remaining unaware of those limitations. Situating Benjamin as a link in a chain of scholars sanctions and validates him as a knower and perpetrator of a certain kind of knowledge. Broadening the scope of influences and examining their interconnections provides a corrective to these limitations. In other words, it is necessary to look at the relationships Benjamin established with the "no so great" -- the members of his social world (to use Addelson's concept).

Salomon was an important figure in Benjamin's social world during the writing of his habilitation; however, he is only briefly mentioned as an intermediary between Benjamin and the

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[85] Other Benjamin scholars have cited Kambas' essay when referring to this period of Benjamin's life (e.g., Witte, *Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 50, and Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin* 149).

University of Frankfurt and its members.[86] There are a number of reasons for this silence concerning Salomon, most of which are related to the procedures of exclusion and the conditions of application that Foucault refers to in his explanation of mastery. The friendship between the two men provides a further means of examining the relations of power in the university and the procedures by which certain people and certain forms of scholarship are either included in, or excluded from, the process of knowledge production.

Scholem was one of the first scholars who attempted to rescue Benjamin from obscurity, and, consequently, he had a strong influence on subsequent scholarship.[87] His understanding and knowledge of Benjamin is based on a long friendship -- one that was conducted, for the most part, through correspondence. As a Zionist and one of the first scholars of Jewish mysticism, Scholem brought a particular disciplinary perspective to his understanding of Benjamin. It is not surprising that Scholem rejected Benjamin's materialism and emphasized his messianism. Benjamin himself was aware that his political side was not a welcome topic for Scholem. Kambas observes that Benjamin clearly knew who would understand and be interested in different aspects of his thinking. To Salomon he sent his thoughts and essays about political matters, to Scholem he wrote more about religious and literary matters (Kambas 618).

In comparing Benjamin's letters to Scholem with those to Salomon (which were written at the same time and about the same events and experiences), one sees that political observations rarely found their way into letters to Scholem. By contrast, his letters to Salomon from Capri, for example, contain commentaries on Mussolini's visit to Naples, the spread of fascism throughout

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[86] See, for example, Witte, *Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 50, 52, 53; Fuld 136, 161; and Lindner 149. Wohlfarth's analysis centres on Schultz without mentioning Salomon.

[87] In retrospect he could be considered one of the founding fathers (and they are, indeed, all fathers -- no mothers) of the Benjamin industry, an industry that now fuels publishing houses and forms the bases of careers.

Europe, and his growing fears concerning the possibility of another war (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 491-92, 507 and 494).

Adorno, who occupied a complex position in Benjamin's life, first as a disciple and later as a friend and intermediary (between Benjamin and the members of the Frankfurt School), was also interested in promoting certain aspects of Benjamin's work. As a kind of supervisor of Benjamin's work for the Institute of Social Research during the 1930s, and as Benjamin's literary executor, he was in a position to shape how Benjamin was presented and understood -- how, in other words, he was "made."[88] As Rolf Wiggershaus argues, after the Institute moved to New York in the early 1930s, Adorno was especially interested in keeping theological materialism at the forefront of its work, and therefore focused on the messianic aspect of Benjamin's work (194). Like Scholem, but for different reasons, Adorno was most interested in Benjamin's theological work and strongly encouraged him to focus on a "materialist transformation of theological motifs" (Wiggershaus 194). For both Scholem and Adorno, given their particular interest in Benjamin's work, his relationship to a sociology professor by the name of Salomon was of little concern or relevance.

The exclusion of Salomon's role in Benjamin's life can also be understood as a product of a gendered separation of spheres. Salomon's relationship to Benjamin can best be characterized as one of mentoring -- an activity that does not "produce" in the productivist sense of the word but, rather falls within the realm of nurturing and reproduction. Not only did the two men share many intellectual interests and pursuits, but it was Salomon to whom Benjamin repeatedly turned for advice during his application for habilitation.

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[88] To this day the Benjamin archive which has become part of the Adorno archive in Frankfurt is not open to all scholarly investigators. While conducting research for his Benjamin biography, Brodersen, for one, was denied access to the Benjamin estate in Frankfurt (Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin* x).

Finally, Benjamin's letters to Salomon have only recently been published (1997), and Salomon's replies are as yet unpublished, making it difficult to analyze their friendship. We know that it was a friendship that began with practical, everyday matters. Benjamin asked Salomon's assistance in gaining entrance to the University of Frankfurt, in determining which of his essays to send to Schultz as samples of his writing, and in finding a typist for his dissertation. Benjamin's first contact with his supervisor, Schultz, occurred through Salomon, after which he asked Salomon for an indication of Schultz's reactions and opinions "Vielleicht können Sie mir etwas über Schultz' Stellungnahme andeuten" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 303) [Perhaps you could indicate to me something about Schultz's opinion].

Later, in a letter to Scholem, Benjamin expressed his frustration at not having heard from Schultz for a long period of time (*Briefe* Vol. 3, 25; *Correspondence* 263). Soon after, he again wrote to Scholem about the "Abbruch meiner frankfurter Vorhaben" ["wreckage of my Frankfurt plans"]. He explained the disastrous turn his plans had taken as follows: "Es war alles soweit, daß Anfang Juli meine vierte oder fünfte Reise dorthin hätte von statten gehen sollen" (*Briefe* Vol. 3, 59) ["Things were at the point where I was supposed to take my fourth or fifth trip to Frankfurt at the beginning of July" (*Correspondence* 275)]. However, he had heard from a friend of his father-in-law that Cornelius and Kautsch, the other two members of his examining committee, had claimed not to understand his habilitation. To better comprehend the situation and to discover what was happening in Frankfurt, he wrote: "Alsbald wandte ich mich an Salomon um genauere Auskunft" (*Briefe* Vol. 3, 59) ["I immediately turned to Salomon for more precise information" (*Correspondence* 275)].

It was also Salomon in whom Benjamin confided, after his trip to Capri, that, although he had hoped to submit his habilitation that semester, it was still incomplete: "Untergetaucht in monatelangem Schweigen und auftauchend ohne die köstliche Perle der Arbeit in der Hand! Ja, es

ist immer wieder die alte Erfahrung, daß es nicht schnell bei mir geht." (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 421) [Submerged in silence for months only to resurface without the exquisite pearl of work in my hands! Well, it is always the same old story, that nothing goes quickly with me].[89] When he then returned from Capri, after a two-week holiday and with his work not completed as planned, Benjamin spoke to Salomon before contacting Schultz (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 506). Salomon was clearly the person Benjamin trusted and depended on for information and support. In the end, Benjamin took Salomon's advice and withdrew his application for habilitation rather than having it formally rejected. Moreover, it seems that the issues closest to Benjamin's heart were the ones he shared with Salomon. According to Kambas, Benjamin personally hand-delivered a political essay he was working on to Salomon, whereas he sent his dissertation chapters by post to Salomon to pass on to Schultz (618). This provides some indication of the respective importance that Benjamin placed on the two pieces of writing as well as of the distance between him and his supervisor.

Yet Salomon has until now been relegated to footnote status as the helpful but uninformed mediator between Benjamin and other faculty members. Obliterated in this process is the fact that Salomon's seminar was one of the few that Benjamin attended (together with Adorno) at the University of Frankfurt. While Adorno indicates that Benjamin's plan to habilitate in Frankfurt was "eine Absicht, die von Salomon energisch gefördert wurde" (*Über Walter Benjamin* 9) [an intention that Salomon energetically supported], he does not elaborate on this other than to say that "Salomon interceded very vigorously with a number of influential senior professors" (*Friendship* 116). Thus Salomon's practical assistance is acknowledged but not investigated. Tiedemann, Gödde, and Lonitz further acknowledge Salomon's supportive role in relation to Benjamin's

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[89] This is in stark contrast to Adorno, who planned his doctoral dissertation in mid-May, had it accepted by his supervisor, Cornelius, on May 26, finished writing on June 6, dictated the dissertation to a typist on June 11, and submitted the completed dissertation on June 14 (Wiggershaus 70).

endeavours. "In Salomon-Delatour hatte Benjamin für die Frankfurter akademischen Angelegenheiten einen Vertrauten gefunden, der für ihn eintrat und ihn regelmäßig über den Stand der Dinge unterrichte" (68) [In Salomon-Delatour Benjamin had found a confidant for the academic matters in Frankfurt who stood up for him and kept him regularly informed about how things were going]. That Salomon was a scholar in his own right, and that he and Benjamin had many similar scholarly and political interests, is not mentioned by Benjamin scholars; instead, Salomon provides the kind of energetic support and assistance that is usually assumed and expected of women, and therefore not subject to further investigation. With the exception of Kambas' paper, Salomon's role as friend and mentor, a role that intersects the public and the personal, has received only scant attention.

After examining the Benjamin/Salomon correspondence, Kambas comes to the conclusion that Salomon was Benjamin's most important correspondent while he was writing his habilitation: "Salomon wurde zur Zeit der Niederschrift des *Trauerspielbuchs* für ihn [Benjamin] zum wichtigsten Gesprächspartner" (606) [Salomon became his (Benjamin's) most important discussion partner while he was writing the *Tragic Drama* book].[90] Their discussions gradually came to include wide-ranging aspects of daily and professional life: finding a room to rent, information as to what Schultz and the habilitation committee were doing, university politics, enquiries regarding each other's health and other family members, and current political matters. Furthermore, as Kambas has clearly demonstrated, contrary to earlier understandings of Salomon's purely supportive role in Benjamin's work, he also played a role in the content of the habilitation: "Daß Salomon nicht nur half, wenn sich Schwierigkeiten im Umgang mit den Universitätsinstanzen ergaben, wird ... deutlich; auch am inhaltlichen Produktionsvorgang der Habilitationsschrift war er ein Stück weit beteiligt"

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[90] "Tragic Drama" is Orborne's translation of "Trauerspiel," which is sometimes also referred to as "Play of Mourning."

(605) [It has become clear that Salomon not only helped when there were difficulties in dealing with university authorities; he also participated in the production process of the habilitation with regard to content]. Kambas bases her conclusion on their common interests, on Salomon's advice, and on Salomon's mediating role in introducing Benjamin to the work of Carl Schmitt (which provided part of the methodological basis for Benjamin's habilitation) (Kambas 609-11).

Kambas discusses how the friendship between the two continued long after Benjamin's travails at Frankfurt. On occasion they met each other during their travels through Europe -- one such occasion being Benjamin's trip to Capri, where he first met Asja Lacis. Later in Benjamin's life, when he and Salomon were in exile in Paris, they remained friends (Kambas 620). Salomon was a political activist during those years, and Benjamin was working on his "Arcades Project" -- a project that attempted an analysis of nineteenth-century Paris, including the work of early socialists (particularly Fourier and Saint-Simon). It is likely, as Kambas notes, that these common interests once again brought them together.[91] Along with these shared interests, Salomon once again provided practical, everyday assistance to his friend during Benjamin's difficult last years in exile: "Er [Salomon] zeigte dieselbe Hilfsbereitschaft, wie er sie schon zehn Jahre früher geübt hatte. Gegen Ende des Jahres 1937 wohnte Benjamin vorübergehend in der rue de Javel bei Salomon" (Kambas 621) [Salomon displayed the same helpfulness that he had shown ten years earlier. Towards the end of 1937 Benjamin temporarily lived with Salomon in the rue de Javel].

During Benjamin's habilitation years, beyond energetic support, mentoring, and friendship, the two men were linked by common areas of scholarly interest, the most obvious of which was

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[91] Two of Salomon's early publications were monographs that contained selected readings from the early utopian socialists, Saint-Simon and Proudhon. Benjamin's "Arcades Project" quotes extensively from these two writers, especially Saint-Simon.

German Romanticism.[92] After the publication of his investigation of Romanticism, Salomon focused on sociology, a relatively new and not well-established discipline that was practised primarily within the paradigm of the natural sciences. As he explains in his introduction to a volume of readings in social philosophy, his humanistic, philosophically informed understanding of sociology ("Sozialphilosophie") deviated from the then dominant empirical assumptions of sociological research methods (Salomon, "Einleitung" 2-7). The convergence of Benjamin's and Salomon's interests lies primarily in Salomon's area of specialization -- "material sociology" -- which Kambas summarizes as an examination of society and social development in terms of practical political demands. Benjamin's later works, in particular, show similarities to his mentor's sociological-philosophical perspective. Salomon's work, like Benjamin's, was interdisciplinary, practised at the points where philosophy, economics, and literature converge. The intersection of materialist history and philosophy that provided Salomon with his methods of research was also strongly evident in Benjamin's "Arcades Project."

Both Benjamin and Salomon extended their knowledge and research beyond disciplinary boundaries, breeching the established frameworks of their disciplines. Benjamin combined a messianic and materialist understanding of literature, philosophy, and history in order to examine social phenomena. Both Salomon and Benjamin attempted to have socialism discussed throughout German society in general, not just amongst scholars (Kambas 608). Unlike his supervisor and committee members, whose political affiliations were with the far right, Salomon's were with the left: "Salomons politische Bindung lag ... auf sozialdemokratischer Seite" (Kambas 612) [Salomon's political commitments were ... on the social democratic side]. These common interests and goals

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[92] Salomon's 1922 book, *Das Mittelalter als Ideal in der Romantik* [The Middles Ages as the Ideal During the Romantic Period], cites Benjamin's dissertation, *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* [The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism].

suggest, contrary to the contentions of many scholars, that neither Benjamin's initial meeting with Lacis nor his reading of Lukács was the single determining cause of his so-called Marxist turn. Their overlapping interests and their lasting friendship suggests that there was an affinity and an understanding between these two men, both personally and professionally, that they were unable to find elsewhere in the university community.

An examination of Salomon's friendship with Benjamin helps to disrupt the still prevalent idea of Benjamin as the individual, isolated genius, struggling on his own against all odds to produce a body of work. This is crucial to understanding the making of Benjamin, both at the time of his habilitation and today. First, it should be recognized that the fact that Benjamin was not an official member of the academy does not mean that he was isolated from intellectual life. In his relationships at the intersection of the public and private, Benjamin established and maintained "social worlds" that shaped him and provided a context for his work.

As Foucault has persuasively argued, institutional determinations police and produce knowledge, and such production is not achieved through individual acts of genius in a theoretical realm that is somehow detached from material reality. Such an understanding of knowledge presupposes a notion of unified subjectivity that many, including Foucault, D. Smith, and Roman, have convincingly disproved. Knowledge is not "created" by an individual but, rather, as Alexander and Mohanty argue, it is produced in a specific community for specific reasons and according to the criteria set by that community. "[W]e have come to know the critical importance of figuring out our communities of belonging, and therefore those communities to which we are accountable. We do not inherit our intellectual neighbors; we consciously build them" (Alexander and Mohanty ix).

How has the scholarly community produced knowledge about Walter Benjamin? As Jeffrey Grossman has suggested, the institutional community to which Benjamin sought admission, albeit somewhat half-heartedly, could not understand his way of thinking. Perhaps it is more accurate to

say that it *would* not understand his way of thinking. In terms of the functioning of university power relations, the exclusion of the different or unfamiliar is a favoured tactic for controlling what counts as knowledge and who counts as its producer. Both Schultz and Cornelius, and to some degree Horkheimer, were either unwilling or unable to understand Benjamin's work because it was outside of their frames of reference and did not authorize itself in reference to preceding work in the field. It should also be noted, that in all probability, neither Schultz nor Cornelius ever read the entire dissertation.

Benjamin himself was acutely aware that his manner of thinking defied the usual categorizations accepted by the institution. In a 1913 letter to Carla Seligson, which he wrote at the beginning of his studies, he noted:

> Gestern geschah es zum ersten Mal solang ich studiere, daß ich mich in einem kleinen Kreise von Fachphilosophen fand ... ich fühle mich natürlich ganz unzünftig, weil ich zwar viel philosophiere aber dies ist bei mir doch ganz anders ... *wenn ich philosophiere, so ist es mit Freunden.* (*Briefe* Vol. 1, 108, emphasis mine)
>
> [Yesterday, for the first time since I've been a student, I found myself in a small group of professional philosophers ... of course, I am acutely aware that I am not a card-carrying member of the union because, although I do indeed philosophize a lot, I do so in a totally different manner ... *when I philosophize, it is with friends.* (*Correspondence* 29; emphasis mine)]

In Benjamin's own understanding of his philosophizing, he knew that he adhered neither to the boundaries between public and private nor to those between the disciplines. Philosophy was a dialogue with friends -- with Dora, Salomon, and Lacis, among others. An institutional setting was

not required, and conversation was as vital as was written research.[93] In conclusion, Benjamin's resistance to what Foucault would call conformity to procedures for mastery was responsible for his becoming a "failure." His resistance, and his subsequent turn from strictly academic to journalistic and essayistic forms of writing, resulted in his being cast as a failure by the university community. However, it was not only academia that contributed to constructing Benjamin as a failure, but also his own life circumstances and desires. What is important to my project is not whether Benjamin was a success or a failure but, rather, the processes by which he was and is constructed as such. These processes occur at the intersection of the dominant discourses and practices of the university community and Benjamin's life and work. He is not the lone, struggling genius but, rather, someone who was supported and influenced by his wife, lovers, and friends.

In the following chapter I deal with the intersections of Benjamin's life text -- his trip to Capri, ostensibly in order to complete his dissertation -- and his written text. In this constellation his life and work intersect with the life and work of Asja Lacis. Benjamin's lifelong criticism of scholarship whose prime function is categorization is intensified by what he and Lacis call "Porosität" [porosity]. They explored this concept in their observation and analysis of the porous boundaries between public and private life in Naples. Lacis, whose intellectual and practical work provided Benjamin with a model for a new form of existence -- one that combines theory with practice -- helped him ground his philosophy in the material world.

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[93] Salomon expressed a similar view in the introduction to a collection of his essays: "Meine Freunde, zu denen vor allem meine Hörer rechnen, wissen, wie sehr ich die Schrift und die Niederschrift ... uneigentlich finde im Gegensatz zur direkten Ansprache" (*Politische Soziologie* v-vi). [My friends, among them my students, know how much I find publications and writing unsuitable in contrast to direct forms of address].

Chapter 5

Capri, 1924
Lacis and Benjamin: Porous Lines of Demarcation

Ein höchst verworrenes Quartier, ein Straßennetz, das jahrelang von mir gemieden wurde, ward mir mit einem Schlage übersichtlich, als eines Tages ein geliebter Mensch dort einzog. Er war, als sei in seinem Fenster ein Scheinwerfer aufgestellt und zerlege die Gegend mit Lichtbüscheln.

Walter Benjamin

[A highly convoluted neighborhood, a network of streets that I had avoided for years, was disentangled at a single stroke when one day a person dear to me moved there. It was as if a searchlight set up at this person's window dissected the area with pencils of light (Bullock & Jennings)]

The beloved person to whom Benjamin refers in this quotation from "One-Way Street" is Asja Lacis, to whom the book is dedicated. She was the person who shed light on aspects of his life and work that he had previously avoided. According to Benjamin's dedication, the street referred to in the title of this book was both named after her and constructed by her: "Diese Straße heißt Asja-Lacis-Straße nach der die sie als Ingenieur im Autor durchgebrochen hat" ("Einbahnstraße" 81) ["This street is named Asja Lacis Street after her who as an engineer cut it through the author" ("One-Way Street" 444)].

As was discussed in Chapter 3, by Benjamin's own account, love was a strong formative force in his life. In fact, he found himself so changed when he was in love that he sometimes had difficulty recognizing himself. The assertions of his friends appear to confirm this observation, as he wrote to Scholem a few months after his return from Capri: "In Berlin ist man sich ... über eine offenkundige Veränderung einig, die mit mir vorgegangen sei" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 511) ["People in Berlin are agreed that there is a conspicuous change in me" (*Correspondence* 257)].

Of the three great loves in Benjamin's life, the most important, in his estimation, was Asja Lacis: "Am gewaltigsten war diese Verwandlung ins Ähnliche ... in meiner Verbindung mit Asja,

so daß ich vieles in mir erstmals entdeckte" (Benjamin, "Mai-Juni 1931" 427) [This metamorphosis into similarity was the most powerful ... in my relationship with Asja. It was such that I discovered many things within myself for the first time]. Lacis offers him a new route to follow, along which he discovers many new things. This is more than exerting an influence or precipitating a shift; she clearly "makes" him (at least parts of him) in Moi's sense of the word. Together with Lacis, Benjamin began to explore political and social realities he had either tended to ignore or of which he had not yet become aware. The fact that Benjamin used a street metaphor to describe their relationship, and as a main feature of the book, indicates (1) the increasing importance of urban topography in Benjamin's thinking and writing and (2) the link between that topography and Lacis.[94]

The topographical representation of the "space of life" was a possibility that occupied Benjamin for many years. He first envisioned that representation as a map "Lange, jahrelang eigentlich, spiele ich schon mit der Vorstellung, den Raum des Lebens -- Bios -- graphisch in einer Karte zu gliedern" (Benjamin, "Berliner Chronik" 466) [For many years actually, I have already been playing with the notion of articulating the space of life -- Bios -- graphically in a map]. The main distinguishing feature of a city maps is, of course, its streets, and they become the key to understanding modern life.

As Graeme Gilloch has observed in his study of Benjamin's writings about cities, Benjamin "is concerned with the physical structure of the city and the material objects found therein as a setting for, and as indices of, social activity" (7). "For Benjamin, the buildings, spaces, monuments and objects that compose the urban environment both are a response to, and reflexively structure, patterns of human social activity. Architecture and action shape each other; they interpenetrate"

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[94] This is most evident in many of his numerous thought-images ("Denkbilder"), "One-Way Street," "Moscow Diary," "A Berlin Chronicle," "Berlin Childhood Around 1900," and the "Arcades Project."

(Gilloch 6). While Gilloch understands the importance of Benjamin's examination of urban topography as the working out of a social theory of modern life, he pays virtually no attention to the important link between the city, its streets, and Lacis -- a link that is clearly evident in "One-Way Street." In that work, as well as in numerous thought-images, parts of the "Arcades Project," "A Berlin Chronicle," "Berlin Childhood Around 1900," and "Moscow Diary," Benjamin's life and work are clearly interwoven.

A further dimension of Benjamin's attention to materiality -- one not included in Gilloch's study -- is the importance of the human body. Beginning in the mid-1920s, roughly around the time of his first meeting with Lacis, the human body, the concept of body-space, and the significance of bodily perception ("Wahrnehmung") increasingly emerge in Benjamin's writing.[95] Benjamin's vivid and unusual account of his sexual awakening occurs in the streets of his home (Berlin), and his later meeting with Lacis constitutes a reoccurrence of much the same constellation. In "A Berlin Chronicle" he explains how his parents instructed him to go to a relative's home in order to accompany him to the synagogue for a service in celebration of the Jewish New Year. Benjamin wandered through the streets of Berlin, failing to reach his destination. Gradually he became aware of a curious mixture of contradictory feelings and insights concerning his immediate situation. He simultaneously felt helpless, forgetful, and embarrassed -- feelings he explains as follows:

> An dieser Ratlosigkeit, Vergeßlichkeit, Verlegenheit trug zweifellos die Hauptschuld Abneigung gegen die bevorstehende Veranstaltung und gegen die verwandtschaftliche nicht minder als gegen die gottesdienstliche. Während ich noch so herumirrte, überkam mich plötzlich und genau zur gleichen Zeit einerseits der

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[95] Weigel's analysis of Benjamin's concept of body-space deals primarily with its basis in his distinction between image and metaphor, and in the relation between language and the corporeal. Richter analyzes the body in *Moscow Diary* and will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

> Gedanke: viel zu spät, die Zeit ist längst verpaßt, du schaffst es nie - andererseits das Gefühl, wie durchaus gleich das alles sei. (Benjamin, "Berliner Chronik" 105-06)
>
> [This bewilderment, forgetfulness, and embarrassment were doubtless chiefly due to my dislike of the impending service, in its familial no less than its divine aspect. While I was wandering thus, I was suddenly and simultaneously overcome, on the one hand, by the thought "Too late, time was up long go, you'll never get there" -- and on the other, by a sense of the insignificance of all this. ("A Berlin Chronicle" 53)]

As he becomes aware of the possibility of two simultaneously occurring contradictory perceptions, Benjamin experiences a sexual awakening.[96]

> [D]iese beiden Bewußtseinsströme flossen unaufhaltsam zu einem großen Lustgefühl zusammen, das mich mit blasphemischer Gleichgültigkeit gegen den Gottesdienst erfüllte, der Straße aber, auf der ich mich befand, so schmeichelte als hätte sie mir damals schon die Kupplerdienste zu verstehen gegeben, welche sie später dem erwachten Triebe leisten sollte. ("Berliner Chronik" 106)
>
> [(T)hese two streams of consciousness converged irresistibly in an immense pleasure that filled me with blasphemous indifference toward the service, but exalted

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[96] Individual sections of "Berlin Childhood Around 1900" were published in newspapers (*Frankfurter Zeitung* and *Vossische Zeitung*) between December 1932 and August 1934. On Scholem's advice, this segment, "Awakening of Sexuality," was not published, primarily due to the problematic connection between Jews and sexuality in the dominant ideology of the time. Jewish men were often portrayed as sexual predators who violated pure, "Aryan" women.

the street in which I stood as if it had already intimated to me the services of procurement it was later to render my awakened drive. ("A Berlin Chronicle" 53)]

This incident, described in both "A Berlin Chronicle" and "Berlin Childhood," is a constellation in which the separation of public and private becomes impossible, and in which feelings, thoughts, consciousness, perception, and the (male) body converge. The physical setting of this moment, the street, is vital in that this is where Benjamin's feelings and insights are primarily directed. In the summer of 1924, Benjamin meets Lacis while he is wandering through the streets of Capri doing his shopping; in many ways, this meeting resembles the scene of his earlier sexual awakening. However, before examining this meeting, I will look at how and why Benjamin decided to travel to Capri.

His decision is primarily a result of his desire to escape from all that was stressful, conflict-laden, and unpleasant in his life in Germany: inflation, unemployment, political instability, anti-Semitism, financial worries, the responsibilities of being a father and husband, constant arguments with his parents, and the disjuncture between expectations, desires, and lived reality. In addition, he is frustrated by his inability to progress with his habilitation. He wrote to Scholem that he must escape from the "bösen Einfluß dieser Atmosphäre" ["pernicious atmosphere here"]. Setting himself free from that atmosphere had become his "vitalstes Vorhaben" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 432) ["most vital intention" (*Correspondence* 236)].[97]

Since early in his life, Benjamin employed tactics of avoidance, distancing himself from topics or situations that are unpleasant or tension-laden. For example, during his first trip abroad, he was particularly concerned with avoiding any tension or embarrassment among the group of young men with whom he was travelling. In his 1912 diary Benjamin notes:

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[97] Another unsuccessful attempt to receive money from his editor, Weißbach, seems to have triggered this view of the situation.

> In den ersten Tagen war ich natürlich sehr aufmerksam um Spannungen zu vermeiden ... Innerliche ernste aber unberechenbare und schroffe Menschen, sind immer für mich ... im Umgang sehr peinlich ... Aus diesem Grunde wachte ich auch in diesen ersten Tagen sehr aufmerksam, daß keine Gruppe zwischen zweien, die ständige Spannungen gegeben hätte, entstünde. ("Meine Reise in Italien Pfingsten 1912" 253)
>
> [During the first days I was naturally very conscientious about avoiding any tensions ... Associating with inwardly serious but unpredictable and abrupt people is always very embarrassing for me ... For that reason I watched very carefully during the first fews days so that no group of two, that would cause constant tension, could form]

Additional early examples are to be found in his correspondence with Seligson. After she had written to him about some difficulties in her life, he responded: "Möge es Sie nicht verstimmen, wenn ich mit diesen Worten, die ich nur von mir aus sagen konnte, nichts traf, was Ihnen wesentlich ist, wenn ich im Irrtum zu allgemein sprach"(*Briefe* Vol. 1, 140) ["I hope you won't be annoyed if these words, which could be uttered only from my point of view, failed to touch on anything of importance to you, if I made the mistake of keeping my remarks too general" (*Correspondence* 40)]. For which he gives the excuse: "Aber auch Sie werden fühlen, daß alles darauf ankommt, uns nichts von unserer Wärme zu Menschen nehmen zu lassen. Mag es auch sein, daß wir sie für eine Zeit ausdrucksloser and abstrakter bewahren müssen; sie wird bleiben und doch Gestalt finden" (*Briefe* Vol. 1, 140) ["But you will surely agree with me that everything depends on our not allowing any of our warmth for people to be taken from us. Even if, for a while we must preserve this warmth in a less expressive and more abstract way, it will endure and surely find its form"

(*Correspondence* 40)]. Here he avoids addressing something unpleasant, distressful, or potentially embarrassing by escaping from material, lived reality into the realm of the metaphysical.[98]

This was a pattern that was to continue for the rest of his life. After his experience in Capri, Benjamin made numerous journeys every year. Following the failure of his habilitation plans, one of the first things Benjamin did was to board a ship in Hamburg (August 1925) and travel to Capri via Spain and Italy (Barcelona, Genua, Livorno) where, in September 1925, he met Adorno and Kracauer in Naples (Tiedemann, Gödde, Lonitz 210-11). Then, in October, he returned home to Berlin, only to leave again in November, when he journeyed to Riga to pay Lacis a surprise visit. Most of the following year (1926) he spent in Paris, working with Franz Hessel on their Proust translation. Once that was completed, he returned home to Berlin, but left suddenly for Moscow upon hearing that Lacis was ill. He spent December 1926 and January 1927 in Moscow so that he could be with Lacis. This part of Benjamin's life will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

After the finalization of Walter and Dora's divorce (March 1930), Walter journeyed to Scandinavia and wrote a postcard to Gretel Karplus expressing his sense of relief at leaving the constricting atmosphere of Berlin: "einmal fort von Berlin wird die Welt schön und geräumig" (Tiedemann, Gödde, Lonitz 215) [As soon as I get away from Berlin, the world becomes beautiful and spacious]. Benjamin often cited escape as a reason for travelling. "Immer wieder gelang es ihm, durch kleinere Reisen der publizistischen Misere zu entfliehen" (Tiedemann, Gödde, Lonitz 213) [Time and time again, by means of short trips, he was able to flee the miseries of publishing]. He escaped not only from the economic and political situation in Germany, but also from a troubled

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[98] There are a number of hints that there may have been more between Benjamin and Seligson than their mutual membership in the Student Reform Movement and discussion group. I have been unable to determine the nature of the "difficult experience" referred to in her letter, as her letters have not been published. This is a common difficulty, for, although Benjamin's letters have now all been published, letters *to* Benjamin, with the exception of those from Scholem and Adorno, have not.

marriage, from his responsibilities as a father and husband, from the problems and distractions of everyday life, and from any particularly stressful event (such as the death of his father).

Of his trip to Capri, Benjamin said: "Am Anfang war das vielleicht nur der gebieterische Impuls aus Deutschland zu fliehen" (Benjamin, "Mai-Juni 1931" 423) [In the beginning, it was perhaps only the imperative impulse to flee from Germany]. This need to escape was common among underemployed or unemployed intellectuals who, in the 1920s, frequently fled Germany for the sunny south. For many, like Benjamin, the middle-class lifestyle that they had come to expect was no longer possible for them in Germany, but they could continue to enjoy some semblance of it in Italy. It was not only the day-to-day living conditions in Germany that were becoming unbearable to many, but also the fears about what economic and political direction Germany would take in the near future. Brodersen describes Benjamin's situation as follows: "Like many an unemployed or needy intellectual during the crisis-stricken years of the Weimar Republic, he had decided to make this journey to escape the atmosphere of wide-spread economic and social depression."

Benjamin informed his friend Scholem that he was unable to continue working in such an atmosphere and that he was only half-heartedly in Germany: "Ich selber bin gerade jetzt mit weniger als halbem Herzen in Deutschland; eine Loslösung, ein Elan von außen her tut mir not" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 386) ["I happen to be in Germany myself just now and less than half my heart is in this visit; I am in need of a separation, of an outside source of energy" (*Correspondence* 221)]. By March of the following year, he had completed the research for his habilitation in the form of over 600 quotations from primary and secondary texts, and he had decided the only way for him to complete this project was by getting away from Berlin:

> [S]o ist meine Frankfurter Schrift noch immer nicht begonnen, obzwar bis unmittelbar an die Abfassung von langer Hand her herangeführt. Hier will sich der

> Elan, der den Übergang zur eigentlichen Niederschrift ergibt, nicht leicht einstellen und ich plane, in der Hauptsache die Ausarbeitung im Auslande vorzunehmen. Anfang April will ich - auf Biegen oder Brechen - von hier fort und unter der Erleichterung des Lebens in einer größern und freiern Umwelt diese Sache so weit mir das gegeben ist etwas *von oben herab* und presto absolvieren. (*Briefe* Vol 2, 432-33; emphasis mine)

> [I still have not begun my Frankfurt project although I long ago brought it to the point of being able to set things down in writing. The élan that brings about the transition to actual writing simply does not seem to want to make an appearance, and I am planning to do most of the work abroad. At the beginning of April I intend -- by hook or by crook -- to get away from here and, to the extent that it is in my power, to complete this matter from a somewhat *superior vantage point* and quickly, under the benign influence of a more relaxed life in more spacious and freer surroundings. (*Correspondence* 236; emphasis mine)]

What did Benjamin mean by a "superior vantage point?" First of all, he wished to extricate himself from his own life situation, which, it seemed to him, was detrimental to his immediate project: his habilitation. He attempted to avoid anything that he believed could distract him from that work. For example, in a letter to his friend and mentor Florens Christian Rang, it is clear that he is concerned about politics but wants to avoid diverting his attention from his habilitation: "Denn eine wirkliche Vertiefung in die Philosophie der Politik muß ich eben jetzt um so mehr vermeiden, als ich noch garnicht im wünschenswerten Maße in meiner eigenen Arbeit stecke" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 355) ["Right now I must avoid true immersion in the philosophy of politics, all the more because I still have not

gotten into my own work as much as I would like" (*Correspondence* 210)]. He hoped that being away from the situation in Germany would enable him to focus on his writing.

Benjamin wanted an isolated existence in which his basic material needs were no longer a cause for concern. He wished for peace and quiet -- perhaps longing to recapture his initial years as a university student in Freiburg, when he was young, alone, and without responsibilities: "Dies fühlte ich, als ich aus dem gewohnten Kreise Berliner Freunde hier herüber kam ... ich habe jetzt zum ersten Mal die Einsamkeit kennengelernt ... Ich kann Ihnen noch nicht sagen, bis zu welcher Ruhe ich dieses Alleinsein gebracht habe" (*Briefe* Vol. 1, 138) ["I felt this when I came here, having left the familiar circle of my Berlin friends ... I have become acquainted with loneliness for the first time ... I am still unable to tell you what kind of tranquility I have achieved with this solitude" (*Correspondence* 39)]. In a later letter to Seligson, he idealizes solitude: "die tiefste Einsamkeit ist die des idealen Menschen in der Beziehung zur Idee, die sein Menschliches vernichtet" (*Briefe* Vol. 1, 161) ["the most profound form of loneliness is that of the ideal person in relationship to the idea, which destroys what is human about him" (*Correspondence* 50)].

Roughly a decade later, he experienced the detrimental effect of solitude when he and Dora decided to live separately for a time. "Im übrigen lebe ich sehr einsam, so, daß meine Arbeit sogar im Grunde darunter sehr leidet. Mir fehlen alle Kommunikationsmöglichkeiten" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 388) ["Otherwise I am living a very solitary life, so much so that it has even caused my work to suffer. I never have an opportunity to really talk" (*Correspondence* 222)]. Although rarely acknowledged, one of the reasons he had difficulty in progressing with his habilitation dissertation was his isolation, which seriously hampered his need to communicate and associate with other (like-minded) people. He was caught in the contradiction between the need for solitude and the need for community. He found both in Capri but, initially, maintained that isolation and its concomitant "superior vantage point" were necessary.

This superior vantage point, as can be seen from Benjamin's letter to Seligson, has a material dimension: "Aber wenn ich Ihnen in meinem ersten Brief so sehr mein Zimmer mit seinem Fenster auf den Kirchplatz hinaus pries, so bedeutete das nichts andres, als eben diese Ruhe" (*Briefe* Vol. I, 138) ["In my first letter to you, when I so fulsomely praised my room with its window looking out onto the church square, it signified nothing but this tranquility"(*Correspondence* 39)]. Just as the physical reality of cities provided Benjamin with clues for understanding modern urban life, so the physical space in which he thought and wrote provide us with clues for understanding his work. The superior vantage point is one that is not only at a distance from, but also above, its subject. This embodies the understanding of academic work criticized by Dorothy Smith (and many others). This superior vantage point enables the "knowers doing the knowing" to position themselves both at a distance from, and in a position superior to, their subjects -- thereby becoming invisible. In other words, the practices of thinking are understood as activities that occur outside of time and place (D. Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power* 51).

While Benjamin attempts to remove the thinker (himself) from the thought (his habilitation), his observation concerning the importance of the room in which his thinking takes place belies his ability to do so. In other words, the importance of the room with regard to his intellectual production undermines Benjamin's attempt to render himself (as thinker) invisible. Thus the superior vantage point proves to be illusory. The traditional understanding of the production of intellectual work not only separates the public from the private, the intellectual from the material, but also makes especially successful work contingent upon the elimination of "real" life. The genius achieves greatness in isolation from the demands of life -- in fact, this greatness is predicated upon being distant from life, from material reality (an underlying assumption from which the Benjamin industry suffers to this day).

The actual physical space in which intellectual work occurs constitutes only one of many dimensions. Brodersen provides significant insights into those dimensions in his discussion of Benjamin's living arrangements and working space while staying in Capri. First, he observes that Benjamin's move from one room to another is symbolic of his leaving the "halls of academia": "Im Umzug von dem einen Domizil in das andere manifestiert sich nämlich Benjamins Auszug 'aus den Hallen der Wissenschaft'" (Brodersen, *Spinne im eigenen Netz* 135) [Benjamin's move from one dwelling to the other was a manifestation of his moving out of the "halls of knowledge"]. By seeking admission into those halls, Benjamin implicitly accepted the unwritten rules that required him to work above, and at a distance from, his subjects. In his first room he could do just that: look out over the town and the ocean. By contrast, in his second room he looked deep into his immediate surroundings: "Ausgezogen aus einem Domizil, dessen Balkon einen Blick weit hinaus *über* die Dinge hinweg gestattete, schweift er jetzt, von dieser neuen Herberge, *tief* in das Labyrinth ineinanderverschlungener Rosenbüsche und Weinstöcke" (Brodersen, *Spinne im eigenen Netz* 137; emphasis mine) [Having moved out of a room with a balcony that allowed a view high *above* things, he now looks out from his new quarters *deep* into the labyrinth of interwoven rose bushes and grape vines (emphasis mine)]. For Brodersen, the second room is a sign that Benjamin is no longer writing as an academic, but rather as a free thinker.

Brodersen does not consider Lacis' effect on Benjamin other than to make a superficial connection between academic writing and Dora, as opposed to "free" writing and Lacis. This distinction bears the marks of the tired old juxtaposition of wife-child-responsibilities versus mistress-freedom-inspiration. The former is associated with the cramped works of the academic, while the latter is associated with the inspired works of the true genius.

What happens to Benjamin in Capri, however, comprises a constellation very similar to the one he constructs in looking back at his sexual awakening in Berlin. In his letters from Capri,

Benjamin makes a number of rather obtuse references to Lacis. In one letter to Scholem, in which he describes his surroundings in Capri, he makes reference to the Song of Songs:

> Ein anderes sind die Weingärten, die auch zu den Wundererscheinungen dieser Nächte gehören. Du wirst das gewiß kennengelernt habe, wenn Frucht und Blatt in der Schwärze der Nacht untertauchen und man vorsichtig - um nicht gehört und verjagt zu werden - nach den großen Trauben tastet. Aber es liegt noch viel mehr darin, worüber vielleicht die Kommentare des hohen Liedes Aufschluß geben. (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 486)
>
> [The vineyards are also among the miraculous nighttime sights here. You will surely have experienced the following: fruit and leaves are immersed in the blackness of the night and you cautiously feel for the large grapes -- so as not to be heard and chased off. But there is so much more to it than that. Maybe the commentaries on the Song of Songs will shed some light on this. (*Correspondence* 250)]

The Song of Songs is an unambiguously erotic biblical love song that contains a great deal of sexually explicit vineyard imagery.[99] In one section of the song, for example, the bridegroom describes the beauty of the bride, proclaims his desire to "climb up," and finally expresses his wish to "find your breasts like clusters of grapes on the vine" (Song of Songs, 7-8, 805). As Witte has pointed out, for a biblical scholar such as Scholem, this reference to sexual love would be unmistakable (*Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 54). This is a strong indication that the relationship between Lacis and Benjamin was heavily erotically charged. After

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[99] A further aspect of this biblical text is that, for all its seemingly obvious sexual imagery, its interpreters (from Augustine on) insisted that it had nothing to do with sex. Both Benjamin and Scholem would have been aware of that – therefore the reference to the commentaries on the Song of Songs.

having met Lacis and probably having engaged in some form of sexual activity with her, Benjamin made the connection between the imagery of the Song of Songs and the physical landscape of Capri -- a landscape he viewed from the room to which he moved after meeting Lacis. Lacis described the room as follows: "Zu meinem Erstaunen glich das Quartier einer Höhle in einem Dschungel aus Weintrauben und wilden Rosen" (Lacis, *Revolutionär im Beruf* 43) [To my astonishment, his quarters resembled a cave in a jungle of grapes and wild roses]. He lived deep within the labyrinth of the vineyard -- a powerful symbol of sexual love. He is no longer stationed above, at a "superior vantage point" that allows him easily to see the route to take; he is now in the thick of things. Benjamin's awareness of his various physical spaces -- the streets of Capri (where he first observed and then met Lacis) and his own room -- emphasizes the inextricability of life and work.

Another important observation is that Benjamin, as an "independent" scholar, both lived and worked in the same room(s). He had no office, no separate dedicated work space, to go to: the public and the private are interwoven. Although he does not thematize this constellation in "Naples," it constitutes a significant dimension of this moment in his life and work, where the physical, intellectual, emotional, and political converge. This particular constellation has not yet been analyzed by Benjamin scholars. Later, in his work on Moscow, Benjamin repeatedly describes the apartments/rooms in which people both live and work. Most of his meetings with Russian intellectuals occurred in their homes and much of his time with Bernhard Reich (Lacis' partner) and Lacis is spent in the rooms where he both lived and worked. It is at this time and in this context that he began to address more directly the issue of public and private spheres as they pertain to intellectuals.

Benjamin's "Denkbilder" [thought-images] contain further thoughts on this conflation of work and living space.[100] In the thought-image called "Weimar," Benjamin describes Goethe's rooms in the Goethe-Schiller-Archive and, while observing how primitive they are, he notes that: "auch der Reiche die Härte des Lebens noch am eigenen Leibe zu spüren hatte" (Benjamin, "Weimar" 354) [even the rich had felt the harshness of life on their own body]. Benjamin reminds his readers that the rich and famous "Dichter" [poet/writer] is more than the sum of his ideas -- ideas written on white pieces of paper that can be viewed in a white, sterile, hospital-like room. Goethe's works have become "wie Kranke in Hospitälern" (Benjamin, "Weimar" 353) [like the ill in hospitals]. They are objects that provide clues about Goethe (in the way that a sick body provides clues about a healthy body), but they do not provide an adequate representation of him. Further, there is a certain arbitrariness at work, as those works could just as easily have sunk into oblivion as become famous: "Lief nicht ein Schauer über sie hin, und niemand wußte, ob vom Nahen der Vernichtung oder des Nachruhms?" (Benjamin, "Weimar" 354) [Did not a shudder run through them, and nobody knew whether from the nearness of eradication or of posthumous fame?].

The physical space in which Goethe produced his work is critical to Benjamin, as can be seen from the following observation: "Man kann gar nicht ermessen, was die Nachbarschaft der winzigen Schlafkammer und dieses einem Schlafgemache gleich abgeschiedenen Arbeitszimmers bedeutet hat" (Benjamin, "Weimar" 355) [The significance of the proximity of the tiny bedroom and this one bedroom-turned-workroom cannot be measured]. The proximity of sleep and work spaces, this permeation of private and public, is open to view, as is a museum; however, Benjamin indicates that something is missing: "Noch warten wir auf eine Philologie, die diese nächste,

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[100] The assumption of a separation of work and home is, of course, gendered. For women, who worked primarily in the home, the merging of the two spheres was the status quo. The home was where women worked, often performing waged as well as unwaged labour.

bestimmendste Umwelt ... vor uns eröffne" (Benjamin, "Weimar" 354) [We are still waiting for a philology that will open up these nearest, most determining surroundings for us]. Benjamin awaits an academic practice that will open the world of the great man to scrutiny rather than contenting itself with sickly reflections of who he was and how he produced his writing.

As already discussed, Benjamin's critique of the academy is nothing new. As a young student he was critical of the academy's need to classify. According to him, the poor quality of much of the scholarship of his time was primarily due to this one great weakness of contemporary experts: "sie [fühlen] sich natürlich nicht wohl ... bis sie nicht alles nach den crudesten Maßstäben rubriziert haben" (*Briefe* Vol. 1, 468) ["they of course do not feel comfortable until they have classified everything according to the crudest criteria" (*Correspondence* 133)]. Benjamin's criticism of this tendency to classify everything and everyone is, to some degree, parallel to Salomon's criticism of empirical sociology. Benjamin recognized and criticized some forms of this tendency early in his career, but it is only after beginning to examine life in Naples, with its fluid and permeable boundaries between public and private, that he began to pointedly question those boundaries, first as they relate to urban life and then as they relate to intellectuals.

Benjamin had more than a passing interest in Naples, as is evident in the fact that during his six-month stay in Capri (May-October 1924) he visited it about twenty times (Tiedemann, Gödde, Lonitz 210). In "Naples," Lacis and Benjamin observe that the activities of buying and selling are not confined within the physical boundaries of stores and the temporal boundaries of set business hours; rather, they spill over into homes and out onto the streets at any time of the day or night, where they mingle with other everyday activities that are often categorized as private (such as sleeping and eating). Religious, commercial, and family activities intermingle on the streets and in the homes of the Neapolitans.

Gilloch is one of the few researchers to discuss the importance of "Naples" within the context of Benjamin's work. In Gilloch's view, the essay contains "a series of insights and issues that were to come to dominate all his intellectual activities" (23). These include "the attempt to devise a mode or style of writing that in some way incorporates ... urban experience, ... the need to salvage the disregarded debris of contemporary society, ... and the particular forms of mundane life found within the urban environment." These are explored through "a set of fundamental relationships: between architecture and urban experience, public and private spheres, sacred and profane, ritual and improvisation, individual and collectivity" (Gilloch 23-24).

Gilloch rightly assigns new importance to "Naples"; however, he is not entirely successful in accomplishing what he sets out to do. He first hypothesizes that little attention has been paid to this essay because "critics and commentators have focussed on the progress of the *Habilitationsschrift* and/or Benjamin's romantic entanglements during this period" (Gilloch 22). He continues by insisting that "[i]t is precisely the plethora of Benjamin's other pressing preoccupations, however, that makes this essay so intriguing. Given his emotional and intellectual concerns and crises in the summer of 1924, why did Benjamin choose to write about Naples?" (Gilloch 22). Although Gilloch recognizes the permeation of the public and private in "Naples," he fails to apply that recognition to his analysis of Benjamin.

Lacis' and Benjamin's concept of porosity is key to "Naples". "Porosität ist das unerschöpflich neu zu entdeckende Gesetz dieses Lebens" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 311) [Porosity is the inexhaustible law of life in this city, reappearing everywhere ("Naples" 417)]. They discovered and rediscovered that there are no firm boundaries in time or space. In examining the materiality of city spaces as it intersects with bodily perception, Lacis and Benjamin explored their permeability. This lack of clear boundaries was most readily and concretely observable in Neapolitan architecture. As the two of them continued to examine the buildings and the life within

and around them, Lacis observed that the houses looked porous (Lacis, *Revolutionär im Beruf* 46). In their essay, they described that porosity:

> Bau und Aktion gehen in Höfen, Arkaden und Treppen ineinander über. In allem wahrt man den Spielraum, der es [sic] befähigt, Schauplatz neuer unvorhergesehener Konstellationen zu werden. Man meidet das Definitive, Geprägte. Keine Situation erscheint so, wie sie ist, für immer gedacht, keine Gestalt behauptet ihr "so und nicht anders". So kommt die Architektur, dieses bündigste Stück der Gemeinschaftsrhythmik, hier zustande. (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 309)
>
> [Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything, they preserve the scope to become a theater of the new, unforseen constellations. The stamp of the definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts it "thus and not otherwise." This is how architecture, the most binding part of the communal rhythm, comes into being here. ("Naples" 416)]

The construction of definitive spacial boundaries serves to fix actions and their meanings "so und nicht anders" [thus and not otherwise]. Such boundaries are erected both literally and figuratively, based on dominant understandings of when, where, and how activities take place and what social forms are practised. Once such boundaries are constructed, they tend to further reinforce the understandings that initially created them, rendering other ways of understanding ever more difficult and increasingly less acceptable.

Whereas porous boundaries allow for new constellations of the dimensions that both constitute and valorize social forms and activities, the boundaries expressed in the architecture of modern cities reflect and reinforce demarcation and separation. The separation of the spheres of

waged work and home, for example, both reflects and promotes an understanding of the home as an enclosed, separate sphere -- the private sphere (which, if necessary, is established by force). This process is evident in the changing architecture of Naples, which was "anarchisch, verschlungen, dörflerisch im Zentrum, in das man vor vierzig Jahren große Straßenzüge erst hineingehauen hat. Und nur in diesen ist das Haus im nordischen Sinn die Zelle der Stadtarchitektur" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 309) [anarchic, embroiled, village-like in the centre, into which large networks of streets were hacked only forty years ago. And only in these streets is the house, in the nordic sense, the cell of the city's architecture ("Naples" 416)].

This city existed in its anarchistic porous form for centuries, and it was only in the forty years preceding Benjamin's visit that modern city streets were forcefully cut through it. These new streets are lined with "box houses" that are the cells of the new cityscapes. The home becomes a refuge that shuts out what is now designated as a separate public sphere.[101] By contrast, the Neapolitan home is a reservoir of new ideas, possibilities, and energy into which its inhabitants repeatedly dip: "So ist das Haus viel weniger das Asyl, in welches Menschen eingehen, als das unerschöpfliche Reservoir, aus dem sie herausströmen" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 314) [So the house is far less the refuge into which people retreat than the inexhaustible reservoir from which they flood out ("Naples" 419)]. Their way of living, as both expressed in and reinforced by this architecture, is understood by Benjamin to constitute a subversive energy -- an energy that allows for subversive gestures, the breaking of boundaries that keep hierarchies in place.

The Nordic house is a stagnant, dead box, while the Neapolitan house is full of energy. This energy is further illustrated in the difference between the stairs of Nordic houses and the stairs of Neapolitan houses: "Diese [die Treppe], niemals ganz freigelegt, noch weniger aber in dem

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[101] Benjamin's understanding of the home as a private refuge from the public world is obviously from the perspective of the men who left the (middle-class) home to go to their places of work.

dumpfen, nordischen Hauskasten geschlossen, schießen stückweise aus den Häusern heraus, machen eine eckige Wendung und verschwinden, um wieder hervorzustürzen" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 310) [The stairs, never entirely exposed, but still less enclosed in the gloomy box of the Nordic house, erupt fragmentarily from the buildings, make an angular turn, and disappear, only to burst out again ("Naples" 417)]. The stairs of Neapolitan houses do not simply reappear outside after disappearing inside, but, rather, they "burst forth." The choice of verb here indicates the vitality associated with porosity in contrast to the torpidity and oppressiveness associated with the clear, controlling boundaries of Nordic houses.

His thought-image, "Nordische See," provides a further example of Benjamin's critique of the construction of definite boundaries and the concomitant perceptual shift that locks away everything that comes to be constructed as private: "Muße im Freien ist nirgendwo vorgesehen ... Das Haus hat noch strenge Grenzen" (Benjamin, "Nordische See" 383) [Taking one's leisure outside is nowhere provided for ... The house still has rigid boundaries]. The house in northern Europe is a box that functions not only to separate actual activities, but also to shape understandings of what activities are appropriate to which sphere. In northern Europe, the private is inside, locked away, while in Naples: "Wie die Stube auf der Straße wiederkehrt, mit Stühlen, Herd und Altar, so, nur viel lauter, wandert die Straße in die Stube hinein" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 314) [Just as the living room reappears on the street, with chairs, hearth, and altar, so -- only much more loudly -- the street migrates into the living room ("Naples" 420)]. There is permeation in both directions -- from inside to outside and from outside to inside.

The interior of the Nordic house is a place where one sleeps, not in beds in rooms, but in specially made cupboards: "Schränke bald mit drehbaren Türen und bald mit Schiebladen, bis zu vier Stätten in ein und derselbe Truhe" (Benjamin, "Nordische See" 383) [Cupboards sometimes with revolving doors, sometimes with drawers, up to four spaces in one and the same cabinet]. Not

only is there a sharp distinction between inside and outside, public and private, but the interior is clearly divided, with specific spaces serving particular functions and designed for only certain activities (such as sleeping, cooking, and eating). Even the mixing of sleeping and sexual activity were to be kept at a minimum: "Für die Liebe war damit schlecht gesorgt" (Benjamin, "Nordische See" 383) [Love was not well provided for]. In Nordic houses architectural and functional boundaries are meant to confine and control; in Neapolitan houses sleeping, for example, is done in shifts, at different times of the day, often not even in beds but behind counters in stores or on steps: "Dieser Schlaf ... ist also nicht der behütete nordische. Auch hier Durchdringung von Tag und Nacht, Geräuschen und Ruhe, äußerem Licht und innerem Dunkel, von Straße und Heim" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 315) [This sleep is not the protected one of the north. Here, too, the permeation of day and night, noises and silence, outer light and inner darkness, of street and home]. In Naples, even sleep is porous.

The thought-image describing the city of Bergen is problematic in that it melds two hundred years of the city's history with the present and draws on decontextualized generalizations about northern Europeans. Similarly, Benjamin depicts Neapolitans as somewhat quaint throwbacks to an earlier time. He also tends to "orientalize" them by presenting them as the Other in relation to German culture. Furthermore, Benjamin's attempts to grasp porosity are based on the juxtaposition of two seeming opposites -- a juxtaposition that contradicts the very concept he wants to elucidate.

In *Berliner Chronik*, [Berlin Chronicle] he recounts his childhood visits to his wealthy grandmother, who lived in spacious, luxurious rooms that gave one a "Gefühl von bürgerlicher Sicherheit"(82) [feeling of bourgeois security]. Rather than a nostalgic reminiscence, this is a strong criticism of the lifestyle of his immediate family. Their feeling of safety was the result of the certainty that everything was under control: nothing and nobody was out of place, nothing unpredictable could occur, and everything was as expected. The rooms and their contents were

stagnant: nothing moved, nothing changed, nothing ever even wore out: "Hier herrschte eine Art von Dingen, welche, ... im Ganzen so von sich und ihrer Dauer überzeugt war, daß sie mit keiner Abnutzung, keinem Erbgang, keinem Umzug rechnete und immer gleich nahe und gleich weit von ihrem Ende... verharrte" (Benjamin, *Berliner Chronik* 82-83) ["Here reigned a species of things that was ... so wholly convinced of itself and its permanence that it took no account of wear, inheritance, or moves, remaining forever equally near to and far from its ending" ("A Berlin Chronicle" 41)]. This is the "für immer gedacht" [intended forever] and "so und nicht anders" [thus and not otherwise] that was absent in Naples.

Each room in Benjamin's grandmother's house had a specific function: some were reserved for family Christmas gatherings,[102] one was used as a guestroom when a married aunt came visiting, one for the children to play in when the adults wanted peace and quiet, and yet another was used only for his aunt's piano lessons (Benjamin, *Berliner Chronik* 84). He revisits those rooms in "One-Way Street," emphasizing their deadly qualities:

> Hochherrschaftlich möblierte Zehnzimmerwohnung: ... Das bürgerliche Interieur ... mit seinen riesigen, von Schnitzereien überquollenen Büfetts, den sonnenlosen Ecken, ... und den langen Korridoren mit der singenden Gasflamme wird adäquat allein der Leiche zur Behausung. ... Die seelenlose Üppigkeit des Mobilars wird wahrhafter Komfort erst vor dem Leichnam. (Benjamin, "Einbahnstraße" 88-89)
>
> [Manorially Furnished Ten-Room Apartment: ... The bourgeois interior ... with its gigantic sideboards distended with carvings, the sunless corners ... and the long corridors with their singing gas flames -- fittingly houses only the corpse ... The

[102] Many Jewish-German families adopted traditions and celebrations, especially Christmas and Easter, in order to conform to Christian norms.

> soulless luxury of the furnishings becomes true comfort only in the presence of a dead body. ("One-Way Street" 447)]

These restrictive, overfilled rooms in which only the dead could feel comfortable are in stark contrast to the lively houses in Naples. The former gave Benjamin nightmares, and the latter awakened his passions. For Benjamin, the two houses represent two extreme possibilities: the Neapolitan house is full of life and is totally porous; the Nordic house is bound and stagnant, filled with seldom-used rooms that would make better homes for the dead than the living.

Naples is a place where eating and sleeping do not occur in designated places at specific times: "Schlaf und Essen haben keine Stunde, oftmals keinen Ort" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 314) [Sleeping and eating have no set time, often no place]. Moreover, sleeping and eating clearly have a significance beyond their biological necessity. Attempts to control these activities are attempts to establish control over the body by architecturally specifying space-time boundaries. Control of the body equals control of the everyday. The acceptance of the notion that people should conduct themselves in accordance with selected norms influences the type of architecture that a people will produce; this type of architecture, in turn, reinforces the norms that produced it.

Benjamin sought to escape the confining boundaries of his grandmother's house in the only room that was not assigned a definite purpose. That room was the loggia -- a room that is neither inside nor outside, but resides at the transition point between the two. For him it was the most important room of all because it was "am wenigsten installiert" ["the least furnished"], because it was a space into which the "Straßenlärm hereindrang" ["street noises came in"], and "weil hier die Hinterhöfe mit Kindern, Dienstboten, Leierkastenmännern, Portiers sich eröffneten" (Benjamin,

Berliner Chronik 84) ["because it opened onto the back courtyards,[103] with children, domestic servants, hurdy-gurdy men, and porters" ("A Berlin Chronicle" 42)].

The loggia gave Benjamin an early experience not only of spacial porosity, but also, to a degree, of temporal porosity. On Sundays, while the other rooms of the house and their inhabitants changed and slipped into lethargy, the loggia was alive with the sounds of the outside world. Later, in Naples, Benjamin and Lacis observed: "Ein Gran vom Sonntag ist in jedem Wochentag versteckt und wieviel Wochentag in diesem Sonntag!" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 311) ["A grain of Sunday is hidden in each weekday. And how much weekday there is in this Sunday!" ("Naples" 417)]. They found it almost impossible to determine what day of the week it was by observing the activities of the Neapolitans, as something celebratory occurred every day. In his radio talk about Naples, Benjamin explained this temporal porosity as follows:

> Da habe ich euch ein bißchen vom Alltag und ein bißchen vom Festtag Neapels erzählt, und das Merkwürdigste ist, wie beide ineinandergehen, wie an jedem Alltag die Straßen etwas Festliches haben, voll von Musikstücken und von Müßiggängern sind, über denen die Wäsche wie Fahnen flattert, und wie auch noch der Sonntag etwas vom Werktag hat, weil jeder kleiner Krämer seinen Laden offen halten kann bis in die Nacht. (Benjamin, "Rundfunkgeschichten für Kinder" 213)
>
> [Now I have told you about the everyday and a bit about holidays in Naples. The most noteworthy is how the two merge into one another, how the streets are somewhat festive every weekday -- they are full of music and idlers, over which the

[103] At this time, apartment buildings in Berlin were built around a whole block, with a public yard in the centre.

laundry flutters like flags -- and how Sundays contain a bit of weekdays, because every little shopkeeper can keep his shop open until late at night]

Just as daily life is not compartmentalized, so the passage of time in Naples is not a linear counting of days, weeks, and months. Traces of work days are to be found on Sundays and holidays, just as traces of the festive are to be found in every work day.

Benjamin further develops the concept of the porosity of time in his work on memory and history -- a work that Roger Simon has used so fruitfully in critical pedagogy. Benjamin engaged in a process of excavation that entailed repeatedly examining objects and constellations in order to illuminate their significance. It is not the object or event itself that is vital, but rather the process of analysis. This process does not assume a linear narrative of progress, but rather attempts to illuminate the object of study from as many positions as possible. In "A Berlin Chronicle" Benjamin explains this kind of archeological activity as follows: "Sie dürfen sich nicht scheuen, immer wieder auf einen und denselben Sachverhalt zurückzukommen ihn auszustreuen wie man Erde ausstreut, ihn umzuwühlen wie man Erde umwühlt. Denn Sachverhalte sind nur Lagerungen, Schichten, die erst der sorgsamsten Durchforschung das ausliefern, was die wahren Werte ... ausmacht" (Benjamin, *Berliner Chronik* 52-53) ["He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it, as one scatters earth, to turn over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is only a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real hidden treasure" ("A Berlin Chronicle" 26)]. This process entails excavating through the layers of meaning produced by discourses and memory. Each layer provides clues to how objects, events, and actions have been judged over time. For Benjamin, the most important insights are to be gained by analyzing refuse -- that which has been discarded (a topic to which I will return later in this chapter). What is clear is that Benjamin's project is not linear-chronological, culminating in a finished product; rather, it remains unfinished, looking at the textual weave, the ways that the

various dimensions of various constellations are woven together. His project also seeks to examine the constellations of his own life and work.

Looking back at his childhood, Benjamin explains how the porosity of loggias enabled him to escape from the regimentation of his life and the watchful eyes of adults. After meeting Lacis, the loggia -- this link between inside/outside, public/private, control/freedom -- gained further significance: it was associated with love. In "One-Way Street," the section entitled "Loggia" lists the names of flowers often found in the loggia, beside each of which there is an aphoristic statement pertaining to his understanding of the experience of love. One further link between the loggia of Benjamin's childhood and his trip to Capri is his choice of the adjective "pompejanisch" [Pompeian] (Benjamin, "Einbahnstraße" 85) to describe the red of the loggia's walls. This choice is probably a reminder of his trip to Capri, as his descriptions rarely mention colour unless it has a particular significance. As a child, Benjamin encountered porosity in the form of the possibility for a brief respite from the oppressive atmosphere of his grandmother's and his own home. In his later life, porosity was as a kind of law that governed the lives of the Neapolitans. In developing the concept of porosity with Lacis, he understood its potential to subvert, and perhaps even to oppose, the controlling practices of dominant powers.

More generally, the loggia, as its name indicates, is an architectural feature that originated in Italy. In "Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert" ["Berlin Childhood around 1900"] Benjamin was even more explicit about the links between the loggia and his trip to Capri. In describing the loggia of his parents' home, he observed: "Ich glaube, daß ein Beisatz dieser Luft noch um die Weinberge von Capri war, in denen ich die Geliebte umschlungen hielt; und es ist eben diese Luft, in der die Bilder und Allegorien stehen, die über meinem Denken herrschen" (Benjamin, "Berliner Kindheit" 294) [I think that a mixture of this air was still around the Capri vineyards in which I tightly embraced my beloved; and it is precisely this air in which the images and allegories that

dominate my thinking are to be found]. The relationship between the loggia and Capri were both central to his thoughts and intoxicating. He refers to: "die Luft der Höfe, [die] auf immer berauschend blieb" (Benjamin, "Berliner Kindheit" 294) [the air of the courtyard, (that) always remained intoxicating]. Again, the physical, emotional, and intellectual are woven together and described in terms of their materiality. The body is key to that materiality, as is evidenced by Benjamin's use of erotically charged language.

Sexuality, sensuality, and eroticism are prominent dimensions of Benjamin's life and work, and, until recently, they have been all but neglected. Eva Geulen recognizes that Benjamin's texts are "saturated with the imagery of gendered eroticism. This determines not only a significant aspect of his prose's seductive beauty but pertains also to the political materialism of his thought" (162). For a "wohlgeborenes Bürgerkind" (Benjamin, *Berliner Chronik* 7) ["son of wealthy, middle-class parents" ("A Berlin Chronicle" 3)], sex was a taboo subject, something that occurred behind the closed doors of specifically designated places within a constricting house.[104] As a child he felt imprisoned by the boundaries of his family and their social position: "In meiner Kindheit war ich ein Gefangener" (Benjamin, "Berliner Kindheit" 286) [During my childhood I was a prisoner]. His imprisonment extended beyond the houses his family occupied to the topography of Berlin itself, where he sought to overstep two of those boundaries: that of class and that of sexuality. While walking along a street in Berlin he experienced an unusual feeling: "ein Gefühl, die Schwelle der eigenen Klasse nun zum erstenmal zu überschreiten" ["a feeling of crossing the threshold of one's own class for the first time"]. This feeling of transgressing his own class boundaries occurred when he was confronted with the "fast beispiellosen Faszination, auf offener Straße eine Hure

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[104] For a further examination of the formation of desire within the "social topography" of the middle-class home, in which the family's bedrooms are upstairs and the servants' quarters are in the "nether world" downstairs, see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 150-153.

anzusprechen" (Benjamin, *Berliner Chronik* 25) ["almost unequalled fascination of publicly accosting a whore in the street" ("A Berlin Chronicle" 11)]. Recounting the same incident in "Berlin Childhood," he formulated the significance of this feeling more strongly: "ein Gefühl ... meiner eigenen Klasse abzusagen" (Benjamin, "Berliner Kindheit" 288) [a feeling ... of refusing my own class]. As he explained the incident, Benjamin not only took a small step over a class boundary, but he also publicly demonstrated his refusal of his own social class. Crossing boundaries is prominent in Benjamin's life, be they psychological, political, or intellectual. Thus, his acknowledgement of the prostitute takes on numerous layers of significance. While Benjamin interpreted this event as an act of rebellious border-crossing, it can also be seen as an act of conformity. According to the prevailing middle-class morals of the time, although prostitutes were considered to be tainted, it was implicitly assumed that men would sexually engage with lower-class women (usually prostitutes), while middle-class women would remain virgins until their wedding day. So in speaking to a prostitute, far from rebelling, Benjamin may be seen as accepting the a class and gender-based double standard, particularly given that he later often "took his pleasure" with street prostitutes.

Nevertheless, Benjamin constructs this particular encounter with a prostitute as a starting point for gaining insight into the positions of the marginalized, unprivileged members of society. His later political project, in which Lacis plays a major role, is to begin to find ways of giving a voice to the voiceless -- to those whose marginal status is closely associated with the belief that they are dirty, useless, and without value. This complex constellation of dirt, value judgement, and sex is closely associated with the topography of the city. The sexuality associated with the street and with prostitutes is both literally and figuratively "dirty." Living in Berlin, Benjamin sometimes spends the night with a prostitute or is helped/serviced by one in a doorway:

> Ich habe in Berlin nie auf der Straße gelegen. ... Ich habe immer ein Quartier gefunden, manchmal allerdings war es ein spätes und ein unbekanntes dazu, das ich nie wieder bezog und in dem ich auch nicht allein war. Wenn ich so spät unter einem Hausbogen innehielt, hatten sich meine Beine in die Bänder der Straße verwickelt, und die saubersten Hände waren es nicht, die mich befreiten. (Benjamin, *Berliner Chronik* 56)
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> [I never slept in the streets of Berlin ... I always found quarters, even though sometimes tardy and also unknown ones that I did not revisit and where I was not alone. If I paused thus late in a doorway, my legs had become entangled in the ribbons of the street, and it was not the cleanest of hands that freed me. ("A Berlin Chronicle" 27-28)]

The assignation of the adjective "dirty" constitutes a form of social ordering predicated upon a value judgement. That which is disorderly or improper is dirty.[105] For Benjamin, cleanliness is uninteresting because it discloses so little. Of clean objects he says: "Die Dinge sind blank ... Sauberkeit treibt sie in sich zurück" (Benjamin, "Nordische See" 383) [The things are spotless ... cleanliness drives them back into themselves]. To be clean means to be devoid of traces of living. So it is by examining dirt that one is able to comprehend the creation of dichotomous categories and the danger of thresholds.

For Benjamin, the threshold is both the literal and figurative point at which porosity manifests itself. It is the point where the boundaries between inside/outside, public/private, past/present are unclear and, therefore, can be transgressed. Transgression of these boundaries is

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[105] For a detailed discussion of the social construction of dirt, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

often achieved with the assistance of a prostitute. As Sigrid Weigel convincingly argues, in Benjamin's work prostitutes function as "Schwellenhüterinnen" [guardians of thresholds]. According to her analysis, in "Berlin Childhood," the whore is the gatekeeper between the innocence of childhood and the sexual knowledge of adulthood. In the "Arcades Project," the whore occupies a threshold position between past and present.[106] It should be noted that women, not men, sit at the "Schwelle" [threshold]. In his thought-image "San Gimignano," for example, the women of the village sit at the thresholds of their houses, the point where inside and outside meet, and where passage from one to the other is possible: "[A]lle Frauen haben ihren Platz auf der Schwelle, ganz körpernah am Grund und Boden ... Der Stuhl vor der Haustür ist schon Wahrzeichen städtischer Neuerungen" (Benjamin, "San Gimignano" 365) [All women have their place at the threshold, physically close to the ground and the earth ... The chair in front of the house door is already a sign of urban innovation]. It is the women who, sitting at the threshold between inside and outside, provide the key to change.[107]

As previously discussed, Benjamin saw his life as being mapped onto streets, and those streets played a key role in his passionate awakenings. He met the prostitute while he was wandering the streets of Berlin; he met Lacis while he was wandering the streets of Capri. Together, he and Lacis examined the streets of Naples. His exploration of his relationship with Lacis converged with his attempt to understand city life, as may be seen in "One-Way Street" and in his works about Moscow -- the city he explored while visiting a sick Lacis. This topography is closely linked to social thresholds and the possibility of their being crossed: "Stets aber war am

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[106] It must be noted, however, there are two main problems with Weigel's analysis: it remains at a very abstract level and it reduces women to either mothers or whores. Furthermore, her psychoanalytical examination does not take into account either the city or the body, both of which were of vital concern to Benjamin.

[107] To be sure, this image is problematic in that it could be understood to assign the feminine to nature.

Anfang dieses Überschreiten einer sozialen Schwelle auch das einer topographischen" (Benjamin, *Berliner Chronik* 25) [However, always at the beginning of crossing a social threshold there was also the crossing of a topographical one].[108] The physical, material crossing precedes the emotional, intellectual crossing. This brings us back to Benjamin's room down in the labyrinth of the vineyards -- the room that parallels the bodily reality of everyday life in the city streets of Naples.

One dimension of that reality, of course, is primarily associated with food and eating, often in conjunction with sexuality.[109] Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky's discussion of Benjamin's engagement with the work of the French feminist writer, Claire Démar, indicates his fascination for Démar's radical feminist/socialist project of the "Rehabilitierung der Sinnlichkeit" (16) [rehabilitation of sensuality]. Deuber-Mankowsy limits her discussion to the "Arcades Project," in which Benjamin cites Démar extensively; however, this "rehabilitation" is evident throughout much of his work, and it cannot be fully understood without examining its intersection with the private sphere.

Benjamin often describes eating experiences as being particularly sensuous. These texts, primarily his thought-images, have received no critical attention in the interpretive discourse. In "Pranzo caprese" [Capri dinner], which is one segment of the thought-image "Essen" [Food], Benjamin recounts an evening when he went to visit Lacis, who was out when he arrived. During the ensuing dialogue with her landlady, he was cajoled into having dinner with the latter. His description of that evening intermingles the sensuality of food and sexuality: "[D]avon gepackt, gewalkt zu werden, ganz und gar, von Kopf bis Fuß, von dieser Speise durchgeknetet, von ihr wie von ihren Händen ergriffen, gepreßt und mit ihrem Saft -- dem Saft der Speise oder dem der Frau, das hätte ich nicht mehr sagen können -- eingerieben zu werden" (Benjamin, "Essen" 379) [To be

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[108] Jephcott's translation, "At the beginning, however, this was a crossing of frontiers not only social but topographical" (11), loses the concept of the threshold altogether.

[109] Benjamin also met Lacis in a shop buying food. While she was attempting to buy almonds, he came to her assistance, supplying her with the Italian word for them.

totally seized and pummelled by this food, from head to foot; to be thoroughly kneaded by it, to be grabbed, pressed as if by its hands and to be rubbed with its juices -- the juices of the food or the woman, I was no longer able to say].[110] In this passage, Benjamin clearly attempted to "rehabilitate" sensuality, albeit from a distinctly male, heterosexual perspective.

A similar intermingling of sexuality and the sensuality of food also occurs in Benjamin's reconstruction of his childhood. In "One-Way Street" (and reprinted in "A Berlin Chronicle"), there is a segment that describes a young child sneaking into the pantry at night to secretly revel in the sensuality of gustatory pleasures. The sexual imagery of the description is unmistakable:

> Im Spalt des kaum geöffneten Speiseschranks dringt seine Hand wie ein Liebender durch die Nacht vor. Ist sie dann in der Finsternis zu Hause, so tastet sie nach Zucker oder Mandeln, nach Sultaninen oder Eingemachtem. Und wie der Liebhaber, ehe er's küßt, sein Mädchen umarmt, so hat der Tastsinn mit ihnen ein Stelldichein, ehe der Mund ihre Süßigkeit kostet. Wie gibt der Honig, geben Haufen von Korinthen, gibt sogar Reis sich schmeichelnd in die Hand. Wie leidenschaftlich dies Begegnen beider, die endlich nun dem Löffel entronnen sind. Dankbar und wild, wie eine, die man aus dem Elternhause sich geraubt hat, gibt hier die Erdbeermarmelade ohne Semmel und gleichsam unter Gottes freiem Himmel sich zu schmecken, und selbst die Butter erwidert mit Zärtlichkeit die Kühnheit eines Werbers, der in ihre Mägdekammer vorstieß. Die Hand, der jugendliche Don Juan, ist bald in alle Zellen und Gelasse eingedrungen, hinter sich rinnende Schichten und strömende Mengen. (Benjamin, "Einbahnstraße" 114)

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[110] The grammatical gender of food ("Speise") is feminine, adding a further dimension to the German original that is lost in the English translation.

> [Through the chink of the scarcely open larder door, his hand advances like a lover through the night. Once at home in the darkness, it gropes towards sugar or almonds, raisins or preserves. And just as the lover embraces his girl before kissing her, the child's hand enjoys a tactile tryst with the comestibles before his mouth savours their sweetness. How flatteringly honey, heaps of currants, even rice yield to his hand! How passionate this meeting of two who have at last escaped the spoon! Grateful and tempestuous, like someone who has been abducted from the parental home, strawberry jam, unencumbered by bread rolls, abandons itself to his delectation and, as if under open sky, even the butter responds tenderly to the boldness of the wooer who has penetrated her boudoir. His hand, the juvenile Don Juan, has soon invaded all the cells and spaces, leaving behind it running layers and streaming plenty. ("One-Way Street" 464)][111]

Touch and taste are closely intertwined in this textual weave, as are past and present sensuality. The early sensual pleasures of childhood return in a new form to include sexuality. The food takes on the passive, yielding role of the woman, with the child = boy in the active male role of engaging in bold invasion and penetration. Although Benjamin was unable to imagine sexual roles other than the dominant ones of his time and class, his attempt to rehabilitate the sensual was a radical move -- especially given that the empirical paradigm of knowledge production was then gaining increasing acceptance in virtually all academic fields. He was true to his pursuit of alternatives to institutional knowledge -- alternatives that included bodily perceptions. In this pursuit, Benjamin attempted to

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[111] Bullock and Jennings' translation has a somewhat different tone than does Benjamin's original text. One reason for this is the rather sophisticated vocabulary found in the translation as opposed to the everyday language found in the original. Second, the translated title of this segment, "Pilfering Child," loses the connotation of secretly eating (usually sweets) of the original title, "Naschendes Kind." Also missing in the translation is the specific reference to "penetrating" the maid's chamber. This omission is significant, for, as Stallybrass and White have amply demonstrated, during the late 19th and early 20th century, middle-class male desire was often strongly bound to the maid.

step over thresholds and to destabilize boundaries in order to present new constellations of passions at the intersection of the emotional and intellectual.

Both in childhood and adulthood, one element of sensual pleasure is the slight danger of being caught doing something forbidden -- something that breaks boundaries. In "One-Way Street," Benjamin reinvests the scene of sneaking food from the pantry with the added dimension of sexuality. This passage is somewhat reminiscent of the Song of Songs in that it combines the sensual pleasures of food with sexual pleasures. It was written shortly after Benjamin's sexual-sensual awakening with Lacis, which, as previously mentioned, he referred to indirectly by way of the Song of Songs in a letter to Scholem. His relationship with Lacis also smacks of the tasting of forbidden fruit, as Benjamin was married and Lacis was involved in another relationship. Moreover, she was neither Jewish nor middle-class. And further, many of the foods so passionately consumed -- almonds, raisins, currants -- are from southern countries, thus suggestive of their passionate first meeting in Italy.

This instance of not adhering to the family timetable of eating only at regular meal times is also a reminder that, in Naples, meals and sensory pleasures are one element of porosity: "Zarte Sonnen entzünden sich in den Glasbottichen mit Eisgetränken. Tag und Nacht strahlen diese Pavillons mit den blassen aromatischen Säften, an denen selbst die Zunge lernt, was es mit der Porosität für Bewandtnis hat" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 311) ["Faint suns shine from glass vats of iced drinks. Day and night the pavilions glow with the pale, aromatic juices that teach even the tongue what porosity can be" ("Naples" 418)]. Eating and drinking are not merely means of fuelling the body, they are a means of experiencing porosity through the body. And indeed, it is often through the body that Benjamin gains insights when with Lacis. This chapter's introductory quotation, taken from "One-Way Street," refers to lighting the way and being enabled to see. Also in "One-Way Street" Benjamin describes Lacis' absence as a loss of hearing: "Ein Tor befindet sich

am Anfang eines langen Weges, der bergab zu dem Hause von ... leitet, die ich allabendlich besuchte. Als sie ausgezogen war, lag die Öffnung des Torbogens von nun an wie eine Ohrmuschel vor mir, die das Gehör verloren hat"("Einbahnstraße" 90) ["At the beginning of the long downhill lane that leads to the house of...., whom I visited each evening, is a gate. After she moved, the opening of its archway henceforth stood before me like an ear that has lost the power of hearing" ("One-Way Street" 447)].[112]

In stark contrast to Naples' voluptuous sensuality is its ubiquitous poverty, and this provides a further dimension of porosity: "Das Elend hat eine Dehnung der Grenzen zustande gebracht" (Benjamin, "Rundfunkgeschichten für Kinder" 214) [Misery has brought about an expansion of boundaries]. In Naples, Benjamin and Lacis were confronted with abject poverty daily, leading them to conclude: "Das Elend ist groß in der Stadt" (Benjamin, "Rundfunkgeschichten für Kinder" 214) [There is great misery in the city]. One of the first observations in "Naples" concerns that widespread poverty, which is evident both in the streets of the city and in how it has been institutionalized. A beggar lies in the street, and his presence indicates a descent -- possibly to the grave or to hell. Streets lined with misery are indicators of a general descent into inhumanity, into a hidden repository of the marginalized: "Ein Bettler liegt gegen den Bürgersteig gelehnt auf dem Fahrdamm und schwenkt wie Abschiednehmende am Bahnhof den leeren Hut. Hier führt das Elend hinab ... durch einen 'Garten der Qualen', noch heute sind die Enterbten darinnen Führer" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 308) ["A beggar lies in the road propped against the sidewalk, waving his empty hat like a leave-taker at a station. Here poverty leads downward ... through a 'garden of agony'; in it, even today, the disinherited are the leaders" ("Naples" 415)].

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[112] The name of the person whose house he visited is elided in the original text. From the German, it is clear that the person was a woman, as the relative pronoun is feminine: "Haus von ... leitet, *die*."

This metaphoric description is then followed by a description of what Lacis and Benjamin observe along the street leading to the poorhouse of Naples -- a material repository of the marginalized: "Zu beiden Seiten der Straße stehen die Bänke der Siechen. Den Heraustretenden folgen sie mit Blicken, die nicht verraten, ob sie ihnen ans Kleid sich klammern, um befreit zu werden oder unvorstellbare Gelüste an ihnen zu büßen" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 308) ["On either side of the road stand benches for the invalids.[113] who follow those going out with glances that do not reveal whether they are clinging to their garments with hopes of being liberated or with hopes of satisfying unimaginable desires" ("Naples" 415)]. The inhabitants of the poorhouse are locked away, allowed out only to sit at the side of the road and to watch life pass them by. The act of locking them away silences them: their requests are mute, spoken only with the body, the eyes. Passers-by can only guess at what those requests might be, as they hurry by, afraid of contagion and seeking to escape their shame. The discomfort of the passers-by is a source of pleasure for the incarcerated: "Im zweiten Hof sind die Kammerausgänge vergittert; dahinter stellen die Krüppel ihre Schäden zur Schau, und der Schrecken verträumter Passanten ist ihre Freude" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 308) ["In the second courtyard, the doorways of the chambers have gratings; behind them the cripples display their deformities, and the shock given to daydreaming passers-by is their joy" ("Naples" 415)]. Their joy is that of forcing the passers-by to acknowledge their existence by means of shocking them, for otherwise those outside would not be aware of them at all.

Benjamin's and Lacis' concept of porosity seeks to give voice to the voiceless. Critics have investigated the recuperation of the living refuse of society in Benjamin's "Arcades Project" but not,

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[113] The German word "Siechen" includes the idea of languishing or wasting away. This is lost in the translation "invalid."

to any great degree, in his other writings.[114] One exception is Gilloch, who examines the importance of certain marginalized figures in Benjamin's investigations into modern urban life. "One of Benjamin's principal goals is to give voice to the 'periphera,' the experiences of those whom modern forms of order strive to render silent and invisible" (Gilloch 9). Those figures are primarily the poor: the families living in overcrowded conditions and struggling to survive, the inhabitants of the poorhouses, and the destitute beggars living in the streets. Gilloch points out Benjamin's attention to those relegated to the outermost margins of society and his disdain for those, like his own family, who live comfortably and would rather not be discomforted by even the sight of the poor and the ill. According to the dominant order, the poor and the ill are "deviant," and, as their numbers climb in the expanding cities, there is an "increasing compartmentalization of space and the removal of disruptive and disturbing figures from everyday life. The poor and the dispossessed vanish as modern 'hygiene' demands the institutionalization and confinement of the dead, the sick, the insane and the disabled" (Gilloch 8).

Foucault refers to "normalizing judgement" that "compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes* ... by bringing into play the binary opposition of the permitted and forbidden" (Foucault, "The Means of Correct Training" 195; emphasis in original). Conspicuous consumption is permitted by the dominant normalizing judgement of the rich and powerful in Benjamin's Berlin, whereas begging, and thereby poverty, are forbidden and must be both punished and ultimately expunged. Beggars are removed from the streets and locked up in the poorhouses or jails where they are neither seen nor heard but can be controlled. Their very presence in the streets is interpreted as an act of resistance against the established order, and it not only

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[114] See especially Wohlfarth, "Et Cetera? The Historian as Chiffonnier," *New German Critique* 39 (1986): 143-68 for a detailed examination of the doubly marginalized figure of the ragpicker, both representation and embodiment of the *Lumpenproletariat*, who ekes out a marginal existence by collecting rubbish and finding a new use for it.

affronts, challenges, and threatens but also plays on the emotions -- specifically, fear and shame: "Armut und Elend wirken so ansteckend, wie man sie Kindern vorstellt, und die närrische Angst, überbevorteilt zu werden, ist nur die dürftige Rationalisierung dieses Gefühls" (Benjamin and Lacis, "Neapel" 308) ["Poverty and misery seem as contagious as they appear in descriptions aimed at children, and the foolish fear of being cheated is only a scanty rationalization for this feeling" ("Naples" 415)]. The unease caused by their own privilege is rationalized by the possibility of contagion by the forbidden -- poverty and misery -- which, in turn, invokes fear.

Benjamin's observations concerning poverty and destitution in Berlin are recorded in "Reise durch die deutsche Inflation" [A Tour through the German Inflation], which later became a chapter in "One-Way Street." Benjamin gave this essay, written shortly before his journey to Capri, to Scholem, who understood it to be about the "immediate horror of the experienced present" (Scholem, *Friendship* 119). In it Benjamin comes to the conclusion: "Unmöglich, in einer deutschen Großstadt zu leben, in welcher Hunger die Elendsten zwingt, von den Scheinen zu leben, mit denen die Vorübergehenden eine Blöße zu decken suchen, die sie verwundet" (Benjamin, "Einbahnstraße" 96) ["It is impossible to remain in a large German city, where hunger forces the most wretched to live on the banknotes with which the passers-by seek to cover an exposure that wounds them" ("One-Way Street" 452)]. He is highly critical of the privileged, who seek to ease their own discomfort by throwing money at the poor rather than attempting to incur some form of substantive change.

Benjamin's own sheltered middle-class childhood in Berlin cut him off from numerous aspects of urban life. Just as the homes and rooms in which his family lived were compartmentalized, due to a desire to fit the norm, so too was the urban landscape. His family's perceived need to "assimilate," to act only as permitted, was complicated by the contradiction of being both in a privileged economic position and being Jews -- a contradiction of which Benjamin

became increasingly aware throughout his life. In later life he understood that his childhood had been spent in the confines of the middle-class world of his family: "In dies Quartier Besitzender blieb ich geschlossen, ohne um ein anderes zu wissen" (Benjamin, "Berliner Kindheit" 287) [I remained enclosed within this district of the propertied without knowing of anything else]. Poverty existed for Benjamin only in the form of beggars, whom he rarely glimpsed: "Die Armen -- für die reichen Kinder meines Alters gab es sie nur als Bettler" (Benjamin, "Berliner Kindheit" 287) [The poor -- for the rich children of my age, existed only as beggars].

Poverty, illness, and death had their assigned spaces far from the homes of the increasingly wealthy and powerful. In those homes where he spent his childhood, although they had more in common with death than with life, there was no room set aside for death: "Das Elend konnte in diesen Räumen keine Stelle haben, in welchen ja nicht einmal der Tod sie hatte. Sie hatten keinen Raum zum Sterben -- darum starben ihre Besitzer im Sanatorium"(Benjamin, *Berliner Chronik* 83) ["Poverty could have no place in these rooms where even death had none. They had no space for dying -- which is why their owners died in a sanatorium" ("A Berlin Chronicle" 41)]. Here one can observe Gilloch's "hygiene," which institutionalizes poverty, misery, illness, and death. Social institutions exercise control by drawing parameters around permissible and impermissible actions, between the worthy and the worthless. These boundaries are not only conceptual but, once again, written on the body: "Schmutz und Elend wachsen wie Mauern als Werk von unsichtbaren Händen um sie hoch" (Benjamin, "Einbahnstraße" 97) [Filth and misery grow up around them like walls, the work of invisible hands ("One-Way Street" 452)]. Unseen hands construct invisible walls around those who live in poverty, effectively silencing them.

The "deviants" of society are controlled not only by means of punishment and regulation but by being categorized as social refuse. The determination of what is garbage and should therefore be discarded, both literally and figuratively, is an effect of a socially constructed from of

ordering.[115] Human detritus, those who challenge existing classifications, are excluded from public discourse: they are criminalized, incarcerated, or simply left to die. The categorization of the destitute as garbage is related to the fact that they are not part of the commodity exchange economy. Within this dominant order, they are deemed non-producing, non-contributing members of society and, therefore, useless and, above all, dispensable. This conceptual transforming of people into rubbish is facilitated by the widespread commodification of people as well as things. Once people become commodified, it is not difficult to turn those who deviate from the norms into society's refuse.[116] This detritus, which consists of both objects and people, is what Benjamin and Lacis examine in Naples and what increasingly becomes the focus of Benjamin's work.

With regard to the "Arcades Project," on which he worked from 1927 until his suicide in 1940, Benjamin outlines his methodology as follows:

> Methode dieser Arbeit ... Ich werde nichts Wertvolles entwenden und mir keine geistvollen Formulierungen aneignen. Aber die Lumpen, den Abfall: die will ich nicht inventarisieren sondern sie auf die einzig mögliche Weise zu ihrem Rechte kommen lassen: sie verwenden. (Benjamin, "Arcades Project" 574)
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> [Method of this work ... I will appropriate nothing valuable and adopt no clever formulations. But the rags, the refuse: I do not wish to take an inventory of them, but rather allow them to come into their own by the only possible means: by using them.]

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[115] Mary Douglas analyses the construction of the category of dirt and demonstrates how it functions as a negative category of social ordering, associated with disorder and, ultimately, with chaos. Geyer-Ryan also discusses the "social value system of purity and filth" (109).

[116] This practice is still alive and well. Helmut Maucher, chair of the Nestlé executive board, was awarded the 1997 prize for the "Unwort des Jahres" [the year's most dehumanizing addition to the German language]. Maucher coined the German term "Wohlstandsmüll," meaning prosperity's waste product, to refer to people unable or (allegedly) unwilling to work (i.e., those who do not contribute to prosperity).

By using both what and whom has been constructed as rubbish, Benjamin attempts to understand the processes involved in making such constructions and so to propose, or at least to imagine, the possibility of more just and humane alternatives. The porosity here is between the everyday, the private, and the academic as well as between theory and practice. This is another example of how Benjamin's relationship with Lacis and their exploration of porosity helped him, as Brodersen indicates, to work beyond established disciplinary boundaries and "to step beyond the limits of his own thinking and creative production" (*Walter Benjamin* 144).

Before Benjamin met Lacis, he was searching for new points of reference, for new ways of understanding the new urban reality. He wrote his scathing observations on inflation in Berlin before travelling to Capri, and he later included them, in only slightly altered form, in "One-Way Street," which was dedicated to Lacis -- the "engineer" of the new street, the new points of reference, in him and his work. In the following passage, Benjamin condemns those who ignore the misery around them and cling to their privileged positions:

> Wer sich der Wahrnehmung des Verfalls nicht entzieht, der wird unverweilt dazu übergehen, eine besondere Rechtfertigung für sein Verweilen, seine Tätigeit und seine Beteiligung an diesem Chaos in Anspruch nehmen. So viele Einsichten ins allgemeine Versagen, so viele Ausnahmen für den eigenen Wirkungskreis, Wohnort und Augenblick. Der blinde Wille, von der persönlichen Existenz eher das Prestige zu retten ... setzt sich fast überall durch. Darum ist die Luft so voll ... von Trugbildern, Luftspiegelungen ... weil jeder auf die optischen Täuschungen seines isolierten Standpunktes sich verpflichtet. (Benjamin, "Einbahnstraße" 98-99)
>
> [Anyone who does not simply refuse to perceive decline will hasten to claim a special justification for his own continued presence, his activity and involvement in

> this chaos. There are as many exceptions for one's own sphere of action, place of residence, and moment of time as there are insights into the general failure. Blind determination to save the prestige of personal existence ... is triumphing almost everywhere. That is why the air is teeming ... with phantoms, mirages of a glorious cultural future breaking upon us overnight in spite of all, for everyone is committed to the optical illusions of his isolated standpoint. ("One-Way Street" 453)]

Benjamin could have been criticizing himself for remaining in Germany and attempting to live his life as he always had -- living in a privileged position and being blind to the conditions that brought about the misery of those not so privileged. In other words, he was part of the complex processes that created and perpetuated the structures that punished anyone who deviated from the norm. Over the years, Benjamin developed a method for permeating these structures. It included recognizing that their boundaries differ in differing contexts and that one needs to employ a shift of perspective -- from that of the dominant to that of the marginalized -- in order to gain an understanding of how they are constructed. Thus the refuse becomes what is most valuable, as can be seen in the following:

> Kleiner methodologischer Vorschlag .. Es ist sehr leicht, für jede Epoche auf ihren verschiedenen "Gebieten" Zweiteilungen nach bestimmten Gesichtspunkten vorzunehmen, dergestalt daß auf der einen Seite der "fruchtbare," "zukunftsvolle," "lebendige," "positive," auf der anderen der vergebliche, rückständige, abgestorbene Teil dieser Epoche liegt.... Daher ist es von entscheidender Wichtigkeit, diesem, vorab ausgeschiedenen, negativen Teile von neuem eine Teilung zu applizieren, derart, daß, mit einer Verschiebung des Gesichtswinkels (nicht aber der Maßstäbe!) auch in ihm von neuem Positives und ein anderes zu Tage tritt als das vorher bezeichnete [sic]. (Benjamin, "Arcades Project" 573)

> [A small, methodological suggestion ... It is very easy for every era to split their own "areas" according to definite perspectives so that on the one hand the "fruitful," "forward-looking," "lively," "positive," are opposed to the futile, antiquated, dead part of the era on the other ... It is therefore of crucial importance to apply a new division to these already eliminated portions so that something positive and something different from the previously designated appears by means of a shift of perspective (but not of standards!)]

In Lacis' work with orphaned children Benjamin found this shifting of perspective from dominant to peripheral, from theory to practice. In Chapter 6 I will explore this in more detail.

Benjamin's relationship with Lacis occurred at the intersection of his life and work and shaped it. Their concept of porosity is vital to understanding that intersection, which includes the following: (1) the interaction of four passions -- emotional, physical, political, and intellectual -- that developed during Benjamin's relationship with Lacis and became permanent dimensions of his subjectivity; (2) the interaction of public and private; (3) the interaction of the intellectual and the physical, which contradicts the traditional mind/body split; and (4) the focus on the perspective of the marginalized. The scene of all this is the modern cityscape, particularly its streets and architecture.

Chapter 6

Lacis, Moscow, and Radio Pedagogy

> *Meinungen sind für den Riesenapparat des gesellschaftlichen Lebens, was Öl für die Maschine; man stellt sich nicht vor eine Turbine und übergießt sie mit Maschinenöl. Man spritzt ein wenig davon in verborgene Nieten und Fugen, die man kennen muß.*
>
> Walter Benjamin

> [Opinions are to the giant apparatus of social life as oil to a machine. One does not stand in front of a turbine and pour machine oil over it. One squirts a bit of it into the hidden rivets and seams that one must be familiar with.]

Benjamin spent two months, December 1926 and January 1927, living in Moscow, and for the next four years he wrote about what he experienced and learned there. As Lacis observed, in going to Moscow he had taken on a specific task: "sich in das ungewöhnlich Milieu einzuleben und es zu verstehen" (*Revolutionär* 54) [to familiarize himself with the unusual social surroundings and to understand them]. Given that he had never been to Russia and did not speak Russian, it was a difficult task, as is evident from what he wrote to Jula Radt: "An dem was ich sehe und höre, werde ich sehr lange zu arbeiten haben, bis es sich mir irgendwie formt" (*Briefe* Vol. 3, 221). ["I will have to work for a very long time on what I am seeing and hearing before it takes on some kind of shape for me" (*Correspondence* 310)].

There were three reasons for Benjamin travelling to Moscow, and they all combined the personal and the professional. The first reason was psychological. As was discussed in Chapter 5, Benjamin often travelled in order to escape from everyday responsibilities, stresses, and hardships. The specific events that occurred shortly before his journey to Moscow included the marriage of the first of his three great loves, Jula Cohn, to a childhood friend of his, Fritz Radt. Subsequently, Benjamin's father, Emil, died after a long and painful illness, whereupon Walter experienced a series

of nervous breakdowns.[117] Furthermore, his financial situation continued to be unstable at best. Unlike some un(der)employed young members of the "Bildungsbürgertum" [educated bourgeoisie], including his friend Adorno, Benjamin no longer received financial support from his parents. The path to a university career had effectively been blocked when Benjamin did not obtain his habilitation, and unemployment for intellectuals was high. Working in Germany as an intellectual not affiliated with a university had become a "brotlose Kunst" [a breadless art; i.e., unpaid work]. The struggle to receive payment for his work from his publishers, who were either unscrupulous or in financially difficulty themselves, proved to be an ongoing battle.[118]

The second reason for his journey to Moscow was professional. For a left-leaning intellectual committed to social change and political engagement, Moscow was one of the most exciting places to be. It was a time of radical change in almost all aspects of life. Particularly in Germany, where there was also great social upheaval, many people were interested in what problems and issues the Russians were attempting to solve. In fact, German interest was so great that the term "revolution tourism" ("Revolutionstourismus") was coined to refer to Germans travelling to Moscow. Initially, Benjamin hoped to establish some form of official tie with Russia based on the themes common to his work and to the work of many Moscow intellectuals. His critique of capitalist society and the role of the intellectual, strongly evident in his work since his stay in Capri (especially in "One-Way Street"), made Moscow a logical place to turn for new ideas and like-minded intellectuals. He was also looking for paid work in Moscow, and his journey provided him with an opportunity to publish a number of essays and articles in Germany. In fact, he financed his trip with money he was given as advances on various pieces he was to write about

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[117] From an unpublished letter, cited in Witte, *Walter Benjamin mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* 139.

[118] At that time, there was no form of government social assistance for any of the unemployed. The law providing unemployment support was passed in July, 1927.

his observations in Moscow (Scholem, "Preface," *Moscow Diary* 5). Again, the personal and the professional overlap.

The third reason for Benjamin's journey was personal. What prompted him to make the final decision to travel to Moscow was news that Lacis had had a serious nervous breakdown, from which she was recovering in a Moscow sanatorium. In spite of the difficulties in procuring a visa to travel to Russia at that time,[119] Benjamin obtained one extremely quickly. He learned of Lacis' illness some time in November, and on 6 December 1926 he arrived in Moscow. Benjamin's love for Lacis is a constant thread through his "Moskauer Tagebuch" [Moscow Diary], a work that has received rather limited critical attention. It was published relatively late (1980) and was thought to be only of "biographical" interest.[120] *Moscow Diary* is of particular interest to me precisely because in it Benjamin documents two months in which many dimensions of his life and work converge and conflict with one another. It provides information about and insights into how Benjamin was dealing with his writing, his position as a writer/intellectual, and his relationship to Lacis and her life partner, Bernhard Reich. Some of the main themes of the diary are ones that he pursued for the rest of his life.

As has been previously discussed, in order to gain a more complete understanding of what made Benjamin, one must look at the intersection of his emotional and intellectual landscapes. As Jaggar argues, reason and emotion are mutually constitutive rather than oppositional. It should be noted that the emotional is being increasingly examined in critical, especially feminist, pedagogy.

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[119] Walter and Dora Benjamin's friend, psychologist Charlotte Wolff, had obtained a visa to visit Moscow two years earlier, and she explains that the difficulty in obtaining a visa was due to the fact that in many districts the inhabitants were starving. Clearly the government did not want foreigners to see these problems (Wolff, *On the Way to Myself* 198). However, Soviet officialdom soon realized the strategic importance of allowing foreign intellectuals into Moscow. Their enthusiasm would translate into "good press" and European approval. Benjamin himself seems to have been unaware of these issues.

[120] The first volumes of the *Gesammelte Schriften* [Collected Works] contain nothing that is considered to be autobiographical writings. Benjamin's travel diaries and city portraits are contained in the last volumes, an indication they were considered of lesser importance than his other work.

Recurring themes in bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* are: (1) the claim that pleasure, excitement, and even pain are not inappropriate in formal learning situations but, rather, are necessary elements of both teaching and learning; and (2) the conclusion that the assumption that truly intellectual work must be cut off from emotions is false. Kathleen Weiler, in *Women Teaching for Change*, notes that the acknowledgment of the necessity of examining the intersection of the public and the personal also requires the inclusion of emotions (63). Magda Lewis, in *Without a Word*, criticizes academic discourse for precluding scrutiny of the private (including emotions). She pays particular attention to the anger of female students experiencing subtle forms of exclusion that are not easily documented with "hard" evidence, and she outlines the positive potential of that anger for teaching and learning (Lewis, *Without a Word* 61-68).

Moscow Diary provides a great deal of evidence concerning Benjamin's emotions while in Moscow. At first he was quite hopeful about his relationship with Lacis and observes "daß sie [Lacis] im Grunde nichts vergißt, was uns angeht" ("Moskauer Tagebuch" 297) ["that she [Lacis] basically forgets nothing that involves us" (*Moscow Diary* 15)]. Yet he also notes Lacis' ambivalence towards any shared intimacy: "Bei Asja wieder ständiger Wechsel zwischen du und Sie" (Benjamin, "Moskauer Tagebuch" 300) ["With Asja still the usual switching back and forth between the formal *Sie* [you] and the informal *Du* [you]" (*Moscow Diary* 19)].

Benjamin was repeatedly disappointed that Reich constantly supervised his visits with Lacis and rarely left them alone for more than a few moments. For example, one evening the three of them attended a play for which they were able to get only two seats together. Benjamin and Lacis sat next to one another during the first act; however, during the intermission, Reich exchanged seats with Lacis, ostensibly out of concern for her frail health: "er meinte, das Übersetzen sei ihr zu anstrengend" (Benjamin, "Moskauer Tagebuch" 305) ["He thought the strain of translating was too much for her" (*Moscow Diary* 25)]. On the following day, Benjamin's hopes to spend time alone

with Lacis were thwarted: "Reich ging nach dem Aufstehen einen Augenblick fort und ich hoffte Asja allein begrüßen zu können. Aber sie kam überhaupt nicht" (Benjamin, "Moskauer Tagebuch" 306) ["Reich stepped out briefly after he got up and I hoped I would be able to greet Asja in private. But she never turned up" (*Moscow Diary* 25)]. Benjamin recounts similar incidents throughout the diary. As Gerhard Richter has indicated, within the context of Benjamin's pronounced interest in the material physiology of Moscow and his detailed attention to the body in *Moscow Diary*, Reich physically keeps Lacis and Benjamin apart, thus thwarting Benjamin's physical desires.

One result of those thwarted desires was Benjamin's jealousy, not only of Reich, but of anyone who kept him and Lacis apart. When Lacis' new Jewish roommate arrived and she spent a great deal of time speaking with her, Benjamin remarked: "Mir ist deren Anwesenheit weniger angenehm, weil ich jetzt, selbst wenn Reich nicht zugegen ist, Asja kaum allein spreche" ("Moskauer Tagebuch" 322) [I find her [the roommate's] presence less than agreeable because now, even when Reich is not around, I rarely speak to Asja in private anymore].[121] Benjamin struggled for the attention both of a woman he loved and of the intellectual world she inhabited.

In one telling passage, the further fusion of the public and private is clearly visible. Benjamin describes his first two weeks in Moscow as follows: "Ich bin vor eine fast uneinnehmbare Festung geraten. Allerdings sage ich mir, daß schon mein Erscheinen vor dieser Festung, Moskau, einen ersten Erfolg bedeutet.... Reichs Position ist stark" ("Moskauer Tagebuch" 316) ["I find myself facing an almost impregnable fortress. Nevertheless I tell myself that my mere appearance before this fortress, Moscow, already constitutes an initial triumph ... Reich's position is strong" (*Moscow*

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[121] My translation. I disagree with Gary Smith's translation of this sentence. He interprets "deren Anwesenheit" -- whose presence -- to refer to Lacis; however, I understand the antecedent to be the roommate, not Lacis. Smith's interpretation makes little sense: why would Benjamin find Lacis' presence disagreeable when he wishes nothing more than to be alone with her?

Diary 34)]. Benjamin was faced with a double fortress -- that of a cold, unfamiliar city and that of this woman whom he loved so passionately but who appeared ambivalent towards him and remained at a physical and emotional distance. Reich's position in Moscow was that of an accepted and successful director on the one hand and Lacis' lover/partner on the other. He occupied a strong position in her life and in Moscow's intellectual life. And, of course, his already strong position in relation to Lacis was made stronger by the fact that she was ill and therefore much more dependent on him than was normally the case.

Yet in spite of Reich's watchful eye, there were moments of intimacy between Benjamin and Lacis. After the first two weeks of his stay, they were once again on closer terms: "Das du zwischen uns scheint sich zu behaupten" (Benjamin, "Moskauer Tagebuch" 317). "The familiar *du* [you] seems to have gained ground between us" (*Moscow Diary* 35)]. The ice seemed to have broken between the two of them to such a degree that Benjamin suggested adding a new element to their relationship: "Heute sagte ich ihr, daß ich jetzt ein Kind von ihr haben möchte" (Benjamin, "Moskauer Tagebuch 317) ["Today I told her that I now wanted to have a child by her" (*Moscow Diary* 35)]. Benjamin's desire to have a child at this point could, of course, be a desire for physical proof of their union -- and his virility. Richter provides convincing evidence for his assertion that Benjamin was most probably impotent during his visit to Moscow (109-11). He further demonstrates that Benjamin's "physical impotence is translated into intellectual impotence in the realm of writing" (Richter 110). Within the male sexual economy, using Lacis to produce a child would re-assert both his physical and intellectual virility.[122]

Lacis was in fact in no state to have a child. Physical, emotional, and intellectual dimensions are intertwined throughout the diary, which is scattered with such observations as: "Asja ging es

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[122] Lacis' reaction to and opinion of Benjamin's desire to have a child with her remains unknown.

nicht gut" ("Moskauer Tagebuch" 313) ["Asja was not feeling well" (*Moscow Diary* 31)]; "Sie ist nach dem Kohlensäurebad ... ermüdet" ("Moskauer Tagebuch" 297) ["She is tired after the carbonic acid bath" (*Moscow Diary* 16)]. Her health was a constant concern, not only in terms of her well-being, but also because it was her ill health, together with Reich's interference, that kept Benjamin and Lacis apart.

The importance of her physical presence is evident from Benjamin's first reference to Lacis: "Asja sah nicht schön, wild unter einer russischen Pelzmütze aus, das Gesicht durch das lange Liegen etwas verbreitet" ("Moskauer Tagebuch" 292) ["Asja did not look beautiful, wild beneath her Russian fur hat, her face somewhat puffy from all the time she had spent bedridden" (*Moscow Diary* 9)]. His attempts at physical closeness were generally unsuccessful: "Als sie hereinkam, wollte ich sie küssen. Wie meist, mißlang es" ("Moskauer Tagebuch" 309) ["As she entered the room, I wanted to kiss her. As usual, it proved unsuccessful" (*Moscow Diary* 27)]. However, their few moments of brief physical contact are carefully noted: "Da fühlte ich an meinem Halse Asjas Hand.... Mir wurde bei dieser Berührung inne, wie lange schon mich keine Hand freundlich berührt hat" ("Moskauer Tagebuch" 342) ["Suddenly I felt her hand on my neck.... At this contact I realized just how long it had been since any hand had touched me with such gentleness" (*Moscow Diary* 57)]. Benjamin watched Lacis with great intensity: "Es geht mir so öfter: ich höre kaum, was sie sagt, weil ich so intensiv auf sie sehe" (Benjamin, "Moskauer Tagebuch" 303) ["This often happens to me: I barely hear what she is saying because I am examining her so intently" (*Moscow Diary* 21)]. He felt that her gaze had a certain power over him: "Ihr Blick, wenn sie lange mich ansieht ... hat nichts von seiner Gewalt über mich verloren" (Benjamin, "Moskauer Tagebuch" 317) ["the long gazes she directs at me ... have lost none of their power over me" (*Moscow Diary* 35)].

Benjamin's detailed attention to Lacis' body, her clothing, and the condition of her health, are not solely due to his feelings for her; they are also linked to his concern with the physical modes

of being he encountered in Moscow. In writing about his Moscow essay to Hofmannsthal, he says that in it he had attempted to depict that with which he was most concerned: "die konkreten Lebenserscheinungen, die mich am tiefsten betroffen haben" (*Briefe* Vol. 3, 257) ["the concrete phenomena of daily life, which affected me most deeply" (*Correspondence* 314)]. Without the physical presence of Lacis, he was unable to experience the city. As he said to her: "In meinem Leben ist Moskau nun einmal so angelegt, daß ich es nur durch Dich erfahren kann" ("Moskauer Tagebuch" 94) ["The place Moscow now occupies in my life is such that I can only experience it through you" (*Moscow Diary* 380)].

While throughout the diary Benjamin certainly portrays Lacis as an object of desire, she is of even greater significance to his work. In recounting a conversation they had concerning a paper he planned to write, he again becomes clearly aware of her importance to his intellectual work: "[I]ch hatte von neuem festzustellen, wie sehr bei mir die Möglichkeit, solche Themen in Angriff zu nehmen von dem Kontakt mir ihr abhängt" (Benjamin, "Mokauer Tagebuch" 299) ["I once again realize just to what extent the possibility of tackling these subjects depends on my contact with her" (*Moscow Diary* 18)]. It seems that he was only able to engage in intellectual projects through her. She was vital to his work because of her intellect, the things he learned from her about Russian theatre, and her work with children's theatre. Concretely, she provided him with important contacts both in Moscow and Berlin, and she instilled in him a passion not only for her, but for work and politics. It was through her that he learned about the intellectual world of Moscow and the opportunities it held for him, both in terms of paid work and insights.

Benjamin wrote the following concerning his motivations and hopes for his trip to Moscow. These are his "official" reasons for the journey:[123]

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[123] This is taken from a draft of the preface to a planned series based on the diary. This series was never published.

Mehr und mehr wird in Deutschland.... die Fragwürdigkeit des freien Schriftstellers als solchen empfunden und man wird sich allmählich darüber klar, daß der Schriftsteller (wie überhaupt der Intellektuelle im weiteren Sinne) ... im Auftrag einer Klasse arbeitet und sein Mandat von einer Klasse erhält. Daß die wirtschaftliche Existenzbasis des Intellektuellen immer schmäler wird, hat diese Klarstellung in letzter Zeit beschleunigt. . Unter diesen Umständen ist der Anteil der deutschen Intelligenz an Rußland nicht nur abstrakte Sympathie, sondern es leitet sie ein sachliches Interesse. Sie will erfahren: Wie sieht die Intelligenz in einem Lande aus, in dem ihr Auftraggeber das Proletariat ist? Wie gestaltet das Proletariat ihre Lebensbedingungen und welche Umwelt findet sie vor? Was haben sie von einer proletarischen Regierung zu erwarten? (Benjamin, "Anmerkungen" 781-82)

[In Germany ... the status of the unaffiliated writer is being put into question and one is gradually realizing that the writer (like the intellectual in the broadest sense of the term) ... works in the service of a class and receives his mandate from that class. Given the fact that it is ever more difficult for an intellectual to make a living, this particular realization has been accelerating of late. .. Given these circumstances, the sympathy of the German intelligentsia for Russia is not merely abstract, but has to do with a concrete interest. It is curious to find out: how does the intelligentsia fare in a nation in which the proletariat is the employer? How does the proletariat define the conditions essential to its existence and what kind of environment will the intelligentsia find? What can it expect of a proletarian government? ("Editorial Notes" *Moscow Diary* 133-34)]

In other words, Benjamin was looking for an alternative to the situation in Germany. There, based on an unarticulated but inflexible notion of what constituted acceptable disciplines, methodologies, and research subjects, the university determined who was a scholar and whose work was worthy of consideration. The work of intellectuals not affiliated with the university was increasingly affected by financial considerations. Selling the work took precedence over the quality of the work -- a situation that Benjamin condemned. Even worse, according to Benjamin, was the fact that writers sold their work and produced what was expected of them without even recognizing that they were doing so: "Die große Masse der Geistigen ... ist in trostloser Lage.... Die Journalisten, Romanciers und Literaten sind meistens zu jedem Kompromiß berreit. Nur wissen sie das nicht, und eben dies ist der Grund ihrer Mißerfolge.... sie wissen nicht, daß sie käuflich sind" (Benjamin, "Käuflich doch unverwertbar" 630) [The great majority of intellectuals ... are in a desolate situation.... Journalists, novelists and writers are most often willing to enter into a compromise. Only they do not know, and that is the very reason for their lack of success ... they do not know that they are purchasable]. They could be more successful if they were to realize their marketability, yet at what price would that come? The success of the writer was measured in terms of sales.[124] The German word "käuflich" means both marketable and corruptible, suggesting that the two are inseparable -- a significant double meaning lost in the English translation.

The profession of the literary critic was clearly undergoing a profound change in Germany. What had been taken for granted for many years was now being questioned: which types of texts merited critical scrutiny? how were they to be scrutinized? and to what ends? The purely aesthetic,

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[124] It has been said by those who view Benjamin as a failure that he had an abysmal publishing record. The assumption that intellectual worth is always a function of publishability and marketability is certainly questionable. Furthermore, during his lifetime Benjamin published 447 items -- a mixture of books, essays, book reviews, social commentary, and articles in scholarly journals (Tiedemann and Schweppenhäuser, "Bibliographie" 477-519).

contemplative attitude towards "Literature" was no longer appropriate: the question of the relevance of art needed to be addressed. The critic was no longer primarily the upholder of allegedly universal bourgeois values but also a player in the redefinition of literature, culture, and society: he/she was part of a growing network of exchange relationships in which both things and people were being increasingly commodified. (Wolin 119-20). As Benjamin observed before his trip to Moscow: "Der Kritiker ist Stratege im Literaturkampf"("Einbahnstraße" 108) ["The critic is a strategist in the literary struggle"("One-Way Street" 460)].

Moscow at that time was an ideal place in which to observe new forms of that struggle, as Benjamin repeatedly confirms in his letters. While still in Moscow he wrote to Jula Radt: "Die Gegenwart in diesen Verhältnissen ... hat einen außerordentlichen Wert. Es ist alles im Bau oder Umbau und beinah jeder Augenblick stellt sehr kritische Fragen" (*Briefe* Vol. 3, 221) ["The situation here ... is of extraordinary value. Everything is in the process of being built or rebuilt and almost every moment poses very critical questions" (*Correspondence* 310)]. After returning to Berlin, he explained to Scholem: "Aber zwei Monate, in denen ich so oder so in und mit der Stadt mich herumschlagen mußte, haben mir ... doch Dinge gegeben, zu denen ich auf anderm Wege kaum gekommen wäre" (*Briefe* Vol. 3, 312) ["But two months in which, one way or another, I had to struggle in and with the city have given me some understanding of things that I would not have achieved in any other way" (*Correspondence* 312)].

In seeking answers to his questions regarding the place of the intellectual in a society governed by the proletariat, Benjamin was, at first, favourably impressed by what he encountered:

> Zum ersten Mal befand ich mich in einer Stadt, in der ich, auf den bloßen Titel des Schriftstellers hin, Vergünstigungen materieller und administrativer Art genoß. (Ich habe keine Stadt außer Moskau kennengelernt, wo einem Schriftsteller von

> staateswegen - denn die Hotels sind in Bewirtschaftung der Sowjets - der Preis eines Zimmers ermäßigt wird.). ("Anmerkungen" 782)
>
> [I found myself in a city where in my sheer capacity as a writer I enjoyed privileges of both a material and administrative sort. (I know of no other city except Moscow where the state would pay for a writer's room -- after all, the hotels are all run by the Soviet.). (G. Smith "Editorial Notes" *Moscow Diary* 134)][125]

As time went on, however, and he gained more insight into the situations of intellectuals in Russia, this initial enthusiasm paled and he became more critical

These insights came, in no small part, through Lacis, both from her own work with children's theatre and film and her contacts with Russian theatre. Benjamin's first encounter with revolutionary or proletarian theatre was in Capri. During the time he and Lacis spent together, she told him of her work in proletarian children's theatre (in Orel, 1918-19). There she worked with the "besprisorniki" -- children who had been orphaned as a result of the First World War and the Russian Civil War. They were a lost generation of traumatized beings, without families or any form of support, who banded together into roving gangs, engaging in whatever activities would enable them to survive. When these children were placed under state care in orphanages, most of them repeatedly ran away. Those who stayed had their primary physical needs taken care of -- food, shelter, clothing -- but were, for the most part, totally uninterested in life. Lacis used theatre, first of all, to pull them out of their lethargy:

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[125] Gary Smith's translation is inaccurate. Benjamin states that he was given the room at a reduced price, not at no cost. Throughout the *Diary*, numerous comments about the room provide further evidence that Benjamin in fact paid a reduced room rate and did not live in the hotel for free.

> Um sie aus ihrer Lethargie herauszuholen, bedurfte es einer Aufgabe, die sie *ganz* zu ergreifen und ihre traumatisierten Fähigkeiten freizusetzen vermochte. Ich wußte, welche ungeheuere Kraft im Theaterspielen steckt.... Ich war überzeugt, daß man Kinder durch das Spiel wecken und entwickeln konnte. (Lacis, *Revolutionär im Beruf* 21-22; emphasis in original)
>
> [In order to bring them out of their lethargy, it was necessary to *totally* engage them in tasks that would set free their traumatized capabilities. I knew what tremendous power lay in theatre games I was convinced that one could awaken and develop children through play. (emphasis in original)]

Once she had brought the children back to life, so to speak, her educational goal for them was: "ihre ästhetische Erziehung, die Entwicklung ihrer ästhetischen und moralischen Fähigkeiten. Ich wollte die Kinder dazu bringen, daß ihr Auge besser sieht, ihr Ohr feiner hört, ihre Hände aus dem ungeformten Material nützliche Sachen gestalten" (Lacis, *Revolutionär im Beruf* 22) [their aesthetic upbringing, the development of their aesthetic and moral capabilities. I wanted to induce the children to use their eyes to see better, their ears to hear more accurately, their hands to create useful things from unformed materials]. Lacis wanted to engage the children in something exciting and meaningful in order to awaken their interest in life, to discover and strengthen their various talents, to develop their abilities to observe the world around them, and to instill in them an aesthetic and critical moral sense. She continued to develop both the theory and practice of her work when she later became involved with the street gangs in Moscow. The children became engaged in what they were doing by first becoming involved in all stages of preparing for and performing a play. It was not the finished product that was important, but rather the process of negotiating the best way to perform the play. They discussed, rehearsed, and changed the scenes

as became necessary, made costumes, found and often played appropriate music, and built and painted sets. One measure of the success of the project can be seen in the number of children it attracted: Lacis began with a group of about thirty, and, as those involved told others about it, the group swelled to approximately 200. She was also supported by the local authorities, whom she convinced to supply a daily breakfast, pencils, paints, books, and material that the older children sewed into clothing and costumes (Lacis, *Revolutionär im Beruf* 54).

From his discussions with Lacis about this work, first in Capri and then in Moscow, Benjamin was able to write a theoretical piece on children's theatre for German readers: "Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters" [Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre]. On one level, this contact with theatre also awakened Benjamin's eye for the theatrical and the improvized in everyday life. In "Naples," Benjamin and Lacis comment repeatedly on the theatrality of the beggars and peddlers on Capri's streets and on how the smallest incident could be transformed from an insignificant event into a performance. On another level, theorizing with Lacis about the pedagogical functions of theatre resonated with Benjamin's explicit concerns about education, which dated back to his involvement with the Student Reform Movement. During that time, he also rejected bourgeois notions of education. However, in those days he and his group envisioned replacing established, bourgeois forms of education with an even more elitist system in which a select intellectually superior, few would lead and reform society in accordance with their extraordinary insights.

As a leading member of the Student Reform Movement, Benjamin was involved in theorizing about an ideal world that had no connection to the real world. In his writing during that time, he repeatedly emphasized the significance of youth, whom he considered to be the only hope for a better future. Who or what did he mean by "youth?" In one of his early articles in the journal of the Student Reform Movement he wrote: "Der universellste Repäsentant der Jugend ist Faust,

... denn nirgends ist er beschränkt, stets sieht er neue Ziele die er verwirklichen muß" (Benjamin, "Das Dornröschen" 11) [The most universal representative of youth is Faust, ... as he knows no bounds and always sees new goals he must realize]. Benjamin's ideal youth at that time was a literary figure clearly marked by gender and class. Benjamin asked the question: "zu welchem Grund wollen wir Schulreform?" [for what reason do we want school reform?]. To which he answered: for "Fortpflanzung geistiger Werte" [propagation of intellectual values] as they are represented in the high culture of, for example, Goethe and his literary figure Faust ("Die Schulreform, eine Kulturbewegung" 13).

When his fellow reformers whole-heartedly embraced the First World War, Benjamin immediately disassociated himself from the group, becoming disillusioned with purely idealized forms of social theory and social change. Lacis showed him the importance of interweaving theory and practice, the one informing the other, with the explicit goal of social change aimed at improving the lives of the marginalized. This was a new, exciting possibility, and it explains in part why he was inspired to take up political work once again and why he found Lacis so remarkable. In a letter to Scholem from Capri, in conjunction with an allusion to Lacis, Benjamin referred to a "Wendung, die in mir den Willen erweckt hat, die aktualen [sic] und politischen Momente in meinen Gedanken nicht wie bisher ... zu maskieren, sondern zu entwickeln" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 511) ["change that awakened in me the will not to mask the actual and political elements of my ideas in the ... way I did before, but rather to develop them" (*Correspondence* 257)]. Three months earlier, in a letter to Salomon, Benjamin refers to his "politische Arbeitspläne" [political plans for his work], adding that it was a fortuitous time to continue to work on those plans: "Gerade jetzt käme dieses Gedankenfeld bei mir unter den Pflug" (*Briefe* Vol. 2, 491) [Right now would be the time that this field of thought would become arable for me]. His work noticeably changes during his relationship with Lacis. As she observes: "[i]m ganzen war Benjamin jetzt konzentrierter, stärker mit der Praxis,

mit der Erde verbunden. Er schrieb auch viel einfacher als früher" (Lacis, *Revolutionär im Beruf* 59) [in general, Benjamin was now more focused, more strongly bound to practice, to the earth. He also wrote much more easily than before].

In the essay concerning proletarian children's theatre,"Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters" [Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre], Benjamin criticizes middle-class education based on the bourgeois interest in, and reliance upon, a correct method of educating a student to become a "better person" -- a vague concept not connected to the real world. Proletarian education, by contrast, provides a framework that demands the inclusion of the child's entire life: "es muß sein [des Kindes] ganzes Leben ergriffen werden" (Benjamin, "Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters" 764) [its (the child's) whole life must be deeply affected]. This is quite unlike Benjamin's previous notions regarding education -- notions based on abstract concepts and entailing an elite governing class. Lacis' pedagogical interests and practice clearly contributed to grounding Benjamin and enabling him to envision learning and everyday life together.

Closely related to this essay, "Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters" [Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre], are Benjamin's radio plays and talks, which form a large body of work that, as yet, has received little attention. One of the reasons for this neglect is the simple fact that most of it was published relatively late and has not yet been translated. Furthermore, many of the radio essays are not identified as such in the *Gesammelte Schriften* [Collected Works]. But the main reason these works have been neglected concerns Adorno's conviction that Benjamin was forced to write them in order to earn money (much as Benjamin's friend, Erich Gutkind, was forced to become a margarine salesman). Adorno only mentions the radio plays because the years during which they were written and performed, 1929 to 1932, were the only years that Benjamin had relatively few financial worries: "er konnte einigermaßen sorgenfrei existieren" (*Über Walter Benjamin* 87) [he could lead a more or less untroubled existence]. Adorno's dismissal of this work

is partially based on convictions he shared with Horkheimer: (1) mass culture is separate from, and inferior to, "real" culture, and (2) the use of modern technology can only lead to disaster. Seen against the background of Nazi Germany, which was the first regime to mobilize modern technology for the purposes of propaganda, entertainment, and wish fulfillment, Adorno's and Horkheimer's views make sense. Benjamin, however, at the end of "One-Way Street," argues that (1) technology could be used as a democratic tool for positive change, and (2) it could lead to catastrophic events that would be even worse than the First World War. His view, unlike that of his Frankfurt School colleagues, takes into account both negative and positive possibilities. Also unlike Adorno and Horkheimer, Benjamin was concerned about education and believed that the radio could be a viable means of popularizing knowledge without necessarily diluting it. Institutional forms of education were problematic for Benjamin, as they were a means of control, yet he understood that education also had the potential to liberate:

> Denn Bildung als Befreiungsmittel der Beherrschten und "Bildung" als ein Instrument der Unterdrücker dringen beide aufs Allgemeinverständliche, Populäre. Nun ist die "allgemeine" Bildung, die vor hundert Jahren als Kulturparole der herrschenden Klasse aufkam, ein Herrschafts-, kein Befreiungsinstrument gewesen. Die Befreiung nimmt gerade das Spezialistentum zum Ausgang und führt zur Demaskierung dieses Kulturprogramms. (Benjamin, "Hebel gegen einen neuen Bewunderer verteidigt" 203)

> [Education as a means of liberation of the dominated and education as an instrument of the oppressor both penetrate the generally intelligible, the popular. The general education that arose as the cultural maxim of the ruling class a hundred years ago

was an instrument of domination, not liberation. Liberation takes specialization as its starting point and leads to the unmasking of this cultural program.]

Benjamin began working for radio in 1925, after beginning his relationship with Lacis and before the failure of his habilitation attempt. The works written for radio fall into three categories. First, there were the "Hörmodelle" [radio models], which were radio plays based on real life situations, that gave listeners possible ways of dealing with comparable situations in their own lives. These plays are similar in content and intention to "Milieustücke" [situation pieces], which Lacis describes in her essay about Soviet theatre: "In ihnen stellt sich auch das normal ablaufende Leben als eine Gefahrzone dar mit tausend Hindernissen, an denen die Energie sich zermürbt, mit tausend Fallen, in die man fällt" (Lacis, "Sowjet-Dramaturgie" 148) [The normal passing of life is represented in them as a danger zone with thousands of obstacles, on which one's energy is worn down, and with thousands of traps into which one falls]. By presenting the audience with real life situations and suggestions for dealing with them, it was believed that these plays would inspire the need "aufgeklärt, belehrt, gewarnt zu werden" (Lacis, "Sowjet-Dramaturgie" 148) [to become enlightened, taught and warned]. Certainly there was a strong element of revolutionary propaganda in these plays; however, Benjamin's idea was, for pedagogical purposes, to set a radio play -- a totally new genre -- within the everyday reality of its listeners. Situating the pedagogical experience within the realm of the everyday was in stark contrast to the then widespread humanistic idea that people would become better human beings if they were exposed to "great literature."

The second group of radio works includes stories written for children, "Rundfunkgeschichten für Kinder" [Radio Stories for Children], while the third group is made up of the "Literarische Rundfunkvorträge" [Literary Radio Lectures]. Both groups are unabashedly educational and political. With his literary essays and stories Benjamin wished to achieve more than did the numerous Frankfurt professors who chattered on the radio: "Hier quatschen alle

Universitätslehrer durch den Rundfunk" (*Briefe* Vol. 3, 14) ["All the university professors here blather away on the radio" (*Correspondence* 262)]. His criticism is not so much directed at professors being on the radio, as at their foolishness in trying to simply transfer to it the traditional lecture format. The radio was a new medium, and it had new requirements: "Er [der Rundfunk] verlangt eine gänzliche Umgestaltung und Umgruppierung des Stoffes" (Benjamin, "Zweierlei Volkstümlichkeiten" 672) [It requires an entirely new formulation and regrouping of the material]. Thus, for Benjamin, these lectures were a particular kind of assignment: "eine Aufgabe mit eigenen Form-Artgesetzen" (Benjamin, "Zweierlei Volkstümlichkeiten" 671) [an assignment with its own laws determined by its form].

There is a striking similarity between Benjamin's understanding of possible uses of radio and his explication of the age of mechanical reproduction. Reinhard Döhl, in his essay "Walter Benjamins Rundfunkarbeit" [Walter Benjamin's Radio Work], observes that Benjamin's mechanical reproduction essay is based not only on his theoretical readings and considerations, but also on five years of practical experience of working with and in the new medium of radio. To this observation it should be added that his association with Lacis also played a significant role. In many ways Benjamin's radio work is an attempt to apply practically the theoretical framework she used in her work with children's theatre. Lacis herself was interested in the application of new media to pedagogical purposes; however, her efforts were directed at organizing and implementing the use of film for teaching children.[126]

Benjamin's radio plays and talks differed from both the standard and the purely didactic radio plays being written and performed at that time. He wanted the listeners to understand the particular qualities of this new medium and, to this end, designed both new goals and new content.

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[126] Her essay, "Deti i kino" [Children and film], co-written with Keilina, makes a case for the need to include pedagogical films in the school curriculum, based on the widespread use of such films in German schools.

For example, in the play "Radau um Kasperl" [Fuss about Casper], Benjamin emphasized sound in a manner that was designed to help the listeners understand how the new medium functioned. He attempted to educate not only with the content of his talks, but also with and about the medium within which that content existed. While others used the radio for one-way transmission to the audience, Benjamin insisted on the importance of feedback. He did not want his listeners to be mere consumers; he wanted them to be active participants. He attempted to establish interactive communication -- a dialogue rather than a monologue -- which, at the time, radically altered the relationship between academic and popular knowledge:

> Denn hier handelt es sich um eine Popularität, die nicht allein das Wissen mit der Richtung auf die Öffentlichkeit, sondern zugleich die Öffentlichkeit mit der Richtung auf das Wissen in Bewegung setzt. Mit einem Wort: das wirklich volkstümliche Interesse ist immer aktiv, es verwandelt den Wissensstoff und wirkt in die Wissenschaft selber ein. (Benjamin, "Zweierlei Volkstümlichkeiten" 672)

> [It is a question of a popularity that not only moves knowledge in the direction of the public but simultaneously moves the public in the direction of knowledge. In other words, true popular interest is always active, it transforms the material of knowledge and exerts an influence on the knowledge itself.]

Benjamin understood knowledge not as a fixed entity preserved in an institution, but as part of people's everyday lives. His goal was a particular form of knowledge: "ein wirklich lebendiges Wissen, nicht nur ein abstraktes" (Benjamin, "Zweierlei Volkstümlichkeiten" 672) [a real, living knowledge, not only an abstract one].

To quite a degree, what Benjamin learned about the potential of theatre for social change as well as about new ways of understanding theatre and the medium of film came from Lacis'

children's theatre. She pioneered the use of film in children's education in the Soviet Union, and Benjamin witnessed some of her attempts. Politicization played a key role in Lacis' activities as well as in Benjamin's radio work and later essays. For Lacis, politics was Communism; it is not to be forgotten that she was one of the leading agitprop theatre people of her time. For Benjamin, politics was a way of teaching critical skills rather than of imparting a particular viewpoint or agenda. He, like Adorno and Horkheimer, was wary of the use of new cultural forms and technology for propagandizing, and the Nazi regime certainly proved the need for such wariness. The critical skills Benjamin aspired to impart included watching for warning signs of impending disaster -- warning signs that the people of the Weimar Republic either missed or ignored (Kaulen 34). Benjamin further recognized that all forms of cultural production were increasingly becoming products designed for passive consumption and maximization of profits. In other words, they were becoming commodities in a network of economic exchange.

The revolutionary vision of theatre that Lacis and her colleagues espoused was based on providing a means of education that involved the audience in serious thought concerning pressing social issues, with the ultimate goal being social change. The process of producing such theatre was not traditional, linear, and hierarchical: it was interactive, democratic, and participatory.

Benjamin again encountered this understanding of the role and function of theatre in the performances he attended in Moscow, primarily those influenced by prominent director Vsevolod Meyerhold, who is often credited with being the first director who placed the theatre in the service of the Revolution. He insisted that actors must think as well as perform; they were not merely to get on the stage and act as directed. The process of negotiating and changing the play was more important than simply achieving a finished product. In fact, there never really was a finished product in Meyerhold's (and many other directors') productions; the play was supposed to evolve with every performance.

Other features that distinguished Meyerhold's productions from traditional Russian theatre were, in Benjamin's words, that: "Er spielt ohne Vorhang, ohne Rampenbeleuchtung, mit verschiebbaren Dekorationen"("Neue Dichtung in Russland" 757-58) [He performs without a curtain, without footlights, with moveable sets.] This was not theatre that created an illusion. Nor was it to be measured by its aesthetic qualities. It did not tell an entertaining story but, rather, attempted to show real life situations. Through the insertion of a series of tableaux that disrupted the plot and action of the play, the audience was supposed to be kept from becoming too involved with the plot or identifying too strongly with the characters. This disruption of illusion and lack of familiar conventions served as a continuous reminder to the audience that they were watching a play -- constructed scenes that had been put together to cause the audience to adopt a critical stance and to take action against social injustice.

These goals bear a strong resemblance to what Benjamin attempted to achieve in "One-Way Street." As Wolin observes: "The overall effect ... on the reader was intended to be one of shock: by wrenching elements of everyday life from their original contexts and rearranging them in a new constellation, Benjamin hoped to divest them of their familiarity and thereby stir the reader from a state of passivity into an active and critical posture" (124). This is also the methodology Benjamin later employed in the "Arcades Project."

Just as Meyerhold expected his actors to think and actively participate in the process of producing a play, he expected the audience to join in as well. It was not unusual for his audience to fill out a form about what they had seen, answering questions about the effectiveness of the play, whether the characters' motivations and actions were believable, and whether or not the play constituted Revolutionary theatre. Furthermore, the audience would engage in long, often heated debates with the actors, director, and writer about the piece they had just seen. In addition, the workers' correspondents, "Rabkorr," would write about every play they saw, discuss it with their

fellow workers, and invite theatre people (especially playwrights) to their discussions. The ideas, critiques, comments, and opinions expressed in these discussions were then used to continue to develop the play. These were strategies similar to the ones Benjamin used in his radio plays and talks.

Benjamin was neither interested in selling people a product to be consumed nor in being a proponent of bourgeois values; rather, he, too, felt the need to engage audiences in the interest of social change. For Benjamin, social change was to be the direction of increased social justice, and this could only be achieved through public participation and a critique of the assumption of the inevitability of progress. He had already made this clear in "One-Way Street." Wolin aptly summarizes some of its main themes as follows: "One-Way Street represents a frontal assault on the hypocrisy and decadence of the bourgeois class, its catastrophic mismanagement of economic life, its ruthless sacrifice of all personal, affective considerations to the self-serving ideology of maximizing one's profits, its savage devastation of nature" (121). It was time for a radical change: "social conditions have become too grave for any naive trust in the Enlightenment myth of cumulative historical progress" (Wolin 123). A broad spectrum of society needed to take action; faith in progress was insufficient.

Beyond these general social goals, a pressing question for Benjamin was, what did all this mean for the theatre critic and, by extension, for the writer/intellectual? In Germany most plays were produced, rehearsed, and performed until the final product was achieved. It was the critic's job to see it on opening night and, alone in his room, to write up what he thought of the performance. In Moscow the critic was virtually superfluous. This kind of intellectual, who in bourgeois Western Europe points out the aesthetic qualities of plays in order to influence the taste of the audience, was neither required nor desired in Moscow.

Benjamin made a telling distinction: "Die Theaterkritik, in Europa eine Methode, das Publikum zu beinflussen, ist in Rußland ein Mittel, es zu organisieren" ("Wie ein russischer Theatererfolg aussieht" 561) [Theatre criticism, a method of influencing the audience in Europe, is a means of organizing the audience in Russia]. Russian criticism was not an intellectual battle between the professional critics for the opinions, tastes, and pocketbooks of the audience, but rather a means of mobilizing the audience to think and become involved in the issues of the day. Criticism was a way of prompting the general public to discuss important social issues and to be actively involved not only in making "art," but also in critical issues of social change. Criticism was no longer dependent upon the isolated individual but on group interaction, discussion, and negotiation. Traditional critics, defined as those who, for a fee, publicly expressed their criticisms in print, became superfluous.[127] Benjamin increasingly discovered that to rethink public life and society in terms of participatory democracy could mean that there would be little, if any, role for the intellectual. Certainly this was disquieting to someone who could well be eliminating his own livelihood by pursuing his social goals.

Of course this new form of theatre was by no means as ideal as it first seemed. Benjamin noticed that much of the structure and processes of what determined success or failure remained unchanged. He observed that the "Rabkorr" [workers' correspondents] assumed much power and that directors and playwrights often consulted with them before plays were written and performed. As a result, plays were often a compromise between the writer and the most powerful of the Rabkorr.

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[127] The need to include women in the process of social change aspired to by this kind of theatre is rarely, if ever, discussed. The world of the theatre was overwhelmingly dominated by men, as were other loci of cultural production.

There was also the problem of audience self-censorship. In Benjamin's discussion of Meyerhold's controversial revival and revolutionary revision of a classical play, Gogol's *The Inspector General*, he noted:

> so hat die Partei Parole gegen die Inszenierung ausgegeben und die gemäßigte Besprechung des Theaterkritikers der "Prawda" ist von der Redaktion zurückgewiesen worden. Im Theater war der Beifall spärlich und vielleicht geht auch das mehr auf die offizielle Losung zurück als auf den Eindruck des Publikums ... dergleichen hängt wohl zusammen, mit der allgemeinen Vorsicht bei öffentlicher Meinungsäußerung, die hier herrscht. (Benjamin, "Moskauer Tagebuch" 315)

> [The Party, moreover, has come out against the production, and even the moderate review by *Pravda*'s[128] theater critic was rejected by the editors. The applause in the theater was restrained, and perhaps this was due to the official line more than to the audience's actual reaction... But this is no doubt linked to the general atmosphere of cautiousness when it comes to openly revealing one's opinion. (*Moscow Diary* 33)]

This "cautiousness" was clearly at odds with what was hoped to be gained by involving the audience in the productions. In spite of the overthrow of old power structures and individuals in positions of power, top-down structures of power continued to exert a strong influence on public taste and in formulating the new orthodoxy. Benjamin further observed, during a lengthy dispute concerning Meyerhold's production of this piece, that success and failure hinged, at least partly, on the director's ability to sell himself and his work during the four-hour debate:

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[128] Official party newspaper.

> Wenige sprachen gegen den *Revisor*, dennoch siegten seine Gegner ... Das verdankt Meyerhold seinem unglücklichen Temperament ... Gegen zwölf ruft man stürmisch nach Meyerhold. Der Beifall bei seinem Auftreten sagt ihm, daß hier noch viel zu gewinnen ist. Aber in weniger als zehn Minuten hat er jeden Kontakt mir der Masse verloren. (Benjamin, "Disputation bei Meyerhold" 482-83)
>
> [Few spoke against *The Inspector General*, nevertheless his opponents were victorious ... Meyerhold has his own unfortunate temperament to thank for that. ... At around twelve, the crowd calls passionately for Meyerhold. The applause at his appearance tells him that there is still a great deal to be won here. But in fewer than ten minutes he lost all contact with the crowd.]

Meyerhold took the stage in front of a crowd that was positively inclined towards him, yet he was able to "sell" neither his new play nor his condemnation of his critics. As he attempted to present his case, the audience became impatient, and, in the end, he was booed off the stage. The play was ultimately viewed by many as a huge failure, and Meyerhold's temperament and his lack of salesmanship were, at least in part, to blame. As in the modern capitalist system developing in Germany at the time, in Russia marketing was becoming an ever more important determinant of success. For Benjamin, who was a strong critic of commodification, this was surely a disappointing observation, and one further reason not to make a total commitment to Communism.

Meyerhold's strongest supporters were members of the group of Moscow intellectuals to which Benjamin gained access though Lacis and Reich. This group supported the Soviet state but not its policy of proletarian control over literature. He described the group as: "diese Gruppe, ... die zwar durchaus uneingeschränkt den Sowjetstaat bejaht, die literarische Hegemonie des Proletariats aber nicht anerkannt" (Benjamin, "Die politische Gruppierung der russischen

Schriftsteller" 745) [this group that unconditionally support the Soviet state, but do not recognize the literary hegemony of the proletariat]. One explanation for their position is the fact that they did not want to lose their jobs and income. Additionally, they were convinced that only they would be able to bring about the kind of social change they envisioned. They felt that, as experienced thinkers and social commentators, they knew what was best for the proletariat. However, the strongest reason for their position was the simple fact that most ordinary Russians/Soviets were illiterate. The intellectuals were convinced that the illiterate could not possibly become producers and controllers of writing. Furthermore, a large number of the proletariat lived in rural communities and had very different concerns about, and understandings of, the world they lived in than did the urban proletariat or the urban intellectual. The rural population's needs concerned basic subsistence, practical everyday information, and basic literacy skills.

Clearly, as Benjamin recognized, this situation was unlike the one in Germany. Yet the situation of intellectuals in Germany and France was similar to that of those in Russia with regard to one thing -- the general populace's lack of concern for what they did. In his 1926 review of a French book that presents authors as salesmen,[129] Benjamin agreed with the author's introduction: "Denn sicher hat die Vorrede recht, in der er die Schriftsteller darauf hinweist, sie könnten sich keinen Begriff davon machen, in welchem Grade, was sie tun, dem Volk belanglos scheint"(Benjamin, "Der Kaufmann im Dichter" 48) [Surely the introduction was correct in indicating to authors that they cannot even begin to imagine to what degree what they do appears to be insignificant to the common people]. Meyerhold may not have been able to sell himself precisely because there was so little interest in his work outside of the community of intellectuals

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[129] *Prochainement ouverture de 62 boutiques littéraire* by Henri Guilac and Mac Orlan.

and the groups, such as the Rabkorr, who were directly engaged in a power struggle over control of cultural and intellectual production.

Benjamin placed much of the blame for this squarely on academia as an institution and on intellectuals themselves for their distance from, and irrelevance to, the real world. This is a frequently recurring issue in Benjamin's life and work. After his own attempt at habilitation, he repeatedly attempted to bring everyday life and academic concerns closer together As Wolin observes in his interpretation of "One-Way Street:" "[H]e sought to reduce the discrepancy between philosophical thought and everyday life by incorporating elements of the latter directly ... into the field of philosophical reflection itself... Its ["One-Way Street's"] objective was, by virtue of its affinities with the concrete, to rescue traditional philosophy from a fate of excessive abstraction" (124).

Benjamin's critical attitude towards "blathering" professors has already been discussed. Although he primarily criticized them for failing to appreciate the possibilities of the new medium of the radio, he also found their lectures irrelevant and boring. These early programs were about "Kultur mit einem haushohen K" (Benjamin, "Gespräch mit Ernst Schoen" 548) [culture with a C as high as a house]. They were fiascos because, first, they were not connected to everyday reality and, second, they were based on a pedagogical model of knowledge as a one-way transmission from an expert knower to the unknowledgeable. Few participants in the production of these programs had considered the ramifications of entering into people's homes (a feature of the private realm) with an institutional form of learning (a feature of the public realm).

While Benjamin criticized academia for being divorced from life, he criticized so-called independent intellectual work for serving only the interests of the rich and for succumbing to the general commodification of modern life. Much of his work (and his trip to Moscow) was an attempt to find viable alternatives to "excessive abstraction" -- alternatives that were grounded in everyday

reality, particularly that of the marginalized. Marginal groups occupied increasingly prominent positions in Benjamin's later writing. As discussed in Chapter 5, Benjamin stressed that an adequate understanding of society could only be achieved by examining the "Abfall der Geschichte" [refuse of history]. He therefore insisted on analyzing everything considered disposable, insignificant, or a threat to the dominant order.

Wohlfahrt's analysis of "Das Passagen-Werk" [Arcades Project] examines how the work of the historian is that of the "chiffonier" [rag picker]. The rag picker collects refuse from those who wish to discard it in order to put it to further use. He takes the refuse from its usual context (i.e., the social order that constructs it as useless garbage) and gives it new significance in a new context. By focusing on society's marginalized, Benjamin redirects attention to the nameless and gives voice to those who are silenced (Wohlfahrt 146). This strategy of decontextualization is mobilized in order to weaken the ability of the dominant order to include and exclude; that is, to exercise control. While such a strategy can be a powerful means for "these objects [to] demand a unique, critical consideration and thus cease to be serviceable for the ends of the ruling powers" (Wolin 125), it also runs the risk of placing the person or object being recovered outside of any context -- of making her/him/it an ahistoric fragment.

Benjamin's method of reclaiming the marginalized -- the montage -- was not uncommon in works of photography and literature. It was a surrealist technique of juxtaposing elements normally not found together in order to make a critical statement both about them and the contexts in which they were generally situated. The constructedness of the montage was clearly evident, and it illustrated the generally unnoticed constructedness of the usual context of the juxtaposed elements. In this way it produced a shock effect that, theoretically, would shake the viewers out of their complacency. This was, of course, much like the "Verfremdung" [alienation] of Brecht's epic theatre and Meyerhold's use of tableaux.

Thus it is not surprising that Benjamin was very interested in how Meyerhold's, and later Brecht's, theatre worked in practice. But it was Lacis who provided a living example of what he was looking for. If the ultimate aim is to bring attention to marginalized groups and give them a voice as well as improve their lives, then Lacis was the only one of Benjamin's contacts who actually did this. She represents theory in practice and practice in theory. She worked with the "besprisorniki" on both a very practical level (i.e., material needs) and also on a theoretical level (i.e., intellectual needs).

In conclusion, Benjamin's life and writing were closely intertwined with Lacis, who introduced him to a new pedagogical form. Her work was a living example of theory on the ground, and Benjamin attempted to apply it in his radio work. Besides instilling in Benjamin a passion for her, Lacis reinstilled in him a passion for his work, for politics, and for pedagogical possibilities.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This dissertation addresses a persistent gap in Benjamin scholarship -- a gap that has tended to valorize the public sphere while silencing the private sphere, thus privileging what has been constructed as masculine over what has been constructed as feminine. The linear tracing of the influence of one scholar upon another, which occurs in the public realm, was and is the dominant model for both producing knowledge and understanding intellectual figures. This separation of work from life, of public from private, detaches the intellectual from lived reality in a move that obliterates the interests of those (mostly women) who have been relegated to the private sphere. In this dissertation, I propose that knowledge is produced by the interrelations between the public and the private, and I demonstrate the importance of the latter in the making of both knowledge and intellectual figures.

By examining what has, until now, been largely discounted, I seek to provide a corrective to the limitations of Benjamin scholarship. In so doing, I examine the intersections of numerous discursive strands and texts that have gone into the production of Walter Benjamin. With help from Toril Moi's personal genealogy and Dorothy Smith's ideas concerning the scholarly production of knowledge, I explore the intersections of Benjamin's life and work.

The transformation of Benjamin from an inadequate scholar to a source of intellectual authority places him at a site that lends itself to the examination of the role of the intellectual in society and the processes by which knowledge about such figures is produced and circulated. This is particularly urgent at the present time, when the role of the intellectual is under intense scrutiny and debate. This examination is a particularly challenging, if not threatening, task. As Benjamin himself was well aware, questioning the role of the intellectual as the institutionally sanctioned

primary producer and disseminator of knowledge not only questions how and why knowledge is produced, but also whether intellectuals, as both individuals and as a social group, are necessary or even desirable. I suggest that that the forms that scholarly work will take in the future will necessarily be different from what they are now. If one accepts, as I do, the assertion that the production of knowledge is a form of cultural production subject to specific cultural politics, then how research is currently being conducted within critical pedagogy and cultural studies must be radically transformed. My study provides an opportunity to reflect on the nature of scholarship, and it emphasizes the need to examine the intersection of the public and the private. One consequence of the kind of scholarship I propose is that the questions it asks are not and cannot be divorced from the material world. I suggest that the study of intellectual figures must take into account the fact that they are not collections of ideas, but rather people whose bodies and emotions are embedded within an everyday reality. And their work is produced as much by that everyday reality as it is by their engagement with the ideas of others.

Some feminist researchers and practitioners have worked towards showing the importance of emotionality within the learning process. For example, Magda Lewis proposes possibilities for the productive use of the anger women experience as a result of their exclusion in the classroom. Alison Jaggar discusses how "outlaw emotions" -- emotions not "appropriate" to a given situation -- can facilitate a deeper understanding of the dynamics of whatever is occurring. With regard to both research and teaching practice, it is clearly insufficient to engage with ideas at the expense of emotions. What is particularly required is an understanding of what constitutes "emotional knowledge," along with a rigorous theoretical framework that enables us to examine such knowledge within various contexts. Increasingly, the emotional is being seen as vital to both critical pedagogy and to scholarship. By including the intersection of the intellectual and the emotional in this study of Benjamin, I am moving towards a type of scholarship that no longer separates the two,

but rather attempts to understand the ways in which they are mutually constitutive. This is crucial to gaining a fuller understanding of what constitutes intellectual labour. Benjamin and Lacis' concept of porosity can be applied to examine the porous boundaries between intellect and emotion, to gain a fuller understanding of multiple forms of cultural production, including the production of knowledge both by scholars in the classroom. Just a life and intellectual work have porous boundaries, so do the lives of students intersect with their learning both inside and outside educational institutions.

Benjamin and his work are also important with regard to how we perceive the role and function of the university. While those Benjamin critics who support the university as an institution (e.g., Hans Mayer) conclude that Benjamin was a failure for not being able to gain entry into the academy, those critical of the university often celebrate Benjamin's outsider position as one of freedom from the bondage of the institution and its disciplines (in both senses of the word). Momme Brodersen, for example, speaks of Benjamin being done with academic writing after finishing his habilitation. At that point Benjamin is supposed to have begun the free, exciting life of the freelance writer, unfettered by university constraints and having an exotic, erotic woman at his side. However, the situation is much more complex than this, and rather than simply rejecting institutional knowledge, we need to ask certain questions about it: What counts as knowledge? Who authorizes what forms of knowledge and to what purpose?

Those who celebrate Benjamin as a founding father of cultural studies often depict his outsider status as a liberating and enabling position that allows him the freedom to work between the disciplines -- a disruptive gesture that can inspire and provide guidance to those engaged in a rigorous critique of institutionalized forms of knowledge. Yet to overemphasize this position belies both Benjamin's complex subjectivity and the constraints to which he was subject outside the academy. Angela McRobbie, for example, casts Benjamin as a "model for the practice of being a

cultural intellectual. This comprises of [sic] an inability to conform to the traditional requirements of the scholarly mode" ("The *Passagenwerk* and the Place of Walter Benjamin in Cultural Studies" 151). In her overview of Benjamin's work, McRobbie summarizes what makes him a model scholar. She points out that his writing is a "sustained critique of culture as something cut off and separate from everyday life, which can be parcelled off for study in the traditional mode", "he wants to demystify art by demonstrating those skills and practices which constitute the work of the artist" (McRobbie, "Place of Walter Benjamin" 151). Certainly Benjamin's ideas are useful for cultural studies and critical pedagogies that engage in a rigorous critique of the production of knowledge; however, it is ironic that McRobbie, by presenting Benjamin as a model intellectual, engages in a discourse of mystification. She rightly recognizes that one of Benjamin's valuable contributions to scholarship is that, although he "rejects the notion of progress and rejects history as a straight line, he argues all the more forcibly for the place of history in the study of culture" (McRobbie, "Place of Walter Benjamin" 168). However, in contradiction to this insight, she ignores *his* history by transporting his ideas and methods directly into the present. In short, I would suggest that if it is vital to demystify the artist, then it is also vital to demystify the scholar.

For McRobbie and many others, Benjamin's failure as an academic during his lifetime is the result of the blindness of those who misunderstood his genius. Present-day interdisciplinary scholars are encouraged to pick up the torch of this forerunner of great things to come. Such uncritical acceptance of Benjamin not only ignores many of his dimensions, but it also remains blind to weaknesses in his work. For example, while Benjamin's and Lacis's concept of porosity can be fruitfully employed to examine the boundaries of the so-called public and private spheres, it should not be forgotten that Benjamin was very selective concerning to what and to whom he applied this concept. For example, his examination of the everyday, while it represents an important shift in the subject of scholarly analysis, fails to acknowledge the drudgery of the daily tasks performed

primarily by women. Although he states that culture is produced both by great talents and by anonymous toilers, he does not go on to examine either what forms that anonymous toil takes or who performs it.

As has been said, McRobbie singles out Benjamin's ability to operate outside of the constraints of the academy as one of the most exemplary aspects of his work. Taking this one step further, does this mean that we in cultural studies can only produce valid work if we are outside of the academy? Even if this were possible, at what point would this outsider position itself become institutionalized? What McRobbie ignores, and what Benjamin does not, is that the free and totally independent individual does not exist, either within or without society's institutions. As Lewis affirms:

> There is a strong ideological myth surrounding the work of intellectual production: that as intellectuals we do our work apart from how, where, and with whom we live our personal and intellectual lives; that in order to do this work in its most pure and therefore desirable form we need to disassociate ourselves from the lived "trivialities" of our everyday lives; that the best text is one that silences what Roland Barthes calls "the most delicate mechanisms of social exchange." (123)

The perseverance of such myths, even among those, like McRobbie, who are aware of their mythical status, indicates, in my view, the need for further study of how the personal and the emotional function as constitutive dimensions of intellectual production.

One accomplishment of including these previously neglected dimensions in scholarly research is the recovery of the achievements of women who have long been marginalized by the gendered assumptions of scholarship. Although my work attempts to disrupt these still-held assumptions, further study of the multiple intersections between the public and private is required. For example, Benjamin's early work concerning perception and the role of the body, as well as the

intersection of intellect and eros, love and work, and ideas and politics, needs to be examined, not as a theoretical construct, but as a product of the intersection of public and private spheres. One needs to ask how his theorizing not only constructs, but also reflects, rejects, and/or contradicts both his life and his work. With further research into the intersection of the public and private spheres, this false dichotomy should become obsolete, for if these spheres intersect and are mutually constitutive, then they cannot be separate. Without the public/private split, all work that contributes to cultural production should be valued and validated equally rather than being placed in a hierarchical relationship.

Another research project would involve elucidating Benjamin's positions of dominance and marginality. This is particularly relevant in light of the fact that much present-day scholarship has shifted its focus from the centre to the margins. This shift seems to have almost automatically conferred upon Benjamin superior insights because, as a Jew in German society during the first half of this century and as a failure at the university, he is a marginal figure par excellence. Yet, as a white, middle-class, central European male, he is also a dominant figure par excellence. Although I refer to these complex, contradictory positions, a more thorough examination is required. It would be particularly interesting for those in postcolonial studies and critical pedagogy to look at Benjamin's "orientalization" of the Italians and his colonial references to Mexico and Africa in the "Arcades Project."

While I do not deal with mentoring in a detailed way, the concept of mentorship could be developed so as to provide an alternative means of envisioning and analyzing relationships between the intellectual figure and other people. A study of such mentorship could also help to provide a corrective to the productivist, gendered logic of intellectual traditions in which men produce and women reproduce. Benjamin's relationship with Lacis could serve as a basis for a further investigation of the kind of informal mentorship that occurs outside of institutional contexts. Such

a reconceptualization would include both emotional and intellectual dimensions and the forms knowledge produced at their intersection. It would also take into account specific gendered social positions and not assume that the learning that occurs between mentor and mentee is one-way.

Finally, I have attempted to show how Benjamin's insights into the changing nature of cultural production in an era of technological change and media innovation have been most instructive with regard to the disintegration of the barrier between high culture and mass culture. However, this promising use of Benjamin's work is based, for the most part, on only one of his essays. A broader engagement with more of his work, especially his radio work, would expand such analyses. In this work Benjamin emphasized the need for education to be situated within the everyday reality of the learners. He believed that education should not be used as a tool for control, but rather as a means of enabling interactive, democratic, and participatory learning. Further, it is of significance that the medium of radio emphasizes oral forms of knowledge. In other words, in his radio work Benjamin distanced himself from the written word, thus questioning its status as the most valid form of knowledge and intellectual engagement. This is an issue of vital importance when considering forms of knowledge that are not written, and therefore generally not valorized by Western educational institutions. In not only suggesting but also demonstrating that pedagogy is not confined to print, Benjamin has contributed critical pedagogies that strive to include oral traditions of knowledge as well as students' oral, not only written, expressions of knowledge and learning.

The medium of learning must itself be considered, as Benjamin demonstrated in his radio plays, in which made his listeners aware of how the medium of radio functioned. He insisted that new media necessitated new pedagogical forms. This, of course, should be particularly instructive in our world of computers and the Internet. Benjamin saw great possibilities for the positive and critical employment of radio, yet both radio and its successor, television, seem to have borne out

many of the fears of Adorno and Horkheimer. Can Benjamin's insights assist in providing a deeper understanding of both the positive and the negative applications of new technology? Can it be used as a democratic tool for positive social change?

In conclusion, in today's world of shifting boundaries -- whether between nations, identities, disciplines, or institutions -- Benjamin's concept of porosity has much to offer. Is it possible to theorize about binary oppositions without reifying dichotomous, usually antagonistic, views of the positions being examined? As has been seen, this is simply one of the many questions that the work of Walter Benjamin could help all of us, particularly those of us involved in critical pedagogy and cultural studies, to address.

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