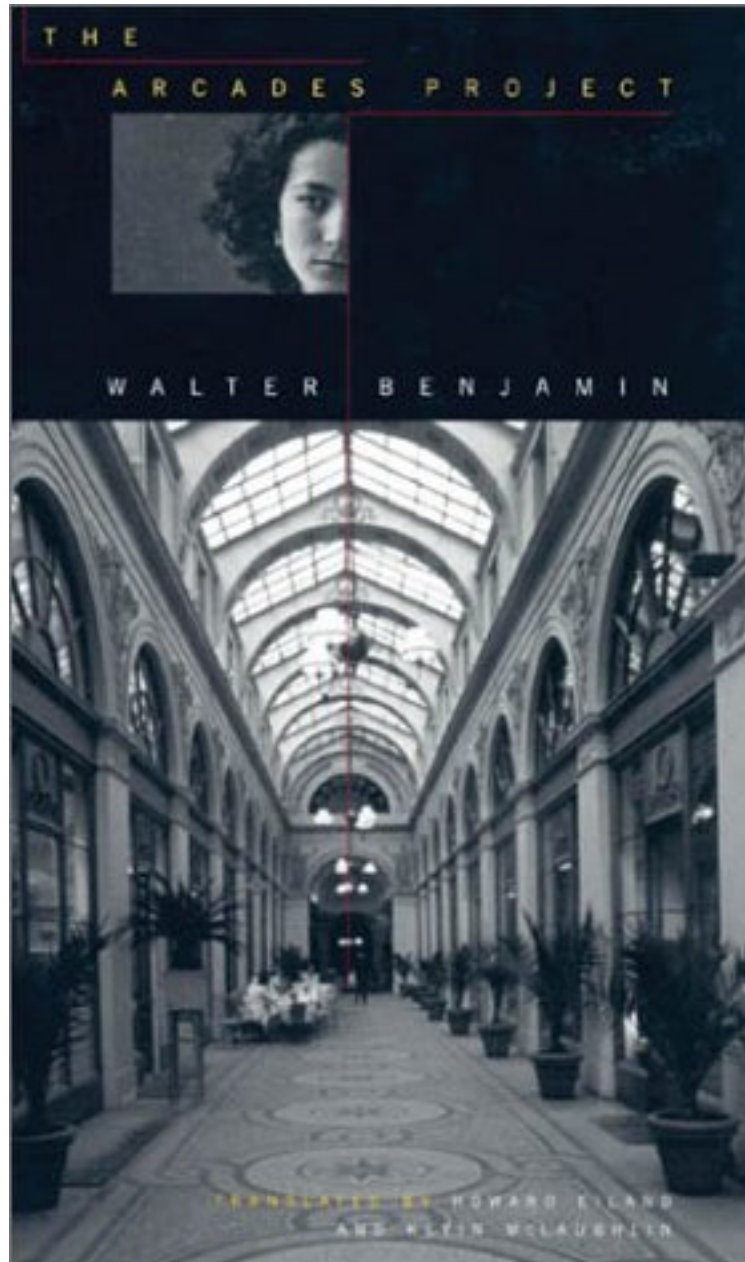


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## The Arcades Project

*Walter Benjamin*

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#110377 in Books Walter Benjamin 2002-03-30 2002-02-19 Original language: English PDF # 1 10.30 x 1.86 x 6.30l, 3.39 #File Name: 06740080221088 pages The Arcades Project | File size: 54.Mb

**Walter Benjamin : The Arcades Project** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Arcades Project:

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Essential readingBy ZyrtoniaEssential reading for academics studying 19th century Paris. The Project contains Benjamin's notes assembled as coherently as possible; but since they are notes, reading can be complicated at times.0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. One of the finest, most original thinkers --- philosopher-criticsBy AnonymousI have elsewhere written a review of Benjamin. One of the finest, most original thinkers --- philosopher-critics.From a reader/writer who celebrates the printed page. Some writers simply cry out to be part of a literary library.10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Benjamin's Arcades Project: A Journey Without EndBy Martin AsinerIf one had to choose only one text by Walter Benjamin that would most nearly encapsulate the totality of his overlapping theories of art, society, politics, literary criticism, and many of the social sciences, one would be hard-pressed to overlook The Arcades Project. For fifteen years, Benjamin trudged over most of Europe like one of Baudelaire's flneurs, seeking and commenting in his wake, but it was in Paris that he felt especially at home. Benjamin had read *Le Paysan de Paris* by Louis Aragon and had been entranced enough to reconfigure the city in his imagination in a manner that grew by slow accretion such that even he could not predict the outcome. As one today reads The Arcades Project one is immediately struck by its massive length, which even weighing in at more than a thousand pages is admittedly incomplete. The images that Benjamin limns range from what seems like one phantasmagorical archetype after another: arcades, boulevards, chimneys, shops, in short the daily detritus of quotidian Paris existence all of which seem to hover somewhere between a dream state and semi-alert consciousness. Given the book's meandering nature, it would have been startling had Benjamin actually found a coda to close it. There is currently considerable controversy over what Benjamin expected his readers to make of his book. There is little doubt that his incessant focus on Paris' capitalist underpinning in the generations before his own should be the starting point whereby his readers could view that point either as an entry into the past or an exit from that past into the present. If the former, then the memories and images of the Paris at the time of his writing would converge and overlap with the concomitant images of the prior Paris. If the latter, then his readers would have time-traveled as it were, almost like Twain's Connecticut Yankee, and after having vicariously accompanied Benjamin as flneur on his lengthy peregrinations, both would emerge in the present with a dream fugue to interpret. Benjamin re-worded his book in much the same way that Thoreau did with *Walden*. It took Benjamin more than a decade to write, with each year seeing a new Benjamin entering and exiting a new Paris. He kept up his Sisyphean task of pushing a mountain-sized peanut, never allowing himself the luxury of regret. Somewhere along the line, he decided to divide the book into some twenty-six "convolutes," or chapters, with each convolute containing clearly delineated objects, some of which were inanimate constructs like chairs and streets. Others were word-collectors like politics and literature; still others were real people, usually writers like his beloved Baudelaire. Whatever a convolute may have contained, Benjamin took that object or construct or author and sought its essential "is-ness" a Kantian sense of identity that could be squeezed into a ball, capturing its essence of that particular now-time, and then gushing it out into his contemporary historical/social milieu. We shall never know how Benjamin might have ended his book, if indeed he even intended an ending. Had he not given into despair at the thought of being handed over to the Gestapo in 1940, he very well might have continued his time trek until his next appointed meeting with his god. And that book would certainly have rivaled Richardson and Proust for sheer length.

"To great writers," Walter Benjamin once wrote, "finished works weigh lighter than those fragments on which they labor their entire lives." Conceived in Paris in 1927 and still in progress when Benjamin fled the Occupation in 1940, The Arcades Project (in German, *Das Passagen-Werk*) is a monumental ruin, meticulously constructed over the course of thirteen years--"the theater," as Benjamin called it, "of all my struggles and all my ideas." Focusing on the arcades of nineteenth-century Paris--glass-roofed rows of shops that were early centers of consumerism--Benjamin presents a montage of quotations from, and reflections on, hundreds of published sources, arranging them in thirty-six categories with descriptive rubrics such as "Fashion," "Boredom," "Dream City," "Photography," "Catacombs," "Advertising," "Prostitution," "Baudelaire," and "Theory of Progress." His central preoccupation is what he calls the commodification of things--a process in which he locates the decisive shift to the modern age. The Arcades Project is Benjamin's effort to represent and to critique the bourgeois experience of nineteenth-century history, and, in so doing, to liberate the suppressed "true history" that underlay the ideological mask. In the bustling, cluttered arcades, street and interior merge and historical time is broken up into kaleidoscopic distractions and displays of ephemera. Here, at a distance from what is normally meant by "progress," Benjamin finds the lost time(s) embedded in the spaces of things.

.com You could spend years trying to read Walter Benjamin's The Arcades Project--after all, he spent much of the last 13 years of his life doing the research. When he committed suicide in 1940, he destroyed his copy of the manuscript, and so for decades the work was believed lost. But another copy turned up, and Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin have translated it into English. It is a complex, fragmentary work--more a series of notes for a book than a book itself--which probes the culture of the Paris arcades (a cross between covered streets and shopping malls) of the mid-19th century and the flneur ("the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets" in an "anamnesic intoxication [that] ... feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but often possesses itself of abstract knowledge--

indeed, of dead facts--as something experienced and lived through"). The Arcades Project is, frankly, so dense a work that one hardly has enough time to glimpse fleetingly at its sections--over 100 pages of notes on Baudelaire alone!--before mentioning it to you, though one certainly looks forward to the opportunity to peruse it at leisure.

From Publishers Weekly

Because he was Jewish and a Marxist in Nazi Germany, history was against the great literary and cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). His writings were left scattered in ephemeral publications, went unpublished or were simply left unfinished when, in 1940, the critic committed suicide because he believed that the Gestapo was about to seize him. In Germany, his works have been compiled and scrupulously edited, and now, at last, American readers too have access to his final, great unfinished work in an edition that is both well translated and helpfully annotated by the editor of the German edition, Rolf Tiedemann.

In 1927, Benjamin began taking notes for a book that would critique the cultural, public, artistic and commercial life of Paris, a city Benjamin thought of as the "capital of the nineteenth century." The arcades of the title are the city's glass-covered shopping malls dating from that era. This edition is comprised of the fastidious notes he made for this never-completed study. Essentially, Benjamin was planning to write a prehistory of the 20th century. The lively arcades--colorful scenes of public mixing, modern shopping and quotidian activities of all sorts--figure as a focusing device. His ambition was to integrate a picture including advertising, architecture, department store shopping, fashion, prostitution, city planning, literature, bourgeois luxuries, slums, public transit, photography and much more. His perspective is largely Marxist, but not in any conventional or dogmatic sense. Benjamin's chief virtue is an uncanny originality of vision and insight that transcends the constraints of ideology. (Dec.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

The Arcades Project, which Benjamin worked on for 13 years before his death, was an attempt to capture the reality that he believed underlay the political, economic, and technological world of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the phenomenon of the Paris arcades, Benjamin saw a turning away from a communal society based on mutual concern to one based on material well-being and economic gain. To fortify his argument, Benjamin used quotations from a variety of published literary, philosophical, and artistic sources and added his own reflections and commentary. Because of Benjamin's untimely and tragic death, this is not a finished work, but, nonetheless, the architectonic of the whole is impressive in its breadth and as an attempt at historical comprehension. Also included is a poignant, beautifully written eyewitness account of Benjamin's last days and hours. The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940 is an excellent accompaniment to The Arcades Project since a considerable portion of the correspondence between Adorno and Benjamin included here concerns the work that Benjamin called "the theater of all my struggles and all my ideas." Originally published in Germany in 1994, the 121 letters included begin in 1928 and allow an intimate look at the two men's personalities, their philosophical thinking, and their attitudes toward the events, persons, and ideologies of the contemporary world. The last letter is from Benjamin, shortly after he was denied entry into Spain in a futile attempt to flee the Nazis and, thus, shortly before his suicide. Recommended for academic collections.

-Leon H. Brody, U.S. Office of Personnel Mgt. Lib., Washington, DC Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.