
Profane Illumination constitutes a title in a still uncatalogued series of Guides Noirs to Gothic Marxism. This series charts the contours of a Marxist genealogy fascinated with the irrational aspects of social processes, a genealogy that both investigates how the irrational pervades

¹. Guide de Paris mystérieux, n.p. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
existing society and dreams of using it to effect social change. Gothic Marxism has often been obscured in the celebrated battles of mainstream Marxism, privileging a conceptual apparatus constructed in narrowly Enlightenment terms. The Enlightenment, however, was always already haunted by its Gothic ghosts, and the same can be said of Marxism from its inception. An archaeology of Gothic Marxism entails not only reclaiming obscured texts for the Marxist repertoire but attending to the darker side of well-known Marxist topoi, starting with the writings of Marx himself; the Guides Noirs often focus on the hidden life of sites familiar from the seemingly rational daylight business of production.

My concern in this book will be to reconstruct early attempts to theorize Gothic Marxism: the first efforts to appropriate Freud’s seminal twentieth-century exploration of the irrational for Marxist thought. In France these efforts were initiated by surrealism, that avant-garde movement generally responsible for introducing psychoanalysis into French intellectual circles. They were most extensively elaborated by the movement’s leader, André Breton, in the course of what Micheline Tison-Braun characterizes as the “ballet of surrealism and the revolution last[ing] from 1925 to 1935, abundantly commented on by Breton, more and more peremptory and perplexing.” While “vulgar Marxism” has undeniably become an “overdetermined and mythically hypostatized category,” the anguished tone of Breton’s writings as he struggled with his relation to the French Communist Party speaks eloquently to the pressure it once exerted, both in France of the time and on him.

It was in the process of trying to accommodate surrealism to this Marxism that Breton devised his “bold” attempt to “reconcile Engels and Freud.” Breton modified practical Marxist notions of subjectiv-

2. As Helena Lewis puts it, “Freud was almost unknown in France until the Surrealists ‘discovered’ him and became fascinated with his theory of dreams.” See The Politics of Surrealism, x.

3. Micheline Tison-Braun, La Crise de l’humanisme, II, 153. Lewis provides a detailed history of Breton’s difficulties with practical Marxism. See also Anna Balakian’s account in André Breton, Magus of Surrealism.

4. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson, introduction to Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, 3. Tison-Braun’s figure of the ballet is a bit dismissive; as Leslie Camhi writes of Breton’s subsequent engagement with the politics of revolution: “For the man who spent weeks with Trotsky in Mexico writing ‘For an Independent Revolutionary Art,’ just months before the exiled Soviet’s assassination, both esthetic and political questions were clearly matters of life and death.” Leslie Camhi, “Extended Boundaries,” 43.

5. André Breton, L’Amour fou, 31. I cite verbatim from Mad Love, trans. Mary Ann Caws, 23. Caws has recently provided impressive translations of the two hermetic Breton prose texts central to my argument, Mad Love and Communicating Vessels, the latter with Geoffrey T. Harris, from which I have profited greatly and which I in large part
ity, historical process, causality, praxis, and event with psychoanalytic concepts and content while he wandered through a landscape reworking nineteenth-century representations of *Paris noir* (Gothic Paris). My exploration of Breton’s Gothic Marxism thus proceeds through motifs remarkably similar to the categories of classification found in the *Guides Noirs* (the trajectory of Breton’s *Nadja* is moreover among the promenade routes that the *Guide to Mysterious Paris* recommends). Uncanny landscapes, ghosts and sorcerers, strange stones and constructions, *illuminati*: to these will be added such surrealist concepts as objective chance, intersubjective desire, the lucky find, the encounter, the dream, bohemian resistance, the social unconscious, and the capillary tissue connecting the communicating vessels of psychic and material life. Breton called his unholy brew “modern materialism,” an appellation borrowed from Friedrich Engels’s nineteenth-century critique of mechanical materialism.

“Profane illumination” was how Walter Benjamin formulated the kernel of surrealist Marxism in an essay that remains arguably the most important assessment of the political and theoretical objectives of the movement to date: “The true, creative overcoming of religious illumination . . . resides in a *profane illumination*, a materialist, anthropological inspiration.” I have a second pressing stake in using Benjamin to reconstruct surrealist Marxism: to elucidate modern materialism’s formative but neglected role in shaping Benjamin’s thought. My concern will be with its vital contribution to Benjamin’s writings that take pride of place in the corpus of Gothic Marxism. These are the unfinished ruins of the *Passagen-Werk*, the arcades project. Centerpiece of the “Parisian production cycle,” as Benjamin called the critical work that was to preoccupy him from his turn to Marxism in the later 1920s, the *Passagen-Werk* was to serve both as *Guide Bleu* and *Guide Noir*

follow. I hence reference both the French original and the published translation in every citation from these texts. I also cite in this fashion to help the non-French-speaking reader follow my argument. When I use the English translations unmodified, as here, I will so indicate in a footnote. *L’Amour fou* will subsequently be abbreviated as *AF* and *Mad Love* as *ML*.

6. David Macey comments that the surrealists’ “interest in mysticism and the occult” is “inseparable from their interest in Freud, whose discovery of the unconscious will help them to go beyond the limitations of conventional thought.” See David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts*, 51.

7. Breton cites from Engels in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 141. Referred to hereafter as *M*.

8. Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism,” in *Reflections*, 179. Referred to hereafter as *R*. I have changed Jephcott’s “materialistic” to “materialist.” For the German original, see *GS*, II, 1, 297.
to the nineteenth-century Paris that Marx had termed "the new capital of the new world." In it Benjamin set out to capture the psychological, sensual, irrational, and often seemingly trivial aspects of life during the expansion of industrial capitalism which such monolithic Marxist categories as base and superstructure tend to obscure. Seeking nonetheless to integrate his preoccupations with the concerns of Marxist theory, Benjamin brought Marxism together with all manner of paradigms for grasping the irrational, ranging from the high tragic narratives of Jewish mysticism to the tawdry spiritism of nineteenth-century Parisian mass culture and the surrealist profane illumination.

The importance of modern materialism to the Passagen-Werk can be summed up by a quote from Breton included in the Passagen-Werk's Konvolut N, where Benjamin collects his epistemological and methodological musings in densest form. "'I can't stress enough that, for an enlightened materialist like Lafargue, economic determinism is not the "absolutely perfect instrument" that "might become the key to all the problems of history,"" runs the citation. Benjamin takes the quote from the 1935 Political Position of Surrealism (Position politique du surréalisme), a text originally given as a lecture in Prague, when

9. I take the term "production cycle" from one of Benjamin's letters at the arcades project's inception: "When I have finished the work with which I am occupied at the moment, carefully, provisionally ... then the One-Way Street production cycle will be closed in the same way that the tragic drama book brought the Germanist one to a close," Benjamin wrote to Scholem, Berlin, 30 January 1928, Briefe, I, 455 (referred to hereafter as B). Benjamin identified this "production cycle" with Paris from its opening work, One-Way Street. "It was in Paris that I found the form for that notebook," Benjamin told Hugo von Hofmannsthal from Pardigon on March 17, 1928, B, I, 446. The Marx citation is from a letter to Arnold Ruge, Kreuznach, 1843, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 12.

10. On this hybrid aspect of Benjamin's thought, Christine Buci-Glucksmann comments:

In his attempt to make the irrational dialectical and to let it be seen ... Benjamin was constrained to put into play two languages and two worlds. One, political and Marxist, derives from the dialectic as the site of confrontation where the perspective, the praxis of the vanquished, is in perpetual opposition to the governing and oppressive rule of the victors. ... The other, the complementary world of Kafka or Klee, that of the "theological dwarf," that of the Angel, is not dialectical: it indicates the interruption of history, catastrophe, the inhuman, and the dehiscence-dwindling of the subject.

Christine Buci-Glucksmann, La Raison baroque de Baudelaire à Benjamin, 99.

11. Das Passagen-Werk, I, 585 (N 6, 4) (designated hereafter PW). The pagination and text of this edition are identical with volumes V, I and 2 of Benjamin's Gesammelte Schriften. In citing from Konvolut N, I will hereafter identify the fragments simply by N and their number enclosed in parentheses. I do so to facilitate their location by readers using either the German text or the English translation of Benjamin's epistemological Konvolut by Leigh Haflrey and Richard Sieburth, published first in The Philosophical Forum and then included in Gary Smith et al., Benjamin—Philosophy, Aesthetics, History. This translation is invaluable and I use it with only occasional modifications throughout my citations from Konvolut N.
Breton's struggles with pragmatic Marxism were culminating in despair. Benjamin found Breton's modern materialism useful in working through his own difficulties with pragmatic Marxism. One of the arcades project's central methodological concerns was to free Marxist theory from its immersion in the nineteenth century, "which produced not only imperialism but also the Marxism that has such useful questions for it," as Benjamin put it in "Brecht's Threepenny Novel" (R, 202). "Every presentation of history must begin with awakening; in fact it should deal with nothing else," Benjamin comments in Konvolut N.12 "This one deals with awakening from the nineteenth century" (N 4, 3). Awakening Marxist theory was necessary if Marxism was to offer a critical representation of the moment in which this body of thought itself first took shape.

Benjamin muses on how to free Marxism from the conceptual limitations of its nineteenth-century origins throughout the epistemological Konvolut N. Stating that "one of the methodological objectives of this project [the Passagen-Werk] can be considered the demonstration of historical materialism which has canceled out the idea of progress in itself," he announces the need to free Marxist historiography from a notion of historical process dear to the nineteenth century's ruling bourgeoisie (N 2, 2).13 Benjamin also asks, "by what route is it possible to attain a heightened graphicness (Anschaulichkeit) combined with a realization of the Marxist method," as he speculates on how to avoid the "historical vulgar naturalism" that Marxist historiography all too often shares with the contemplative bourgeois historiography it should critique (N 2, 6).14 And throughout his notes and essays from the Passagen-Werk, Benjamin is concerned with revising Marxism's "classicist" view of art, as he puts it in the 1937 "Eduard Fuchs," as well as the deterministic and simplistically reflective way in which vulgar Marxism posits base-superstructure relations, with its attending consequences for conceptualizations of ideology and praxis.15

12. I modify what is doubtless a typo in how Hafrey and Sieburth render the opening clause of the sentence: "Every presentation is history must begin with awakening . . . ."

13. Benjamin designates his own Marxist allegiance with slippage among various terms, notably historical materialism, materialism, and Marxism. In this slippage he expresses his simultaneous discomfort with orthodox Marxism and his interest in aligning himself with a Marxist project. A similar discomfort with the term Marxism runs through Breton's writings.

14. Hafrey and Sieburth translate this phrase as "the vulgar naturalism of historicism." The original German runs (I cite the phrase in context): "mit dem historischen Vulkarnaturalismus zu brechen."

15. Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," in One-Way Street and Other Writings, 361 (referred to hereafter as OWS).
In a 1937 letter to Max Horkheimer, Benjamin placed the application of psychoanalysis to orthodox Marxism at the core of the *Passagen-Werk*’s methodological concerns: “I imagine that the definitive and binding plan of the book . . . would have to emerge from two fundamental methodological investigations. One would have to do with the critique of pragmatic history on the one hand and of cultural history on the other, as it presents itself to the materialist; the other with the significance of psychoanalysis for the subject of materialist historiography.” 16 I argue here that modern materialism provides Benjamin with fertile speculation for these concerns. We will see Benjamin particularly provoked by (1) the modern materialist appeal to the fissured subject of psychoanalysis to modify the conscious and rational subject dear to practical Marxism; (2) its application of psychoanalytic notions of history to collective history in order to displace a linear or mechanically causal vision of historical process and to break down the base-superstructure distinction with appeal to libidinal forces permeating both; (3) its use of psychoanalytic formulations of determination and representation to complicate a reflective model for the relation between superstructure and base; (4) its psychoanalytically informed interest in the everyday, which it uses to revise orthodox Marxist notions of the stuff of history as well as to open possible reservoirs for recuperative experience in damaged life; and (5) its application of psychoanalytic notions of therapy to an Enlightenment view of critique, notably as this application pertains to the dialectical image. Finally, we will see Benjamin provide historical justification for the affinity of Breton’s modern materialism with nineteenth-century *Paris noir*. My concluding chapter is devoted to Benjamin’s speculations on Marx himself as a denizen of this Paris, in pursuit of what Konvolut N proposed as the *Passagen-Werk*’s crucial contribution to Marxism: “First, it will explore the way the environment from which Marx’s teachings arose influenced the latter through its expressive character, and not just through its causal relationships; and secondly, it will show those features that Marxism shares with the expressive character of the material products that are contemporary with it” (N 1a, 7).

RESCUING CRITIQUE

Theodor Adorno was the first critic to recognize the potential importance of modern materialism to Benjamin, although Adorno’s general

---

hostility to surrealism did not allow him to develop this recognition beyond rather sceptical surprise. In a 1934 letter Adorno drew Benjamin’s attention to *Communicating Vessels*, a text that, as Mary Ann Caws notes, is “among Breton’s works . . . the most ‘philosophical’ and ‘political’ in the strong senses of those terms”:\(^{17}\)

Moreover, it is just now that an important impetus from outside seems to be transmitted to the arcades. I read in an English film journal a review of the new book by Breton (*Communicating Vessels* [Paris 1932]), that, if I am not mistaken, approaches our intentions very closely. Thus, it turns against the psychological interpretation of the dream and advocates one oriented towards objective images; and seems to accord them importance as historical key. The whole thing lies much too near your concerns not to make a radical turnabout probably necessary precisely in the most central point (where, I can’t tell from the review); but by triggering this turnabout, it could become of great importance, perhaps as important as, *what a parallel!*, Panoffsksy and Saxl for the Baroque book!\(^{18}\)

Adorno’s comments remain an isolated instance of critical interest in the importance of Benjamin’s relation to Breton, however, both in his own work and in readings of the arcades project to come.

That the *Passagen-Werk* has an affinity to surrealism is clear, for Benjamin asserted in no uncertain terms the centrality of high surrealism to the arcades project from its inception. Indeed, it was rather the “all too ostentatious proximity” of the movement that disturbed him; so he told Gershom Scholem in November 1928:

> In order to lift the work [the *Passagen-Werk*] out of an all too ostentatious proximity to the *mouvement surréaliste* that could become fatal to me, as natural and well-founded as it is, I have had to expand it more and more in my mind, and make it so universal in its most particular, tiniest frameworks that it would enter upon the *inheritance* of surrealism even in a purely chronological respect and precisely with all the absolute powers of a philosophical Fortinbras. In other words: I am mightily deferring the time for composing the thing.\(^{19}\)

---


18. Theodor Adorno to Walter Benjamin, Oxford, 6 November 1934, *PW*, 1106–7 (emphasis added). In a letter found in the Bibliothèque Nationale Benjamin archive, dated 20 March 1935 from Merton College, Oxford, Adorno pursues the subject of the importance of surrealism to the arcades project: “Do you actually know Max Ernst? I have never met him, but it would be easy for me to procure your acquaintance through Lotte Lenya, who is a close friend of his. And I can imagine that in the current state of the arcades project, the meeting with the surrealist who, it seems to me, has achieved the most, would be quite à propos.”

Benjamin was to continue asserting the *Passagen-Werk*’s intimate relation to surrealism throughout the twelve years of its unfinished composition. In 1935 he described one of his project’s two central aims as a conceptual liquidation of the surrealist inheritance. He wrote to Scholem: “The work represents both the philosophical utilization of surrealism—and with that its sublation—as well as the attempt to seize the image of history in the most insignificant fixations of existence, in its refuse as it were.”

But from the time of Adorno’s first ambivalent letters taking apart “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” this philosophical utilization has been read as Benjamin’s effort to transmute surrealist aesthetics to philosophy, notably surrealism’s fascination with the debris of bourgeois society and the movement’s shocklike method of montage.

In the standard Marxist readings of this relation, informed by the Marxism either of the Frankfurt School or of Brecht, Benjamin’s use of psychoanalytic language, notably dream language, has been considered the place where he substitutes the smoke and mirrors of writerly technique for critical analysis.

That surrealist Marxism has long remained illegible in the works of Benjamin owes much to its own ill repute. As Peter Wollen observes in one of the first recent writings to engage the theoretical content of surrealist Marxism, “Historians of Western Marxism have tended to discount Breton, seeing him as ‘off-beat’(!) or lacking in ‘seriousness.’”

When the interest of surrealism to twentieth-century Marxist thinking has been recognized, it has generally been credited to the renegade surrealists, who were themselves dubious that high surrealism could for-

21. On surrealism’s contribution to Benjamin’s work, see Ernst Bloch’s “Revue Form in Philosophy,” in *Heritage of Our Times*, Theodor Adorno’s “Benjamin’s ‘Einbahnstraße,’” in Über Walter Benjamin, Susan Buck-Morss’s *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* and *The Dialectics of Seeing*, and Richard Wolin’s *Walter Benjamin, An Aesthetic of Redemption* as well as “Expérience et matérialisme dans le Passagen-Werk de Benjamin” in *Walter Benjamin et Paris*, subsequently reprinted in English translation as “Experience and Materialism in Benjamin’s *Passagenwerk*” in Smith et al., *Benjamin*. See also Elizabeth Lenk and Rita Bischof’s “L’Intrication surréléale du rêve et de l’histoire dans les Passages de Benjamin” and Jacques Leenhardt’s “Le Passage comme forme d’expérience: Benjamin face à Aragon,” both of which are found in *Walter Benjamin et Paris*. The reader may, in addition, wish to consult Joseph Furnkäas’s “La ‘Voie à sens unique’ weimarienne de Walter Benjamin” in *Weimar ou l’explosion de la modernité* and his later book on the same subject, *Surrealismus als Erkenntnis*. Furnkäas is above all interested in the contribution of surrealism to the construction of Benjamin’s “characteristic and specifically avant-garde short prose writings” (p. 2).
22. Peter Wollen, “The Situationist International,” 78. This statement is on the same page as a footnote speculating on the importance of surrealist Marxism to Benjamin: “Within the Western Marxist tradition, Walter Benjamin was also greatly indebted to surrealism.”
mulate political philosophy worthy of the name.23 "It is regrettable, we say, that nothing can enter into M. Breton’s confused head except in poetic form. All of existence, conceived as purely literary by M. Breton, diverts him from the shabby, sinister, or inspired events occurring all around him," Georges Bataille writes in his 1929–30 "The Old Mole and the Prefix Sur," an essay that takes its title from Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire but that owes as much to the polemical energy of The Holy Family.24 Bataille’s opinion has been shared not only by detractors of high surrealism but also by its friends.25 In the same year that Bataille was engaged in the heat of avant-garde polemic, however, Benjamin was formulating the materialist content to the profane illumination.

"To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution—this is the project about which Surrealism circles in all its books and enterprises. This it may call its most particular task," Benjamin writes in “Surrealism—The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia” (R, 189). “Only the Surrealists have understood . . . [the] present commands” of the Communist Manifesto, the essay concludes (R, 192). In my discussion, I will be concerned with the serious Marxist content of what may be considered Breton’s own Parisian production cycle, the three major prose works from the period of his engagement with French communism.

23. On Bataille’s own links to Marxism, see Denis Hollier’s comments in his foreword to The College of Sociology: “Bataille had never been a communist. But he played what he claimed was a Marxist card against Breton. Work would be to society as sexuality was to the individual—the part that is damned, a center of unbridled energies that are uncontrollable and unassimilable, a locus of expenditures that are inconceivable in terms of a rationalist economy. The proletariat is the abject of private property, family and State.” In Denis Hollier, ed., The College of Sociology (1937–39), xix. See also observations throughout Yale French Studies no. 78, On Bataille.


25. Thus, Marie-Claire Banquart: “Breton does not hesitate to use Lenin as reference to predict and preach the proletarian liberation. But is the city any less magical for it? No, it teaches rather that the becoming of man is subjective before all. . . . in the development of the Parisian dream, is the Leninist revolution any more important for Breton than the system of Joseph de Maistre for Baudelaire?” To her rhetorical question Banquart offers the expected no. See Marie-Claire Banquart, Paris des surréalistes, 122–123. See also the writings of Michel Carrouges, Anna Balakian, Jean Gaulmier, and Yvette Gindine, to mention but a few of the more well-known critics with this opinion. Fredric Jameson’s brief discussion of the subject in Marxism and Form is an exception to this reception. In contrast to the Anglo-French reception of surrealism, the German reception takes much from Benjamin’s understanding of this movement’s serious materialist content. Peter Bürger’s Der französische Surrealismus opens with the following declaration: “If a parti pris underlies the work, it is solely that of grasping surrealism here not according to its weakness, its magical irrationalism, but rather according to its strength, its reaction to alienation” (p. 18). Bürger’s opposition between a magic irrationalism and a rational Marxist project does not appreciate, however, the extent to which surrealism Marxism attacks this very distinction.
(1926–35), Nadja, Communicating Vessels, and Mad Love, which Breton saw as forming a unified prose trilogy. In a recent issue of Dada/Surrealism devoted entirely to Breton, Anna Balakan comments on these latter two works: “Breton’s narratives . . . have been with the exception of Nadja mostly neglected in scholarship.” I suspect this neglect owes much to the fact that Breton’s bold effort to reconcile Engels and Freud is central to these texts; they yield their significance above all to a reader taking this effort seriously.

In my project to salvage previously illegible aspects of Benjamin and Breton’s Gothic Marxisms, I pursue the Benjaminitan imperative of “rescuing critique.” For Benjamin this rescue is effected by reading: “The historical index of the images doesn’t simply say that they belong to a specific time, it says above all that they only enter into legibility at a specific time” (N 3, 1, emphasis added). Speculating on what factors determine the legibility of images at one moment and not another, Benjamin links such legibility to how these images mediate between the critic’s present and their own: “Every Now is determined by those images that are synchronic with it: every Now is the Now of a specific recognizability,” Benjamin suggests (N 3, 1). And: “It isn’t that the past casts its light on what is present or that what is present casts its light on what is past; rather, an image is that in which the Then and the Now come together into a constellation like a flash of lightning” (N 3, 1).

What Now and Then come together in Profane Illumination? I

26. Mad Love was published in 1937 but is composed of essays written largely in the period 1933–35. Marguerite Bonnet tells us that “Breton moreover himself wanted to make the unity of the three works palpable: on December 2, 1939, he writes to Jean Pauhlan that he would have liked to unite in one volume Nadja, Communicating Vessels, and Mad Love,” although Gaston Gallimard refused to accept this project because Mad Love was not yet out of print. See Marguerite Bonnet, notes to Nadja in André Breton, Œuvres complètes, 1560. Because there exists at the moment only one volume, I have hereafter abbreviated the text as OC.

27. She continues, “Haim Finkelstein and I . . . found fifteen comprehensive commentaries on Nadja within a single decade but total neglect of the other two books of the trilogy.” See Anna Balakan, “Introduction,” 3.

28. For a discussion of this concept in all its complexities, see notably Irving Wolfsarth, “On the Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin’s Last Reflections.” See also Jürgen Habermas, “Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique,” in On Walter Benjamin, ed. Gary Smith.

29. I situate my study under the aegis of rescue as conceptualized in Konvolut N rather than in the “Theses on the Philosophy of History” because the urgency regulating my project does not approach the terrifying pressure of fascism leading Benjamin to rearticulate the flash of historical recuperation in 1940: “To articulate the past historically . . . means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.” See Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in Illuminations, 235 (hereafter referred to as I). I return to Benjamin’s use of surrealist rhetoric to describe historiographical rescue in chapter 7, “Benjamin Reading the Rencontre.”
would suggest two answers to the question. Jean Baudrillard has observed that “revolution is the spectacle of the changes that have already occurred”; in the past few years, we have witnessed the spectacle of the demise of Revolution itself. The recent collapse of the rusted-out Iron Curtain has monumentalized (albeit as debris) a problem that has periodically troubled Marxist thinkers throughout the twentieth century: How is Marxism to be salvaged from failed attempts to translate its theory into political practice? If, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe put it several years before, “we are now situated in a post-Marxist terrain,” this is a terrain with which Gothic Marxists have long been familiar, and Benjamin and Breton are no exception. Indeed, the problem of salvaging Marxism from the disillusionment provoked by the political systems it generated was particularly acute at the time that Benjamin and Breton wrote, in the wake of the Stalinist turn taken by the Russian Revolution.

The recent critical popularity enjoyed by Benjamin confirms that the pressures of post-Marxism have helped bring the conjuncture of Benjamin and Breton’s Gothic Marxisms into view. In the time it has taken me to frame this book, I have been hard-pressed to keep up with the proliferation of work attempting to appropriate Gothic Marxist aspects of Benjamin’s musings for cultural theory across the disciplines. I too offer my elaboration of Benjamin and Breton’s Gothic Marxisms in response to post-Marxist pressures; if images from the past spring to legibility in the present, it is because they speak to its concerns. The most suggestive material rescued here includes: (1) the valorization of the realm of a culture’s ghosts and phantasms as a significant and rich field of social production rather than a mirage to be dispelled; (2) the valorization of a culture’s detritus and trivia as well as its strange and marginal practices; (3) a notion of critique moving beyond logical argument and the binary opposition to a phantasmagorical staging more closely resembling psychoanalytic therapy, privileging nonrational forms of “working through” and regulated by overdetermination rather than dialectics; (4) a dehierarchization of the epistemological privilege accorded the visual in the direction of that integration of the senses dreamed of by Marx in The 1844 Manuscripts: “... the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities ... The senses have therefore become directly in their practice theoreticians”; accompanying this dehierarchization, a practice of criticism cutting across tradi-

30. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, 4. The work of Slavoj Žižek exemplifies the Gothic strain in some of the best post-Marxism.
tionally separated media and genres as well as critical attention to how and why these separations came to be;\textsuperscript{31} and (5) a concomitant valorization of the sensuousness of the visual: the realm of visual experience is opened to other possibilities than the accomplishment and/or figuration of rational demonstration.

The present flaring to view of surrealist Marxism is also generated by its encounter with a second aspect of our Now. Not only Breton’s modern materialism but high surrealism more generally has been a dead letter in the theoretical ferment of the past thirty years. Above all, high surrealism was dismissed by the French theoretical avant-garde that came to dominance in the sixties and seventies and that has been so influential in shaping the current critical scene. When surrealist theory (like surrealist Marxism) has been noticed, interest has focused on the renegade surrealists around Bataille. As David Macey puts it, “The structuralists forget or simply repress their historic debt,” and Macey notes “the belligerent tone of the criticisms addressed to Breton.”\textsuperscript{32} But with the aging of the French theoretical avant-garde, the time has come to look critically at its claims. The imperative can be put in stronger terms: The moment when this avant-garde falls back into history is the moment to define its place there, to detail how, despite its absolute language, it (like all avant-gardes) did not spring full blown from the heads of some important men and a few women. High surrealism must be included as an intellectual pressure to which the French theoretical avant-garde responded, a movement that reigned with crushing authority over the very notion of the avant-garde during the youth of this generation.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} Karl Marx, \textit{Economic and Philosphic Manucripts of 1844}, 139.

\textsuperscript{32} Macey, \textit{Lacan in Contexts}, 49. Macey refers specifically here to the summer 1971 issue of \textit{Tel Quel}. Macey’s book provides an illuminating contribution to the neglected story of surrealism’s importance for postwar theory. In particular, Macey stresses the importance of surrealism for Lacan, pointing out that Lacan is as unstraightforwardly straightforward about his debt to surrealism as he is about anything. Macey writes, “Of the forty or so French literary authors included in the name index [of \textit{Ecrits}], more than half belonged to the surrealist group at one time or another, or were claimed by the surrealists as their forbears. Surrealism is the only identifiable ‘school’ to which Lacan refers so consistently. . . . The frequency with which Lacan alludes to surrealism is all the more striking in that it is not a major reference for the post-war avant-garde to which received opinion would have him belong” (p. 45).

\textsuperscript{33} Wollen remarks of Breton: “French culture is unthinkable without him. Not only did he develop a theory and practice of art which has had enormous effect (perhaps more than any other in our time), but he also introduced both Freud and Hegel to France, first to non-specialist circles, but then back into the specialized world through those he influenced (Lefebvre, Lacan, Bataille, Lévi-Strauss)” (p. 78). With the aging of the generation tyrannized by high surrealism, official recognition of the movement is returning. Visitors to Paris in the summer of 1991 may remember that its landscape was punctuated with posters of Breton sporting a leather jacket, an advertisement for a massive exhibit of his
One of my aims is thus to draw attention to the subterranean but vital presence of surrealism in subsequent key moments of twentieth-century French thought. In keeping with this study’s focus on the Marxist dimensions of surrealism, I am interested here above all in the importance of surrealism for the Marxist wing of the French theoretical avant-garde: that the schizophrenic strolls into Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* from surrealism’s politicized treatment of madness, above all Breton’s *Nadja*; or what Michel de Certeau’s work on tactics and everyday life owes to Breton’s social application of psychoanalytic models for expression in situations of repression and censorship.\(^{34}\) Because my discussion of Benjamin and Breton’s Gothic Marxsisms is already quite detailed, I have by and large relegated these links to the margins of my argument. But I also wanted to give at least one in-depth example of how the French theoretical avant-garde incorporated the tenets of surrealist Marxism into its thought.\(^{35}\) In “The Questions of Modern Materialism,” I discuss the ways in which Louis Althusser reworks modern materialism through the intermediary of Lacan.

I focus on Althusser for reasons pertaining to my own procedure in rendering legible Benjamin and Breton’s work. Phenomena “are rescued by exhibiting the discontinuity that exists within them,” Benjamin declares in one of his many meditations on “rescuing critique” from Konvolut N (N 9, 4). In the cases of Benjamin and Breton, this discontinuity is often egregious; if these texts can be shown to diverge from their received interpretations, it is because they are profoundly divided against themselves. Benjamin observed, the “profane illumination did not always find the Surrealists equal to it,” and the same might be said of Benjamin’s reworking of it as well (R, 179). In such a situation, an appeal to theoretical work that carries on the project of the texts in some measure can be helpful; that modern materialism was reworked by French structural and poststructural Marxism has been invaluable to private collection at the Pompidou Center. See Camhi’s previously mentioned article, “Extended Boundaries,” which considers the actuality of surrealism as it emerged from the exhibit.

\(^{34}\) The importance of surrealism to the Marxist wing of the French avant-garde is also visible in the debt to surrealism owed by Jameson.

\(^{35}\) In many cases, the transmission of surrealism to the French theoretical avant-garde of the sixties and seventies is far from straightforward. Besides owing much to Bataille and the renegade surrealists, the legacy of surrealism sometimes passes, as Wol- len’s article makes clear, through situationism. The hostile but engaged relation of existentialism to surrealism is also of importance.
me in this regard. Because both Benjamin and Breton were preoccupied with using psychoanalytic categories to recast the base-superstructure distinction, I found Althusser’s writings particularly useful in clarifying their discontinuous musings.

One last word on a road not taken: I would have liked to supplement a textual discussion of Benjamin and Breton’s Marxisms with biographical material. How did these men’s paths cross in the Paris of the late 1920s and 1930s, might their personal intercourse provide some clue to their textual exchange? Information on this subject (at least publicly accessible) is, however, absent, tantalizingly untraceable, as Gershom Scholem comments in his introduction to the published selections from Benjamin’s correspondence: “Of the letters to Benjamin’s French correspondents, the letters to André Breton are for example either lost or are not traceable.”36 Gary Smith confirms that there is no letter between the two men in either the unpublished Frankfurt or Berlin archives.37 On the west side of the Rhine, Marguerite Bonnet, Breton’s editor, finds no mention of Benjamin in any Breton correspondence.38 Certainly, one can speculate on the basis of suggestive details from Pari- sian intellectual life of the time. Pierre Klossowski recalls, “I met Walter Benjamin in the course of one of the meetings of Contre-Attaque, the name adopted by the ephemeral fusion of the groups surrounding André Breton and Georges Bataille in 1935.” 39 So too Breton and Benjamin were both at the opening of a show of Gisèle Freund’s photographs at Adrienne Monnier’s bookstore in March 1939.40 But there is no more vivid record of Benjamin’s biographical relation to Breton.

My argument for Breton’s importance to Benjamin must hence proceed through textual examination alone. And the discontinuous nature of the texts under examination does not facilitate the critic’s task. I will not try to recuperate this discontinuity as strategically important (although this argument could and has been made), nor to make whole

39. Pierre Klossowski, “Between Marx and Fourier,” in On Walter Benjamin, ed. Smith, 368. Klossowski also emphasizes that Benjamin’s position in the Parisian intellectual landscape of the 1930s was with the renegade surrealists opposing the high surrealism of Breton. “Later, Benjamin was an assiduous auditor at the Collège de Sociologie,” Klossowski continues, “an ‘exoteric’ emanation of the closed and secret group Acéphale, which crystallized around Bataille soon after his break with Breton.” Klossowski, in On Walter Benjamin, 368.
40. Gary Smith brought my attention to this event. The name of the bookstore is La Maison des Amis des Livres.
systems that never were.41 Rather, the measure of Benjamin and Breton’s work lies not in the evaluation of its success or failure but in a criterion whose very ambivalence rendered it dear to Benjamin and surrealism alike. That criterion is fascination.42 As Benjamin stated of artifacts from the past in a rather different context, “we believe the charm they exert on us reveals that they still contain materials of vital importance to us—not, of course, for our architecture, the way iron trusswork anticipates our design; but they are vital for our perception, if you will, for the illumination of the situation. Materials of politically vital importance at any rate; the Surrealists’ fixation on these things proves it, as does their exploitation in contemporary fashion” (N 1, 11). 

41. See Irving Wohlfarth’s articles on Benjamin for acute characterizations of Benjamin’s brooding mode of critical reflection. On Benjamin as brooder, see also Richard Sieburth, “Benjamin the Scrivener,” first printed in Assemblage, no. 6, and then reprinted in Smith et al., Benjamin—Philosophy, Aesthetics, History.

42. On Benjamin and fascination, see Ackbar Abbas, “On Fascination: Walter Benjamin’s Images.” Abbas comments: “He sees in fascination not a will-less affect, not the response of last resort, but a willingness to be drawn to phenomena that attract our attention yet do not submit entirely to our understanding” (p. 51).