

CEÇI N'EST PAS UNE PIPE

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Landscape –that, in fact, is what Paris became for the flâneur. Or, more precisely: the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room.

Le flâneur

The continuity between inside and outside, intensely elaborated and almost visual in Benjamin's texts, is enhanced through the connection enabled between two very particular figures from the end of the nineteenth century urban bourgeois culture, however hypothetically opposed: the flâneur and the collector.

Both of them, the flâneur and the collector, are outdated characters on their own time: The city has left them behind. The first seeks anonymity in a crowd that occupies a city already vanished –the motley Paris of the passages previous to Haussmann. The other devotes his life and heritage to build an identity with objects that have belonged to others. They are two sides to the allegorical figure of simultaneity and montage that characterize urban experience in Benjamin's literature.

In principle, the flâneur is the paradigm of the multitudinous experience of the street life and the cafés –a paradigm of exteriority–; the collector is the paradigm of the private and bourgeois atmosphere –a paradigm of interiority.

The flâneur hides in the public space of the 'passage' hoping for anonymity –disappeared swallowed by the crowd. The collector artificially constructs the profile of his private figure through the collection of objects brought from remote sites. This is a spatial paradox to which we are constantly faced to by the literature of Benjamin: the inversion of the experience between the public and the domestic, or between the interior and the urban.

However opposed, within the dense literary fabric of Benjamin the figures of the flâneur and the collector are purposely intertwined to provide a distorted experience of the urban, predicated on such paradoxical inversion. An inverted scenario in which the flâneur lives in the interior space of the street and the collector occupies the exterior space of the domestic.

The figure of the flâneur is embodied by characters as Baudelaire, Proust, Wilde and Poe, each one on its own way. Charles Baudelaire is a ghostly figure, urban and bohemian, that hides from creditors in the crowd. With no fixed address by necessity –not to be localized–, he has turned this circumstances into his own way of life, inhabiting the passages and cafés like if they were interior and private spaces.

"For if flânerie can transform Paris into one great interior –a house whose rooms are the quartiers, no less clearly demarcated by

thresholds than are real rooms– then, on the other hand, the city can appear to someone walking through it to be without thresholds: a landscape in the round."

Although concealed in the inner space of the street, the scenography of the life of the flâneur is 'panoramic' –continuous as a Panorama–, in which a perspectival simulation disguises both the perceptual continuity and naturalness of an artificially constructed image. And the indolent and lazy attitude is only in appearance, since the flâneur is always alert, observing daily life with the precision and the distrust of the physiognomist or the detective.

For Marcel Proust, another prototypical flâneur, Paris is a foreign place –everything is foreign to him–, a place whose experience is simultaneously exhilarating and frightening. Reality, understood as all that is external to us, must be the subject of literary perception –an intermediary, a filter–, that does not distinguish between city and landscape: both are artificial constructs that must be sublimated in order to be assimilated and cease to be foreign.

"..the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room."

The city, its streets, can be described at once open like a landscape or closed like a room, as if their perception depends not on the qualities of the object but on the subject's mood. However, it is not a problem of subjectivity, but of the intensification of perception.

This perceptive simultaneity constructed in between the room and the city –in between figure and background–, disrupts architecture's conventional role as shelter and as envelope. And the analogy constructed around city and landscape definitely dilutes the conceptual boundaries between the continuous and the discontinuous.

Both metaphors of the city –as the confined space of the room and as a continuous open landscape– make an emphasis on a kind experience particular to the flâneur: the prototype of citizen self-excluded from the system –and, therefore, urban by definition–, that dwells in the city in constant conflict, continuously inverting conceptual categories and physical relationships.

We could argue that Benjamin proposes a radically different way –the word might be opposite– to understand the ordinary reality of the city through visual allegories built upon the urban experience of the flâneur. Visual allegories that work as the photographs of Man Ray or Brassai: as instruments capable of altering our perception of reality from the manipulated image of its fragments.

The collector

The role of the ethnographer is the scientific reconstruction of the social, religious and

cultural codes at work in a particular society or tribe, working from the objects, techniques and customs used by its members. The collector operates unlike the ethnographer, re-grouping the artifacts of dismembered and de-familiarized cultural realities according to some new rules, foreign and arbitrary to them. When it becomes part of a collection, each artifact is separated not without violence from the system within which it was produced and where its function could be recognizable.

"What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametrical opposite to any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness. What is this "completeness"? It is a grand attempt to overcome the wholly irrational character of the object's mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, expressly devised historical system: the collection."

The logic of the collection starts with a new taxonomic reclassification that pulls out each object from its context just to re-locate it arbitrarily within a new one. Deprived of the utility bond, functional or symbolic, the artifacts are re-grouped and arranged in relation only to other artifacts of the collection.

For Benjamin the peculiarity of this phenomenon does not lie in the possible psychological roots of the collecting impulse, but in the splitting of the object from all its original functions and its gathering with other similar artifacts. The nature of this new set of relationships is located on the opposite side of utility, defined by the category of integrity, that is, the attempt to overcome the utter irrationality of the mere presence of the object through its inclusion in a new historical order, arbitrary and purposely created: the order of the collection. Consequently, reflecting on the collection would necessarily imply the exposure of the conception of the pseudo-natural order allegedly constructed, along with the identification of its cracks, of the order system and the social conflicts that underpin it. Of its montage.

"The true method of making things present is to represent them in our space (not to represent ourselves in their space). (The collector does just this, and so does the anecdote.) Thus represented, the things allow no mediating construction from out of 'large context'... We don't displace our beings into theirs; they step into our life."

The collector is the true tenant of the interior, as place and as concept. In the private space of the apartment he constructs a private system of relationships between artifacts foreign and external to him that, when absorbed into the collection defines and identifies him. The collection is thus transformed into his physiognomy, it characterizes him, and it replaces him. The collector is the collection.

The collector is the true tenant of the interior,

as place and as a concept. In the interior space of his apartment he defines a private system of relationships capable of absorbing into the collection other artifacts foreign and external to it, thus construing a personal collection of objects that identify him.

“The nineteenth Century, like no other Century, was addicted to dwelling. It conceived the residence as a receptacle for a person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling’s interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet... The twenty Century, with its porosity and transparency, its tendency towards the well lit and airy, has put an end to dwelling in the old sense.”

Thus, as a system of artificially constructed relationships among objects unrelated to each other, the collection occupies the inner space of domestic architecture, almost replacing it: The room is transformed into a case or a box, and its interior is no longer a space for a person but the shell fit for an object or a system objects.

However, the collection also brings into the core of this paradigm the seed of its alter ego and, therefore, its inevitable change and transformation. If the bourgeois domestic space is the epitome of interiority –the case-, of the natural and continuous relationship between form and content and of representation of identity through the privacy and its translation into architecture, the collection is predicated on the opposite principles.

The pursuit of the collector is supported on three mechanisms: fragmentation, assembly and simultaneity. The collector removes artifacts from their context, buying them at the flea market of antiques or through sophisticated justifications of colonial prey, to re-locate them in a new context, either in a museum or a private collection. In both cases, objects are re-grouped into a new order to reproduce inevitably a new meaning.

Such juxtaposition is performed according to a new code, a new semiotic, whereas either the collection, the museum or the collector impose arbitrarily or scientifically their own system of hierarchies. And, as a result, a new system of relationships is construed between the objects. A system in which continuity is only apparent: the technique of montage underlying its production causes fragmentation and discontinuity to be its defining structural quality. Within the collection, despite its apparent narrative, scientific, ethnographic or scholar, there are only the fragments of other cultures or systems assembled in a collage capable of simulating the conditions of a stable context and a continuous code in which they integrate just apparently.

The collection, though resembling the paradigm of the private environment built ad hoc,

introduces the assembly techniques of montage that characterize the urban experience into the core of the interior space, encouraging once again the inversion and collapse of such differences.

An implosion of the spatial paradigms takes place in Benjamin’s essays, re-conceptualizing the city as an interior and the domestic space into an external model. On the one hand, the flâneur lives and occupies the city as if it were a private room; on the other, the collector sets up the multiple fragments from an alien and distant reality within the interior space of the apartment or the museum.

Benjamin shares with surrealism such critical approach to systems of coding and meaning through the techniques of collage and montage.

Trocadero’s drift

“Possession and having are allied with the tactile, and stand in certain opposition to the optical. Collectors are beings with tactile instincts. Moreover, with the recent turn away from naturalism, the primacy of the optical that was determinate by the previous century has come to an end. The flâneur optical, the collector tactile.”

Either because of the interest on the iconography of African masks, or on the discovery of symbolic codes alien to western representation, to collect artifacts extracted from other cultures became part of the intellectual and artistic activities of the Parisian avant-gards.

The images that portray the artistic and intellectual life of Paris in the early decades of the twentieth century give us such evidence, as they often show tribal objects displayed in the private atmosphere of rooms and studies, filling up the space together with many other everyday artifacts, domestic and musical.

That is the case of the many photographs taken by Picasso himself of everyone who passed through his studio in Rue Raspail –pictures of Apollinaire, Kahnweiler or Picasso himself sitted by the wall –as if it was a painted portrait-, and surrounded by canvases, frames and african wooden figures-, as also the ones that portray George Braque in his studio before a wall full of by mandolines, masks, small totems, frames, pottery and clothes. In fact, both Picasso and Braque had small collections of these negro artifacts, always present in the photographs taken in their ateliers, intermingled with guitars, bottles and other cubist and painterly objects. And such presence could not be considered neither accidental nor irrelevant.

As soon as in 1910, Picasso and Braque followed Matisse and Derain in their early interest on African artifacts, while Tristan Zara and Breton became, in the following years, expert collectors of masks and tribal artifacts brought from Oceania. The cubists were fixed on African masks -Grebo

and from Ivory Coast- for its symbolic capacity alien to the codes of representation and figuration characteristic of western painting and sculpture.

“In certain Ivory Coast masks, the Cubist painters discovered marks which, without recourse to imitation, compelled the spectator to imagine the face whose ‘real’ shape the mask did not imitate. That, I am sure, was the decisive discovery which allowed painting to create invented signs, freed sculpture from the mass and led it into transparency”.

However, by obviating the origin and function of these objects -masks, fetishes, totems and ritual costumes-, and approaching them as art objects for their aesthetic and expressive value rather than as cultural artifacts of anthropological and ethnographic value, the Cubists forced their re-interpretation under the aesthetic parameters of those western codes of representation.

The surrealists, by contrast, understood the tribal objects as cultural artifacts able to confirm the existence of other ways of thinking, other symbolic systems and codes. And therefore, their presence gave legitimacy to distancing strategies regarding the regulated and conventional codes governing the relationships with and between things.

The surreal appearance of these tribal objects inside the interior and private space of the collection and its enigmatic presence impossible to decode infected and altered the perception of everything around them. By withdrawing the confidence on western closed systems, disabled to deform to integrate the sublime, their presence required necessarily a reconfiguration of standard codes.

“Before the war Apollinaire had decorated his study with African ‘fetishes’ and in his long poem ‘Zone’ these objects would be invoked as ‘des Christ d’une autre forme et d’une autre croyance’. For the Paris avant-garde, Africa (and to a lesser degree Oceania and America) provided a reservoir of other forms and other beliefs.”

The surrealists made from the compulsive addition of the collector a productive technique, able to impregnate –to modify- the experience of both the city and the domestic, equating both domains as Benjamin had done. The open landscape of the city and the enclosed precinct of the room are equated and merged to provide an ongoing and continuous experience independent from the formal boundaries between inside and outside, or between the individual and the collective.

“A significant purpose of Breton’s home was thus to shelter a physical and intellectual collection of objects whose prime function was to locate the self within the wider world outside. The status of these collections was poetic rather than archival or taxonomic encounters was further enhanced by the inevitable shifts and rearrangements of their display, open to the dynamics of change and accident”.

Breton, like Apollinaire or Tristan Tzara, lived literally within the space of a collection. His studio/apartment, meeting place for many activities of the group -from automatic writing sessions to stormy programmatic discussions- was crowded with objects from very different backgrounds -pictures, books, everyday objects and obsolete artifacts bought at flea markets, dissected insects suffed in glass boxes, masks and fetishes from Oceania, photographs or postcards-, carefully distributed on walls and shelves with no apparent order.

“Most spectacularly, though, the apartment was also the home to the accumulation and installation of Breton legendary collections, a living museum of objects that would have spoken eloquently to their keeper of memories and encounters, places and journeys... In contrast to the look of a museum or archive ... these displays strike the viewer above all for the extraordinarily complex way in which categories and distinctions between types of objects have been blurred or ignored.”

When examining the photographs of their crowded rooms, one tends to believe that the objects on display have been stored in those rooms, kept in glass cases and urns, in order to preserve them but not to classify or sort them according to a legible code, scientific, ethnographic or otherwise. As hoarded treasures of colonial plunder, their variety and exoticism runs paralleled to our misunderstanding. What are these figures? How were they used? What's their meaning? To which cultural, iconic or symbolic system do they belong?

“Before 1930 the Trocadero was a jumble of exotica... Since the collection lacked an up-to-date scientific, pedagogical vision, its disorder made the museum a place where one could go to encounter curiosities, fetishied objects.”

For all the images of the old Trocadero have something in common: They offer deeply internalized spaces -perfectly suit to collectionism- in which objects, alien to each other and to us, are grouped together to seemingly float with surprising autonomy. They are fragments of other cultures, other systems, now displayed next to each other without apparent order or code that might help to unveil their meaning or function.

Regularly visited by Fauves, Cubists, Surrealists and Dadaists, they were all fascinated by a world of stacked objects whose function, meaning or value had been taken away, and now coexist unreferenced in the chaotic space of the endless semicircular galleries of the Museum.

Protected by the confusion between cultural artifacts and art objects that underlies at the accumulation eagerness of any colonial enterprise, the Trocadero galleries became an integral part of the artistic drifts of Paris: an interior space inscribed in the sequence of urban experiences.

But for Surrealists the Trocadero represented

not solely the allegorical model of urban experience, but of every experience: a construction made from fragments of reality in which the unity and continuity of the actual appearance has been replaced by a spatial and oneiric system on floating fragments. We are surrounded -wrapped- by a display of objects of different origin and meaning, however without the knowledge of the codes needed for their understanding.

In the almost abandoned atmosphere of the Trocadero, Surrealists recognize the sort of experiences who were searching for in their writings: a space crowded with symbolic objects, incomprehensible and placed out of context, unrelated to each other, like in a dream. However, this was a real place, as real and intense as the city itself. Therefore, those rooms become part of the sequence of images that build the surreal imagery of Paris.

This technique of strangeness and fragmentation in the assemblage itself causes the apparent breakup glimpsed on images of the museum so effectively, and which underlies the 'system of objects' so pervasive and common in our own time, where any coherence in the systems relationships has been replaced by the exuberance of the production and the simulation of experience.

Alien to their original function, decontextualized from its environment, the artifacts and objects occupy the space forced to participate in a new system that objectifies and makes them opaque. Deprived from their original active function -cultural, semiotic, social, etc...- they have been confined to a passive condition. Once they have lost their original meaning, they are confined to passively wait for a stroller to endow them again with another meaning. One constructed out of the new bond between the object and the collector/flâneur, capable of re-situating the artifact in a new and foreign context.

The interior landscape of Trocadero becomes the allegorical image not just of the spatial model -continuous and discontinuous at the same time- sought by both Benjamin and the surrealists, but also of the model in constant re-configuration of open systems and unstable relationships between the fragments revealed in the techniques of montage. Ahead of its time, and anticipating our own.

Images of simultaneity

The crossings between Walter Benjamin's thought and the techniques of Surrealism became evident in his works in many different ways. In fact, this relationship has a strong presence in the literary technique itself. But, if there was any doubt left, Benjamin approached this connection explicitly in the 1929 text "Surrealism. The latest snapshot of European intelligence."

In this essay Benjamin does not address the foundations or the history of the Surrealist

movement and its characteristic conflicts. And, in regard to their artistic endeavor, openly restricts his interest to the photographic and literary production. The focus of the essay lies on the identification and analysis of very strategic operational tools favored by surrealism: in particular, the use of montage, together with the conditions of discontinuity, overlap and simultaneity that are specific to it.

“[Breton] makes the streets, gateways, and squares of the city into illustrations for a trashy novel, sucking out the trite self-evidence of this age-old architecture to apply it with hyper-original intensity to the action portrayed -to which, exactly as in those old books housemaids read, verbatim extracts complete with page numbers refer. And all the Parisian location that appear here are places at which what there is between these people turns like a revolving door.”

The serial or trashy novel -the froufrou-, like photography and the calligramme, introduce into the description of what surrounds us the qualities of discontinuity, and thus the images and the texts acquire a fragmented and unstable condition, pushing to negotiate at any time -in every circumstance and for every reader- its possible meanings. However, it should not be understood as an overvalue of subjectivity, but the determining role endows to a system of relationships -of codes- that propitiate and builds a world of fragments in which 'what there is between these men turns like a revolving door'.

In the vast and unfinished project of 'Passages', whose murky history and format bring some support to this argument, Benjamin reinforces the relevance of assembly as the technique for the construction of what surrounds us, and assigns to it a structural role not just in regard to the purpose of the book, but also in regard to the conception of history or, specifically, of historiography.

“The first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. This is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event. And, therefore, to break with vulgar historical naturalism. To grasp the construction of history as such. In the structure of commentary.”

As an expression of the historical materialism informs his thinking, Benjamin reclaims the use of real fragments as an allegorical support to describe and analyze the world around us: large-scale constructions produced from fragments -the smaller and more precious cuts subjected to mounting technique-. Like the Surrealists, Benjamin aims to find in the anecdotal experience, of the daily and seemingly banal facts, the really significant elements, only when they are linked and assembled through the techniques of montage -the fortuitous joining of fragments- to provide us with another version of

reality: One characterized by discontinuities, oblivious to the synthesis of any organic model, any natural theory.

“Breton,” writes Benjamin in his essay on Surrealism, “has said right from the outset that he wished to break with a practice that places before the public the literary expressions of a specific form of existence while withholding that form of existence itself. More succinctly and dialectically: the realm of literature was here being exploded from within in that a group of close associates was taking the ‘literary life’ to the outer limits of the possible.”

André Breton, like Benjamin, calls for a direct experience, a continuous contact with reality for as shocking and destabilizing it may be, or precisely because of it. And, as experience should prevail over the theoretical sediments, literature must overcome all restrictions, even those required by the language itself –the regulated system by excellence- if it wants to penetrate into life. “La réalité”, writes Aragon, “est l’absence apparente de contradiction. Le merveilleux, c’est la contradiction qui apparaît dans le réel.” The sublime is forged with fragments of reality, ‘objets trouvés’ whose meaning derives from the changing system of relations in which they are immersed.

Similarly as it happens to the calligramme, Benjamin aims for an experience expressed without mediation: to show and to name, to imitate and to signify, to look and to read in one single act. The overcoming or cancellation of mediation of codes is, according to Foucault, the *modus operandi* of the calligramme, as also fundamental aspiration of the Surrealists.

“Method of this Project: literary montage. I needn’t say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations.”

Both, text and experience, renounce the elaborate synthesis of the unitary and coherent form, in order to enjoy a more open and freer though vaguer space. A space whose allegorical image –as Benjamin’s narrative is allegorical-, is always the city: the diverse discontinuity of the urban, and its capacity to intensify relations by emphasizing precisely the seams, the joints in the assembly of its components.

The proliferation of montage endows with a particular bias to both thought and production -of the city, images or texts etc... And, as a result of its systematic implementation, the continuity associated to regulated and closed systems is altered, deformed by a perception now trained in the proper tools of photography, and therefore looking for the fissures that underlie the natural appearance on things and enhancing its perception with all the consequences

Benjamin’s emphasis on photography as the determining factor in the profound transformation of the production techniques of

images and, therefore, in the capacity of images to represent us, identifies another point he shared in common with the Surrealists. Through photography, reality could be effectively approached without mediation, as it could be transformed by means of the techniques of assembly and photomontage without the representational conflicts inherent to painting and sculpture. When understood as an ‘objet trouvé’, the photographic image fixes a moment of reality, a physical and temporal fragment, alien to conventional codes of representation. Alien to any mediation.

Therefore, each photographic image is a fragment, a temporal and physical instant out of context, a piece detached from a continuous system. However, out of each image, each fragment, a context could be re-constructed, a support re-invented.

In the incomplete notes of the ‘Passages’, the architectural images were carefully assembled through the text -in particular of domestic interiors-, to provide Benjamin with the visual support from which to build the argument. As also real images, such as those collected by Benjamin himself, used as snapshots culled and subjected to changes in the literary montage.

“Yes, this epoch was wholly adapted to the dream, was furnished in dreams. The alternation in styles –Gothic, Persian, Renaissance and so on- signified: that over the interior of the middle-class dining room spreads a banquet room of Cesare Borgia’s, or that out of the boudoir of the mistress a Gothic chapel arises, or that the master’s study, in its iridescence, is transformed into the chamber of a Persian prince. The photomontage that fixes such images for us corresponds to the most primitive perceptual tendency of these generations. Only gradually have the images among which they lived detached themselves and settled on signs, labels, posters, as the figures of advertising.” The private space of the bourgeois citizens –the middle class, the anonymous inhabitant in the city- becomes the setting for the allegorical substitution of the domestic interior for the ‘dream of reason’, or the actual lack of it. There takes place the visual effect of simultaneous overlap of images alien to each other coming from the artificial depository of styles -Gothic, Renaissance, etc.-, reduced to wallpaper, to superficial images.

The historical and chronological logic of styles collapses in the private space of domesticity, where the citizen of the metropolis does not think, but dreams. And in dreams, -another allegory shared by Benjamin and the surrealists-, images are constructed with the fragments of memory, with remnants of the experience.

In the book ‘The Decorative Art of Today’, Le Corbusier emphasizes a paradox endemic to the industrial revolution that, by enhancing mechanical mass production, facilitated the proliferation of ornamentation in domestic objects as something superimposed, added and superficial.

“The hurricane overturned on us without restraint the miraculous fruits of the first industrial age; these came in the form of a cornucopia carved with gadroons and acanthus leaves, in the manner of the craftsmen of the KINGS –baubles catalogued by archeologists born precisely in this disjointed era. No one had any idea what the real outcome of the adventure would be. M. LOUIS-PHILIPPE, with his whiskers, said simply to himself: ‘This will allow me to bring some glitter into my little home, on the cheap.’ And so it did. THE BOURGEOIS SAID: ‘It’s astonishing; I am gathering the fruit ripened by the Revolution: we have cut off the head of Capet; now I am king, long live the king’.”

Within the eclectic and fetishistic confusion particular to the bourgeois private space -filled with objects to accumulate memories, icons, etc... in an obsessive way-, Benjamin, like Le Corbusier, confirm the consequences of a system predicated on the technological progress, unable to ‘produce’ but to ‘reproduce’, under equal conditions, the different ambiances and styles, transforming them into commodities.

But it also introduces the figure of the dream -of the nightmare-, that is, then again, so characteristic of surrealism.

Following the same path as the Surrealists, Benjamin uses to his assistance the new Freudian concept of dream as introspection –and not as an evasion-, to model an idea of the inside –the case- able of transcending the idea of individual privacy and propose, instead, a model for urban experience built out of fragments. A model of privacy that, in order to be visualized as an allegory with all its effectiveness, must be transformed into an architecture built with the same mechanisms.

“The original form of all dwelling is existence not in the house but in the shell. The shell bears the impression of its occupant. In the most extreme instance, the dwelling becomes the shell. The nineteenth-century, like no other century, was addicted to dwelling. It conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling’s interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, usually violet folds of velvet. What didn’t the nineteenth-century invent some sort of casing for! Pocket watches, slippers, egg cups, thermometers, playing cards –and, in lieu, of case, there were jackets, carpets, wrappers and covers”

The domestic space of Louis Philippe, the last breath of the French monarchy nostalgia, is set as an allegorical image of its time: The case that obsessively reproduces the shape –the figure- of its inhabitants and its belongings, is not the product of reason but the expression of the experience accumulated in the collective unconscious of a social class that resists the effects of a transformation happening in real time. A dream transferred to the conception of the domestic made as patchwork, out of unconnected images able to coexist in the space

of the unconscious through the techniques of simultaneity associated to montage.

The allegory of domestic privacy as an expression of the contradictions of urban mercantile capitalism, contained in Benjamin's texts, place great pressure on architecture and on the city. The private rooms of the bourgeois dwelling are offered as changing and phantasmagorical sceneries responsible for disclosing the dialectic between public and private, the extremes to the debate establish between the individual and its social projection.

Within this allegorical image, the city 'opens like a landscape' -whose spatial quality is continuity-, while the idea of the inner private inner is brought about -formalized-, through the analogy of the case, the velvet sheath and its obsessive match between figure and background.

Benjamin shared with the surrealists the fascination for artifacts -its appropriation, the arbitrariness of its forms, the effect they produced upon us-, and their association with the inherent concept of trace. Such fascination -that included, of course, diverse expressions of fetishism- is manifested, for example, in Max Ernst's obsession with commercial and trade catalogs, from where he picked numerous trimmings later inserted in his photomontages; or in Breton's 'objets trouvés'. This obsessive interest on the artifacts and its collection made of the container -of architecture-, a subrogate, a secondary mold whose shape is defined -imposed- by another shape. And it turns the relationship between container and content the only fundamental problem.

Among the images that Benjamin collected -Benjamin was a collector of toys, of images and postcards, etc.-, there were examples of late XIX century living rooms covered in drapery, crowded with objects and memories distributed without distinction, adjacent one to each other, under the only effect of contiguity and simultaneity. Such vague system of order applied in the display of objects and furniture, is identified through the images as the symptom of a particular time and place, in which it was difficult to identify and visualize the conceptual boundaries between things.

In the text 'Illuminations', the attempt to describe the significance of the trace imprinted by the objects is more literary:

"Since Louis-Philippe," writes Benjamin, "we find in the bourgeoisie a determination for losing the traces of private life in the big city. It tries within its four walls. Tireless takes the footprint to a variety of objects. It cares of holsters and cases for shoes and pocket watches, thermometers and egg cups, cutlery and umbrellas. Prefers the covers in velvet and plush that retain the imprint of all contact. In the end style of the Second Empire, the house becomes a kind of case. Conceived as a shell on man in which it is embedded with all appurtenances..."

In the later text of 'Passages', the tone is more dramatic, and the allegory has increased in intensity:

"In Nineteenth-century domestic interior, the space disguises itself -is placed like an alluring creature with mood costumes. ... Such nihilism is the innermost core of bourgeois coziness -a mood that in hashish intoxication concentrates to satanic contentment, satanic knowing, satanic calm, indicating to what extent the nineteenth-century interior is itself a stimulus to intoxication and dream... This mood involves, furthermore, an aversion to the open air, the (so to speak) Uranian atmosphere, which throws a new light on the extravagant interior design of the period. To live in these interiors was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider web in whose toils world events hang loosely suspended like so many insect bodies sucked dry. From this cavern, one does not like to stir."

The literary intensity transforms the domestic interior into nightmare scenery, more akin to Max Ernst's photomontages than the apartment of an anonymous citizen.

In Benjamin's text, both the bourgeois interior and the experience of the city are built in parallel, with the same assembly techniques that the daguerreotype and the incipient film had infiltrated in the production system of images.

"The domestic interior moves outside. It is as though the bourgeois were so sure of his prosperity that he is careless of façade, and can exclaim: My house, no matter where you choose to cut into it, is façade. Such facades, especially, on the Berlin houses dating back to the middle of the previous century: an alcove does not jut out, but -as niche- tucks in. The street becomes room and the room becomes street. The passer-by who stops to look at the house stands, as it were, in the alcove. Flâneur."

It is necessary to take a position in regard to Benjamin's text and its manipulation of architecture, trapped in a schematic duality between the categories of the domestic interior and the urban exterior. If we are to consider the text in purely allegorical terms -a first hypothesis-, architecture would be reduced to a dismembered body succumbing to the needs of literary expression. The collapse between interior and exterior would be purely ornamental, serving the construction of the text.

However, reflecting on Benjamin's insistence on this experiential opposition, together with its extraordinary visual and conceptual intensity, we should necessarily open up other hypothesis.

Through this paradoxical image, Benjamin recreates on the simultaneity akin to montage, exposing the coexistence and collapse of the two opposite poles of the physics of common objects and, therefore, of architecture: the

interiorized space of the room faced to the enveloping façade to the street, the private vis a vis the urban. The writing technique allows him to disassemble the stable structure of architecture to fold it inside out like a sock, to force the domestic space and its private phantasmagoria, turning it into an extension of the street, into a niche that opens up as result of the continuity between the interior and exterior surfaces, since the facade itself, as a boundary, has disappeared.

The alcove and the street overlap and assemble in a kind of montage typical of dream images and distinctive of cinematographic production technique. A montage whose aim it is not to highlight such dialectical opposition but the effects of an unreal or surreal simultaneity.

"Arcades are houses or passages having no outside -like the dream."

We are not so much interested on the analogy established between architecture and dreams, which produces mainly allegorical images, but between architecture and language, or between image and text, as in Magritte's calligramme 'ceci n'est pas une pipe'. In fact, the simultaneity akin to montage reaches its maximum freedom and fluidity in the literary text, where the unstable connections between words and images might promote the maximum confusion, to the point of undermining the support itself of meaning.

Thus, its true potential derives from the discovery of a speech in which images and texts do not coincide -do not illustrate each other-, but are independent from each other.

This applies to Benjamin's metaphorical and allegorical figures, through which the bourgeois dwelling and its grounded material support enters in a vortex whose end can only lead to transparency and fluidity -the openness-, characteristic of the modern spatial paradigm.

Therefore, when speaking of city planning and on the illusions of plans, Le Corbusier writes "le dehors est toujours un dedans" (the exterior is always an interior), we should not be caught by surprised. There is not witnessing a passing moment of incoherence or any minor betrayal of the rationalist program. It cannot be, since Le Corbusier had already exposed these ideas in L'Esprit Nouveau years before:

"The elements of the site rise up like walls panoplied in the power of their cubic co-efficient, stratification, material, etc, like the walls of a room."

Both Benjamin and the surrealists, as also Le Corbusier -as contradictory as it may seem-, take advantage of the same matrix: the visualization of assembly techniques characteristic of photography and film and its huge creative potential, which allows to think paradoxically, visualizing the opposites and, more importantly, enabling the adjoining of conflicts on a single stand.