Anarchic Illuminations:

On Walter Benjamin’s ambiguous sympathies for anarchism and intoxication in ‘Surrealism: The last snapshot of the European intelligentsia’

Mark Huba
Bachelor of Arts with Honours

Master of Arts

Faculty of Arts
School of Social and Political Sciences
The University of Melbourne
April 2009

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.
Abstract

This thesis explores the interrelatedness of anarchism and intoxication in Walter Benjamin’s 1929 article, ‘Surrealism: The last snapshot of the European Intelligentsia’. Responding to Marxist understandings of the ‘Surrealism’ article, this thesis contributes to a position put forth by Gershom Scholem regarding Benjamin’s later writings: that anarchism remains a distinct and alternative path in Benjamin’s thought, a path indebted to a youthful engagement with anarchist ideas. Utilising this understanding of anarchism in Benjamin’s later writings, it is argued that a positive understanding of anarchism in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article is discernible, and it exists in the ambiguous subordination of both anarchism and intoxication before that of Benjamin’s avowedly Marxist position, as expressed in the idea of profane illumination. It is thus considered how a positive understanding of anarchism and intoxication in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article is evident not from the perspective of the article’s conclusions, but from the ambiguities of these conclusions. These tensions are further emphasised in focusing upon the temporal discontinuities of Benjamin’s work and the discordant ordering of his writings. Focusing specifically on Benjamin’s childhood remembrances, written after the publication of his ‘Surrealism’ article, it is to be considered how these remembrances, or “images” grant a positive status for Benjamin’s youthful concerns, a point with demonstrable connections to both anarchism and intoxication. These youthful “images” are understood as offering a new trajectory or pathway in readings of Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article, wherein anarchism together with intoxication are presented as an alternative path unbound from their tense subordination beneath Marxism and the profane illumination. In contemplation of this alternative path, concluding remarks engage with the lineaments of a potential “anarchic illumination.” And, as with Benjamin’s “images” of childhood, these potentialities are to be found in those of Benjamin’s earlier writings that profess a sympathetic portrayal of anarchism and intoxication.


**Declaration**

This is to certify that –

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated in the preface,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is 30,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes but exclusive of tables, maps, appendices and bibliography.

Signature…………………………………………………………
Acknowledgements

I wish to express appreciation for my supervisor Adrian Little and his considerable support throughout the writing of this thesis. Thanks also to John Cash for his help in guiding the direction of this thesis. I would finally like to note my inestimable gratitude to my mother, Michelle Huba, for her emotional support throughout the composition of this thesis.
Table of contents

Introduction:
Walter Benjamin amongst the hashisheen 6

Chapter One:
The “undialectical” energies of anarchism and intoxication 24

Chapter Two:
Intoxication, remembrance and the discord of youth 47

Chapter Three:
Fragments of an “anarchic illumination” 62

Conclusion:
Endings and openings 83
Introduction:

Walter Benjamin amongst the hashisheen
A reasonable State could never survive with the use of hashish, which produces neither warriors nor citizens.¹

In his ‘Bhang Nama: Hemp as a sacrament’, Hakim Bey engages with the etymology and unique meaning of assassin, a word that, through realms both real and imaginal, extends to the purposes of providing the lineaments of an anarchist reappraisal and interpretation of Walter Benjamin’s article, ‘Surrealism: The last snapshot of the European intelligentsia’.² Given to describe the act or actor of stealthily executed murder, assassin derives from a moniker attributed to the Nizari Ismailis, a radical Islamic sect of the Middle Ages.³ The Assassins however possess another meaning, as can be found in the work of Silvestre de Sacy. As de Sacy contends, the meaning of Assassin is only tangentially related to assassination, having its origins in the Arabic word and title of hashisheen. And, hashisheen means “users of hashish,” a person given to imbibe a drug prepared from the dried leaves of the hemp plant, so as to induce a state of intoxication. The confluence of assassin, hashisheen, and the Nizari Ismailis, would consequently emerge from tales of the ‘old man of the mountain’, leader of the Assassins, and his penchant for soliciting loyalty by inducting new members with drug-induced visions of Paradise.⁴ For de Sacy, it is then from the use of hashish that the word assassin can be derived.

Bey accepts the etymological conjunction of assassin and hashisheen, but also acknowledges the word can be conceived as a slanderous insult utilised by the ruling orders of the Islamic world. To be called hashisheen was to insult the integrity of the

---

Ismailis by arguing that their endeavours were essentially crazed.\(^5\) On this basis of misrepresentation, the word assassin entered into Europe. Christians returning from the Crusades brought to Europe propagandistic tales of the intoxicated Assassins of Islam, a scandalous image commensurate with a European vision of oriental exoticism.\(^6\) Assassin, derived from *hashisheen*, becomes the misinterpretation of a derogatory depiction of the Ismailis as murderous drug users.

While Bey considers this a viable interpretation, he contributes another and potentially positive perspective on the misnomer of *hashisheen*. Here, Bey discusses the radical teachings of *Qiyamat*, or “Resurrection” among the Nizari Ismailis. Bey argues that the teachings of *Qiyamat* introduce a radical antinomianism into the Ismailis.\(^7\) This antinomianism emerges in the “spiritual autonomy” of a “direct experience of the inner divine.” Such “spiritual autonomy” implies the cultivation of a mystical experience of intoxication, in which the divine is realised in terms of an inner divinity. In turn, the strictures, laws, and moral assumptions of the Ismailis were overturned. The *nomos*, inclusive of all moral, political, and religious laws, possess no validity to those who have directly realised their own “spiritual autonomy.” For, the “direct experience of the inner divine” cancels the mediating impetus of all laws, and their capacity to bind the self to its judgements, as well as to those who would act as temporal intermediaries of divine law. Where the law seeks to bind and mediate, the “spiritual autonomy” of antinomian mystical experience seeks unmediated liberation.

And, it is into this mystical realm of unmediated liberation that hashish returns. It is not however an antinomian libertinism that introduces hashish—the belief that the absence of moral laws allows for the use of intoxicants. Rather, hashish becomes prominent in the continued survival of *Qiyamat* in its syncretic commingling with numerous heretical and mystical Islamic sects, including the Nusayris, the Druzes, the wandering dervishes of Qalandari Sufism, and even as a subterranean culture amidst the Ismailis. What makes this syncretism so important is that the mystical “spiritual


\(^8\) Bey. ‘The Bhang Nama’, p. 24.
autonomy” of Qiyamat merges here with mystical Islamic traditions that do make use of hashish in their pursuit of a “direct experience of the inner divine.” As evidenced amidst the practitioners of Qalandari Sufism, hashish is not opposed to mystical experience. Hashish complements the liberating pursuit of “spiritual autonomy” by drawing the self into an ecstatic and divine communion with the world. Thus, hashish finds affinities with the Ismailis—the Assassins—through connections existing between the use of hashish and mystical experience. Hashisheen is not then entirely a term of abuse, even if it may have been used as such. It becomes a positive moniker in its alliance with the mystical intensity of intoxication.

These intoxications are positive, as they offer the hashisheen a mystical experience that shares with it definite radical possibilities. As Bey would contend, hashisheen only appears a term of abuse for political and religious orders, because the intoxications of hashish and mystical experience defy the fundamental mediations of authority by striving after a unitive, ecstatic and unmediated experience. Through intoxication, submission to authority of any kind becomes impossible, as the hashisheen refuses to allow any force of authority to intervene in the “spiritual autonomy” of its ecstatic connection with the world. Understood in this manner, experiences of intoxication also bring about a radical means of defiantly revolting against the mediating impetus of the institutions of authority, as too the nomos that binds and enforces its judgements. As Bey writes, “there really is something revolutionary about Ismailism, and there really is something inherently experiential about the “spiritual use” of hashish, something that poses a threat to the mediation of religion, and to the validity of an authority based not so much on order and sobriety as on the suppression of autonomy and intoxication.” In cultivating ecstatic and unmediated experiences, the hashisheen realises potentialities for revolt against those institutions and authorities that would conspire to mediate lives and experiences.

More definitively, the hashisheen moves closer to a radical anarchist tradition.

---


This is not an anarchism of any necessary doctrinal allegiance. The anarchism of the *hashisheen* embraces anarch as the refusal of the constitution of authority, and the vindication of anarchy that is anterior to the binding efficacy of any authoritarian nomos.\(^{12}\) It is that the anarchist, the mystic, and the *hashisheen* seek after an experience in which no authority is capable of mediating the self. The antinomian radicalism of the *hashisheen* comes to intersect with the anarchistic pursuit of an unmediated world without any form of authority. That the *hashisheen* finds a common sympathy with anarchists equally pursuant of a direct, unmediated experience of the world emerges as a positive convergence. Bey’s association of the *hashisheen* with anarchistic radicalism thus suggests an ever more distinct meaning. The *hashisheen* can also be understood as an expression of one who realises the radical potential of intoxication in challenging the mediations of authority, as well as realising an autonomous life through the experience of unmediated connectedness with the world. The *hashisheen* are not drug-crazed murderers. They are those mystics, heretics, rebels, renegades and anarchists who have defied the mediations of authority in realising the potential of a “spiritual autonomy” through ecstatic connection with the world.\(^{13}\) There are realised “anarchic illuminations,” mystical experiences of direct and unmediated communion, into which the mediations of law and authority are actively deposed.

And, it is into this intermingling of anarchistic mysticism with hashish intoxication that Bey introduces one of its European descendents: Walter Benjamin.\(^{14}\) What makes for Benjamin’s sympathy with this *hashisheen* tradition pertains to his own fascination with the radical possibilities of hashish and other intoxicants, an interest founded in his practical involvement in a series of drug experiments between 1927 and 1934, and which will form the basis of his illuminating drug ‘Protocols’—posthumously


titled *On Hashish*, after the proposed name for Benjamin’s unfinished book on intoxication.\(^\text{15}\) Indeed, one of Benjamin’s earliest engagements with hashish intoxication is through his reading of Baudelaire’s *Artificial Paradises*, in which he would have been exposed to the legends of the Assassins.\(^\text{16}\) More specifically though, it is Benjamin’s notion of *profane illumination* that Bey considers to be expressive of the radicalism of the *hashisheen*, a term enunciated in his ‘Surrealism’ article and its concerns over the radical potential of the Surrealist movement.\(^\text{17}\) It is that the *profane illumination*, in its connections to drug intoxication, finds an accord with the pursuit of the unmediated ecstasy of a certain “spiritual autonomy.” And, this *profane illumination* also engenders new potentialities for revolt, much like the mystical anarchist in its pursuit of an unmediated relationship with the world. Bey even situates Benjamin amidst other mystical anarchists, such as in the antinomianism of the Ranters and the radical autonomy of the *Club des Haschischins*.\(^\text{18}\) It is not however to claim Benjamin’s express knowledge of Islamic mysticism and its radical, anarchistic potential. Rather, it is to argue that Benjamin, among other European thinkers, was able to “intuit certain profound truths about esoteric Ismailism.”\(^\text{19}\) There is realised in Benjamin’s interest in intoxication, and in his notion of *profane illumination*, the radical possibilities of an essentially “anarchic illumination,” insights pivotal to those mystical anarchists throughout history who have defied the *nomos* of a mediated reality in pursuit of “spiritual autonomy.”

Bey, in his radical and multifaceted understanding of the *hashisheen*, has thus

---


\(^{16}\) As Benjamin writes in a letter to Ernst Schoen in 1919, “I have also read Baudelaire’s *Paradis artificiels*. It is an extremely reticent, unoriented attempt to monitor the “psychological” phenomena that manifest themselves in hashish or opium intoxication for what they have to teach us philosophically.” Benjamin. *On Hashish*, p. 144. For Baudelaire’s reference to the Assassins, see Charles Baudelaire. *Artificial Paradise*. Harrogate: Broadwater House, 2000, pp. 25-30. The reappearance of Baudelaire in connection to Benjamin is to also highlight the anarchist significance of the quotation that opened this thesis.


\(^{19}\) Bey. ‘Bhang Nama’, p. 24. This intuition also allows Bey, at the beginning of his article, to find insights of comparable esoteric profundity in Benjamin’s writings on intoxication and the poetry of the Islamic poet, Fuzuli. *Ibid*, p. 17.
offered here the lineaments essential to a consideration of Benjamin’s idea of intoxication, specifically in his notion of the *profane illumination*, from the perspective of a distinctive, if heterodox anarchist tradition. And, it is exactly from the perspective of anarchism or, more exactly, an anarchist tradition sympathetic to intoxication, that this thesis seeks to explore Benjamin’s *profane illumination* within his ‘Surrealism’ article. This is not though to compare Bey’s position on the *hashisheen* tradition and Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article, as it is to explore the articulation of anarchistic and intoxicated themes in Benjamin’s own work. Bey is considered here to have opened a very significant anarchist area of study in regards to Benjamin’s work on intoxication, but it is to also argue that there exists an anarchistic and intoxicated basis to the ‘Surrealism’ article itself. It is to elicit an “anarchic illumination” from Benjamin’s own writings, an illumination that finds an accord with the anarchist tradition.

What makes Bey’s anarchistic understanding of Benjamin’s *profane illumination* further significant for this thesis lies in the sheer exceptionality of his placement of Benjamin’s *profane illumination* amidst an anarchist tradition. That is, numerous scholars have presented the *profane illumination* as a distinguished example of Benjamin’s explicit dissociation from both anarchism and intoxication. As Scott J. Thompson has highlighted, scholarly treatments of the *profane illumination* have emphasised its emergence after the effects of intoxication, implying that intoxication is either unnecessary or a derivative aspect of *profane illumination*.\(^{20}\) As Peter Demetz contends, Benjamin’s writings on intoxication are distant from so-called “inarticulate consumers of hashish who merely want their narcissistic kicks.”\(^{21}\) Other scholars, including Richard Sieburth and John McCole will equally continue the depreciation of intoxication as narcissistic escape.\(^{22}\) Susan Buck-Morss, despite an awareness of the importance of intoxication for Benjamin, will also conclude, “Drugs did not themselves provide the “profane illumination” that Benjamin was seeking.”\(^{23}\) And, as Michael

---


\(^{23}\) Susan Buck-Morss. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the*
Löwy definitively states, “Benjamin stresses the distinction between lower or primitive forms of intoxication—religious or drug-induced ecstasy—and the higher form produced by surrealism at its best moments: a profane illumination, ‘a materialist anthropological inspiration.’” From these perspectives, the profane illumination of the ‘Surrealism’ article actively contributes to the depreciation of intoxication.

Most important is the scholarly depreciation of the anarchistic radicalism of intoxication. While the radical potentialities of the profane illumination have been acknowledged, these potentialities remain focused on Benjamin’s later sympathies with Marxism. Thus, as McCole argues, Benjamin took cognisance of the Surrealist’s own indebtedness to anarchism, but also contended, “Their task was to distil what was valid in these [anarchist] revolts and turn it to productive, political, revolutionary purposes.” And, these “revolutionary purposes” arise from the “genuine political action” of Marxism. Beatrice Hanssen possesses a similar argument directed explicitly at the profane illumination. As Hanssen writes, “Seeking to develop a dialectical concept of intoxication, Benjamin hoped to chart a path away from mere anarchistic revolt and mere subversion to the coming of the real revolution.” This depreciation arises also in the work of Norbert Bolz and Willem van Reijen’s, wherein the profane illumination “demythologises anarchic intoxication” in favour of a more rigorous and constructive “materialistic inspiration.” Even Löwy, a scholar who has detailed the prominence of anarchism in Benjamin’s thought, emphasises anarchism in the ‘Surrealism’ article in terms of its dialectical relationship with Marxism. From these perspectives, the profane illumination is very problematically drawn in relation to an independent

---

anarchist tradition. As such, both anarchism and intoxication emerge as minor, if not subordinate aspects of Benjamin’s work.

Interrelated to these problems regarding the scholarly presentation of the ‘Surrealism’ article is the significant point that these interpretations of Benjamin’s work are not entirely unjustified. For, as to be discussed in this thesis, Benjamin can be seen to identify the profane illumination with the after effects of intoxication and a Marxist revolutionary praxis. As Benjamin writes on the question of intoxication, “But the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination certainly does not lie in narcotics. It resides in a profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory lesson.”

Further to this is Benjamin’s depreciation of the anarchistic elements of intoxication. Writing of the “anarchic” component within intoxication, he counters, “But to place the accent exclusively on it [the “anarchic”] would be to subordinate the methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution entirely to a praxis oscillating between fitness exercises and celebration in advance.” And, in conclusion to his work, Benjamin affirms the Marxist inspiration of the profane illumination in the demands set by the Communist Manifesto. From these references, the ‘Surrealism’ article has more evidently bound an “anarchic” freedom to the service of Marxist revolution and intoxication to profane illumination. In turn, it is a subordination that becomes increasingly distant from the antinomian and ecstatic anarchism of the hashisheen. The potential of discerning an “anarchic illumination” in Benjamin’s thought is strained by the Marxist impetus of the profane illumination and its dismissal of intoxication. That anarchism and the “anarchic” appears in Benjamin’s writings on experiences of intoxication can certainly be argued, but to maintain that anarchism defines these writings is to contend with the fact that anarchism is depreciated in its subsumption under Marxism.

As to be contended however, Benjamin’s depreciation of anarchism and intoxication within the ‘Surrealism’ article remains far from conclusive. For, there lingers in Benjamin’s work ambiguous sympathies for anarchism and intoxication.

29 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 179.
31 Ibid, p. 192.
sympathies that introduce discord into the conclusions reached in the ‘Surrealism’ article. The ambiguities of Benjamin’s dismissive stance towards anarchism and intoxication exist in an awareness of Benjamin’s longstanding and sustained relationship to anarchist ideals, particularly in terms of his “early,” youthful engagement with anarchism and the continuation of such ideals as a subterranean current throughout his later, Marxist writings. In this sense of an original and sympathetic encounter with anarchism, it is understood that Benjamin’s anarchistic influences are very problematically subsumed by the Marxist conclusions of the ‘Surrealism’ article. It is that Benjamin’s “early” anarchistic influences, and the continued sympathy for such ideas throughout his life, introduces a certain ambiguity into Benjamin’s conclusions. In regards to the ‘Surrealism’ article, it is to contend that its depreciation of anarchism remains tensely drawn, and can even be challenged by those of Benjamin’s anarchistic influences, whether in earlier or later writings. It is that another “anarchic illumination” is, in fact, discernible in the ‘Surrealism’ article. But, this illumination is not found in the article’s conclusions, as it is to be found within the interstices of Benjamin’s ambiguous sympathies for that which he has depreciated. The reading of the ‘Surrealism’ article performed here is then directed at salvaging its anarchistic or “anarchic” elements from among the ambiguous examples of their depreciation. As such, an “anarchic illumination” will emerge here, as alternate trajectory and positive potentiality, only within the fractured space existing between Benjamin’s sympathies for the anarchist tradition and his ambiguous depreciation of anarchism.

The positing of this alternate, anarchist trajectory is here aided by the thought of Benjamin’s close friend, Gershom Scholem. While Scholem is not the only thinker to have conveyed the importance of anarchism for Benjamin—prominent here is the aforementioned Löwy and the scholar Eric Jacobson—he very importantly expresses an

---


33 This emphasis on Benjamin’s past is to also define the scope of this discussion. While acknowledged that the ‘Surrealism’ article is part of Benjamin’s later Marxist thought—notably the Arcades Project—this thesis explores the article in its relationship to past concerns, so as to purposefully break from a reading that privileges the definitiveness of Benjamin’s later writings. For details on the ‘Surrealism’ article in the context of Benjamin’s Marxism, see Margaret Cohen. Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
understanding of Benjamin’s later references to anarchism in similar terms to those found here: that anarchism survives in Benjamin’s thought, and is only ambiguously brought into proximity to Marxism.\textsuperscript{34} Scholem expresses concerns that Benjamin’s anarchism was to be ignored or taken as an influence for Marxism.\textsuperscript{35} As Scholem would argue, a contention this thesis supports, anarchism is a lasting influence in Benjamin’s thought that is not supplanted by Marxism.

As Scholem acknowledges in his \textit{Walter Benjamin: The story of a friendship}, the two demonstrated a shared, youthful interest in anarchism, particularly in its sympathies with the Jewish mystical tradition. Writing of his own youthful encounter with anarchism, Scholem notes, “In those days, I read a great deal about socialism, historical materialism, and above all anarchism, with which I was most in sympathy. Nettlau’s biography of Bakunin and the writings of Kropotkin and Elisé Reclus had made a profound impression upon me. In 1915, I began to read the works of Gustav Landauer, especially his \textit{Aufruf zum Sozialismus} [Call to Socialism].”\textsuperscript{36} The “profound impression” made by anarchism would also importantly remain a lasting sympathy for Scholem in his studies of Jewish mysticism.\textsuperscript{37} And, Benjamin is privy to these anarchistic influences. Thus, following his discussion of the anarchism of Landauer’s \textit{Call to Socialism}, Scholem states, “I had undertaken to unite the two paths of [anarchist] socialism and Zionism in my own life and presented this question to Benjamin, who admitted that both paths were viable.”\textsuperscript{38} While a restrained pronouncement, this does not hinder the fact that Benjamin will emphasise the intersection of anarchism and Jewish mysticism in his own work. Some of the more prominent expressions of this early interest in anarchism appear in Benjamin’s ‘The Right to Use Force’, where Benjamin affirms an anarchist critique of organised violence, and the ‘Critique of Violence’, wherein Benjamin favours an “anarchistic” force capable of overthrowing the

\textsuperscript{35} As Jacobson writes, “the vigorous exchange between Benjamin and Scholem in the later years must be examined not only from the perspective of Scholem’s criticisms of Benjamin’s attempts to merge his earlier political ideas with elements of Marxism as a rejection of Jewish theology but also as a loosening of his commitment to anarchism.” \textit{Ibid}, pp. 241-242.
\textsuperscript{38} Scholem. \textit{Walter Benjamin}, p. 11.
State. Thus, for Scholem, anarchism informs the earliest expressions of Benjamin’s thought.

It is because of Scholem’s acknowledgement of this early interest in anarchism that he views Benjamin’s later turn towards Marxism not as an inevitable development, but as an entirely different trajectory. This is due partially to the fact that Scholem considered Marxism incompatible with anarchism. As Scholem writes in his biographical study of Benjamin, “To me, communism in its Marxist form constituted the diametrically opposite position to the anarchistic convictions that Benjamin and I hitherto had shared politically.” For Scholem, the anarchism he shared with Benjamin was not capable of being subsumed by Marxism. Scholem does not admit however that this shift towards Marxism obviates an earlier interest in anarchism. Rather, a tension between Marxism and anarchism emerges in Benjamin’s thought. Scholem conveys this tension in a discussion directly following his remarks on the diametrically opposed paths of Marxism and anarchism. Writing of the period between 1924 and 1926, that period in which Benjamin moved closer to an avowed Marxist position, Scholem argues this was “the beginning of a split in Benjamin. At first it remained virtually invisible, manifesting itself only marginally in his writings during the next five or six years. Then, however, as he picked up theoretical ideas from the Marxist heritage, this split gave his writings that gleam of ambiguity that years later I attacked in principle in a letter.”

In Scholem’s reference to a “gleam of ambiguity,” and in direct relation to Benjamin’s earlier anarchism, it is highlighted that differing paths open in Benjamin’s work. As Scholem continues in the letter he references, composed in 1931, and serving as the appendix to his biography—attesting to its importance for Scholem—he argues, with the “greatest reluctance,” how Benjamin’s “materialistic [Marxist] reflections introduce a completely alien formal element that any intelligent reader can detach, which stamps your output of this period as the work of an adventurer, a purveyor of ambiguities, and a


41 Ibid, p. 149-150.
cardsharper.” While anarchism is not mentioned explicitly, Scholem’s reference to it in his biography would attest to its shared concerns, that is, how anarchism disappears amidst the alienating dissonances and ambiguities of a more evidently Marxist position. There is for Scholem an ambiguous, if not deceptive quality to Benjamin’s turn to Marxism that does not sit in accordance with those anarchistic influences Scholem recognises in their youth, and that clearly survive in his later works.

In this sense, Scholem’s awareness of a “gleam of ambiguity” in Benjamin’s turn to Marxism, allows Scholem to read Benjamin’s thought in a distinct fashion. Instead of accepting Benjamin’s shift to Marxism as definitive, closing off earlier interests in anarchism and mysticism, Scholem understands these later, Marxist references through an earlier context in which anarchism was more prominent. Scholem emphasises the persistence of anarchism in Benjamin’s later works, despite their apparent concern with Marxism. He does not then only provide evidence of Benjamin’s earlier interest in anarchism. He seeks also to understand and interpret later, Marxist works through this earlier anarchism, arguing, in turn, that this anarchistic current survives, however ambiguously, in Benjamin’s work. The “gleam of ambiguity” propounded by Scholem becomes a means of reading Benjamin from the perspective of another, discordant and anarchistic current.

As an expression of this, it is pertinent to consider Scholem’s debate over the periodisation of Benjamin’s ‘Theological-Political Fragment’. The dating of the Fragment remains contentious, being caught between Benjamin’s Marxism and his anarchism. The debate itself concerns Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, each thinker a respective representative of the anarchist and Marxist interpretation of the Fragment. As Adorno contends, Benjamin first read the ‘Theological-Political Fragment’ in 1937. Adorno even adds that Benjamin remarked of the Fragment to be the “Newest of the New,” implying it to be contemporary with his later Marxist writings. Scholem refutes this. He states, “I rest assured that these pages were written in 1920-1921 in conjunction

---

42 Ibid, p. 286.
45 Quoted in Jacobson. Metaphysics of the Profane, p. 23.
with the *Critique of Violence* and did not entertain a relationship with Marxism at the
time.” The Fragment expresses rather the “metaphysical anarchism” of Benjamin’s
earlier writings, that period before 1924, and his exposure to Marxism. For Scholem,
Benjamin’s reference to the Fragment being the “Newest of the New” could be nothing
more than a “jest” on his part, one of his common “experiments” to see if Adorno could
differentiate “a mystical-anarchist text for a recently composed Marxist one.”

The debate over the Fragment is still not final. Though, even if Scholem’s
position were invalidated, his argument is not entirely negated. For, Scholem’s claim of
a “mystical-anarchist” interpretation of the Fragment is both a concern over the text’s
periodisation and also a purposeful attempt to disturb the assumption that Benjamin’s
anarchist and mystical interests inhere in Marxism. Scholem is upsetting the
chronological ordering of Benjamin’s life, arguing that anarchism not only survives in
Benjamin’s thought, but that it can also be detached from its later, ambiguous fusion
with Marxism, being returned to an earlier period where anarchism was privileged.
And, from this return to an anarchist past, Scholem allows for what are ostensibly
Marxist works to be read backwards through their apparent confluence with earlier,
anarchist influences. Scholem opens a new trajectory in understandings of Benjamin’s
thought, readings that are not impositions of extraneous anarchist influences, but of a
forgotten or alternate trajectory in Benjamin’s work.

Scholem very notably disturbs a developmental bias of Marxist readings of
Benjamin’s thought. This developmental understanding emphasises how Benjamin’s
later, Marxist writings are somehow more determinedly correct than earlier, anarchistic
writings. Benjamin is interpreted from the end point of his thought. Recognition might
be made of anarchist influences, but they are treated as only minor influences in service
to Marxism. For Scholem however, Benjamin’s youthful anarchism is neither a minor
influence nor is it taken over by predominantly Marxist concerns. Scholem conceives of
anarchism as an unexplored path, a path not fully taken, yet still apparent nonetheless,
and entirely capable of being read back through Benjamin’s past interest in anarchism.
Scholem contributes a non-developmental reading of Benjamin, in which surviving
remnants of anarchism may be read back through Benjamin’s past, and placed in that anarchist context so as to elicit a new understanding.

In this altered reading of Benjamin’s thought, Scholem thus offers the possibility of an alternative, anarchist perspective on the ‘Surrealism’ article. Scholem’s recognition of a continued “gleam of ambiguity” regarding the place of anarchism in Benjamin’s later thought becomes extremely pertinent to this discussion of the ‘Surrealism’ article and its own tensions and ambiguities concerning anarchism and intoxication, Marxism and *profane illumination*. Scholem presents the possibility of reading the tensions of the ‘Surrealism’ article in a non-developmental manner, whereby Benjamin’s earlier, anarchist concerns can be utilised to draw out the ambiguities of anarchism’s subordination before later, Marxist concerns. By recognising that there lingers an unexplored, but still evident anarchistic path in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article, it is possible to rethink these writings, discerning, in turn, a more distinctly “anarchic illumination.”

The interpretive direction of this thesis is not then an attempt to forcibly appropriate Benjamin’s writings on experiences of intoxication for anarchism. The contention held here is due to an already apparent sympathy with anarchism in Benjamin’s thought. Nor is it a method of interpretation dependent on Scholem’s observations. For, Benjamin’s work also supports the interpretive direction of this thesis. This contributory aspect is Benjamin’s notion of “images.” Such “images” are traces or signs of something past but that are still of great import for the present. They are “images” taken out of their original context and juxtaposed with concerns that present a different perspective on the intent of that “image.” Instead of trying to render exactly the authors’ original intentions, the “image” that is past intermingles with the concerns of the present, wherein such traces may actually prove of greater impact when taken out of context or purposefully mistranslated.

There is a certain redemptive quality to the “image.” To purposefully misplace an “image” by juxtaposing it with differing concerns is not to prove entirely unfaithful to

---

that “image.” A more liberating or radical direction in the original meaning of that “image” may actually be discovered. This is particularly evidenced in Benjamin’s ‘The Life of Students’, where the “image” is brought along side a redemptive and messianic vision of history. Benjamin thus criticises “a view of history that puts its faith in the infinite extent of time and thus concerns itself only with the speed, or lack of it, with which people and epochs advance along the path of progress.” For Benjamin, history is not a forward progression. And, as intimated in this historical vision, what has past is not necessarily overturned by future events.\(^50\) As Benjamin argues, the “historical task” of the present is to rescue and vindicate “the most endangered, excoriated, and ridiculed ideas and products of the creative mind.”\(^51\) It is to rescue the apocryphal “image” or “metaphor,” writings and events that are dubbed aberrations of the “creative mind.”\(^52\) And, in rescuing the aberrant “image,” it is to draw out their “ultimate condition” and “immanent state of perfection.” This “ultimate condition” is not “the pragmatic description of details,” which Benjamin associates with detailing the history of an institution or social customs—as as too, it might be added, a person’s biography. The presentation of rescued images is to draw these images into the “messianic domain” of their potential consecration in the present—the realisation of a perfection that lies possible and immanent in their original form, but was not seized upon, was not originally realised or was even denied.\(^53\) In this, Benjamin mentions the French Revolution. Benjamin interprets the Revolution not in terms of its historical unfolding—its conclusion in the Terror—but rather seizes upon the messianic strivings and yearnings that were unleashed with it—messianic potentialities that can be seized upon again in the present.\(^54\) To release the “image” into the present as an “image” of messianic potential is to liberate the “image” from a teleology that dismisses the past before the onslaught of later events, while concurrently demonstrating how the “image” has not ossified in the past: this messianic striving can be released again in the present.

In the context of exploring Benjamin’s ambiguous sympathies for anarchism and intoxication within the ‘Surrealism’ article, the “image” itself proves to be of

\(^{50}\) Compare also with Thesis VI of Benjamin’s ‘Theses’. \textit{Ibid}, p. 42.
\(^{51}\) Benjamin. ‘The Life of Students’, p. 37.
\(^{52}\) \textit{Ibid}, p. 37.
\(^{53}\) \textit{Ibid}, p. 37.
\(^{54}\) \textit{Ibid}, p. 37.
demonstrable importance. When Benjamin’s relationship to anarchism and intoxication is interpreted as a gathering of “images,” it is to emphasise how such images are not themselves fixed in their original intentionality—Benjamin’s own intended meaning. That is, these “images” of anarchism and intoxication within Benjamin’s writings remain still open to further interpretation. There exist paths in Benjamin’s writings that remain unexplored, directions that were not necessarily fully realised, particularly in terms of their anarchistic potentiality. It is that the interpretation of Benjamin’s relationship to anarchism and intoxication as gathered together “images” leaves the direction of these writings open to a potentiality that is not exhausted in their original presentation. References to anarchism and intoxication within the ‘Surrealism’ article in connection to the “image” are not then accepted as being sublated in Benjamin’s turn to Marxism. Nor are his earlier works on anarchism considered past remnants that must be deciphered through a developmental schema leading inevitably to Marxism. The “image” offers a reading of the ‘Surrealism’ article from the perspective of the depreciated elements of anarchism and intoxication, ideas that, refracted through Benjamin’s past, offer an entirely different trajectory.

To explore the anarchistic potentialities of Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article, this thesis is divided amidst three central discussions. The first chapter discusses the appearance of anarchism together with intoxication in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article and how these elements are subordinated before a Marxist profane illumination. This section examines the prominence of anarchism in the article, as well as the ambiguous reasons Benjamin gives for its depreciation. The second chapter elaborates upon the article’s ambiguities, in terms of the temporal dissonances of the “image.” Specifically, it considers those of Benjamin’s youthful and childhood “images,” and how they destabilise the temporal ordering of Benjamin’s work. As to be argued, these youthful “images” have a dissonant impact on the ‘Surrealism’ article in terms of providing evidence of Benjamin’s sympathy for the excoriated elements of intoxication and anarchism. The third chapter gathers together Benjamin’s “images” of youth, and reads these as potential openings into other of Benjamin’s works, other “images.” In that Benjamin’s references to anarchism and intoxication are often presented negatively in the ‘Surrealism’ article, emphasis is given to an alternate and positive reading. It is to
read the depreciated elements of the ‘Surrealism’ article in terms of earlier, positive references. Final concerns will explore how an “anarchic illumination” appears in Benjamin’s work, and consideration of the importance of Benjamin’s past as a creative source of inspiration.
Chapter One:

The “undialectical” energies of anarchism and intoxication
Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism: The last snapshot of the European intelligentsia’, published in 1929 in the journal *Die literarische Welt*, is an excursion not only into the realm of Surrealist, avant-garde radicalism, as it is also a statement of Benjamin’s own position in relation to this radicalism.\(^{55}\) And, it is principally to this latter definition of the ‘Surrealism’ article that is to be explored here. Instead of considering what Benjamin contributes to understandings of Surrealism, focus is given to how the article contributes to an understanding of Benjamin’s own radical position. This is to highlight, in connection to the main contentions of this thesis that the emergence of certain ambiguities in the article, regarding both anarchism and intoxication, reflect upon Benjamin himself, rather than exclusively reflecting on Surrealism—though, the tensions explored here assuredly apply to Surrealism, which maintains its own ambiguous stance towards anarchism and intoxication.\(^{56}\) Indeed, Benjamin affirms in his article the uniqueness of his place as “German observer” of Surrealism in terms of his “direct experience of its own highly exposed position between an anarchistic *fronde* and a revolutionary discipline.”\(^{57}\) It is thus in terms of such a self-professed “direct experience” of a “highly exposed position,” particularly in reference to an anarchistic tension that Benjamin is to be interpreted here.

A principal expression of this tension, and which will become the basis for the ambiguous devaluing of anarchism and intoxication, lies in Benjamin’s focus upon the radical possibilities of experience. As Benjamin writes of the Surrealists, they “are concerned literally with experiences, not with theories and still less with phantasms.” These “Surrealist experiences” are not however dependent on a normalised conception of experience—of a subject given to dispassionately contemplate an object.\(^{58}\) “Surrealist experiences” are kin to dream-states, experiences of affective sympathies between body

---

\(^{55}\) As Löwy notes, the ‘Surrealism’ article “is not a piece of ‘literary criticism’ in the normal sense of the term, but a poetic, philosophical and political essay of prime importance.” Löwy. ‘Walter Benjamin and Surrealism’, p. 18.


\(^{57}\) Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 177.

\(^{58}\) *Ibid*, p. 179.
and world. Benjamin himself captures these intoxicated experiences of unruly affect, stating, “Life only seemed worth living where the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away in everyone as by the steps of multitudinous images flooding back and forth, language only seemed itself where sound and image, image and sound, interpenetrated with automatic precision and such felicity that no chink was left for the penny-in-the-slot called “meaning.””

Surrealism demolishes the boundaries of the waking and sleeping self, offering the unconscious play of image and sound an unrestricted field of playful movement, in which “meaning” is abandoned for the awakened reveries of the lived dream. Discarding an experience of rational detachment, the flood of Surrealist experience draws self and world together into a sphere of beatific transgression—the realisation of the marvellous.

“Meaning” is not the only facet of experience abandoned for the dream reverie. As Benjamin attests, such experiences are “Not only before meaning. Also before the self. In the world’s structure dream loosens individuality like a bad tooth.” The experience of the lived dream loosens the self “like a bad tooth,” an image affirming the necessity of excising this “bad tooth,” due to the apparent anguish it causes. Individuality acts as a constraint on the interpenetration of self and world, just as “meaning” constrains the fluidity of dream images through its extreme rationalism.

The “bad tooth” of individuality hinders the broadening of experience, because it remains painfully lodged in a sense of individuality that is opposed to the loosened reveries of the dream, or, as Benjamin also discusses, an experience commensurate with the empathic nature of love.

In this sense, there is provided a further critique of individual detachment from the world—experience as observer. Here, Benjamin could even be seen to criticise rationalist definitions of the self as an ego given to determine its

---

60 “Let us not mince words: the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful.” André Breton. Manifestoes of Surrealism. Detroit: The University of Michigan Press, 1969, p. 14.
61 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 179.
62 A critique of rationalism is pivotal to Surrealism’s embrace of the dream. As Breton notes, “We are still living under the reign of logic.” And, this “absolute rationalism” imprisons the marvellous. Breton. Manifestoes of Surrealism, pp. 9-10. A critique of “Humanity’s stupid rationalism” appears also in Louis Aragon’s Paysan de Paris, a prominent work in Benjamin’s article. Again, Aragon emphasises the “errors” of Reason that evade quantification. Louis Aragon. Paris Peasant. Boston: Exact Change, 1994, pp. 5-11. For reference to Aragon, see Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 179.
existence through painful opposition to the world. Rather than seeking after the luxuriating embrace of the ecstasies of dream, or the state of love, the “bad tooth,” the rational ego attempts to separate itself from the world, so as to maintain its own rigid self-consistency. The awakened and loosened dream self thus comes as an attempt to move beyond such limiting definitions of the self. The self that moves beyond the barriers of rational detachment is given to live ecstatically in the world.

The loosened self that drifts listlessly through the world is an ecstatic self. More specifically, it is an intoxicated self. Directly following his statement on the dream self, Benjamin affirms a “loosening of the self by intoxication,” a loosening that finds its equivalent in the use of hashish and opium. Indeed, Benjamin explicitly refers to the German word Rausch. It is significant, in that it finds expression in his drug ‘Protocols’, where it is used to describe Benjamin’s drug experiences. Of further import is the apparent connections between the “loosening of the self” performed by the ecstasies of the dream and the ecstasies of intoxication. Benjamin thus notes in his ‘Protocols’ the affective disordering of both “meaning”—in terms of the strange linguistic connections it allows—and the ecstatic connectedness it opens between the self and other beings and objects, an ecstatic feeling Benjamin describes as a spiritually attuned aura verging on physical clairvoyance. The “loosening of the self,” as the loosening of meaning and individuality, is thus achievable by means of the affective connections opened through the drug intoxication.

And yet, it is this conjunction of ecstatic, dream-like experiences with experiences of intoxication that Benjamin problematises and eventually devalues. As Benjamin continues, “This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people [Surrealists] to step outside the domain of intoxication.” There is here a withdrawal from intoxication. Whether taken as Rausch or the awakened dream—interconnected in their capacity to

---

65 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 179.
66 Benjamin. On Hashish, p. 21, 27.
67 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 179.
loosen the self—there is an emphasis on stepping outside the realm of intoxication. Benjamin continues by qualifying this statement, arguing, “Surrealist experiences,” originally enjoined to intoxication, “are by no means limited to dreams, hours of hashish eating, or opium smoking.” While this statement can be construed as an allowance for the broadness of Surrealist experience—Benjamin mentions other experiences, in terms of Surrealist literature, such as “demonstrations, watch-words, documents, [and] bluffs”—it is equally suggested, particularly in relation to stepping outside intoxication, that Benjamin is dismissing the “Surrealist experiences” of “dreams, hours of hashish eating, or opium smoking.” As Benjamin continues, recognising the Surrealist’s “passionate revolt against Catholicism” in their attempt to transfigure both self and world, “it is a cardinal error to believe that, of “Surrealist experiences,” we know only the religious ecstasies or the ecstasies of drugs.” More definitively, in response to the proximity between “religious ecstasies” and the “ecstasies of drugs,” Benjamin states, “the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination certainly does not lie in narcotics.”69 Dream and intoxication take on a problematic status that would appear to undermine their previously stated importance as means of liberating and loosening the self. Their prominence is evident, but there is also an attempt on Benjamin’s part to move beyond them, as if there were still some problem in the ecstasies of Rausch.

A most notable problem lies in the posited intimacy between “religious ecstasies” and the “ecstasies of drugs.” That there is a problem is attested in Benjamin’s reference to the Leninist assertion that religion is “the opium of the people.”70 As Benjamin would argue, this claim can be taken literally; the intoxications of opium and hashish do, in fact, possess similarities to “religious ecstasies.” And, in apparent solidarity with this Marxist critique of religion, it can be seen how Benjamin considers the need to supplant these “religious ecstasies,” and, in turn, move beyond the domain of intoxication. Benjamin captures this critique in a later discussion of his article. He thus

68 Ibid, p. 179. For details on Surrealist anti-Catholicism, see Hopkins. Dada and Surrealism, pp. 46-50.
69 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 179. In Benjamin’s confluence of “religious ecstasies” and the “ecstasies of drugs,” it would be preferable to speak of entheogens rather than “narcotics.” A narcotic technically induces drowsiness, an experience opposed to Benjamin’s intoxication. For information on the troubling classification of hashish as narcotic, see Scott J. Thompson. ‘From ‘Rausch’ to Rebellion: Walter Benjamin’s On Hashish and the aesthetic dimensions of prohibitionist realism’. www.wbenjamin.org/rausch.html.
70 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 179.
notes how Surrealist experience possesses “an inadequate, undialectical conception of the nature of intoxication.” What makes its experiences “undialectical” are its “pernicious romantic prejudices,” which include “occult, surrealist, and phantasmagoric gifts and phenomena.” There remains a romantic, spiritual quality to intoxication that seemingly draws it into an “undialectical” religious domain. This is further attested in Benjamin’s displeasure at Surrealism’s move into the “humid backroom of spiritualism.” There is a concern that Surrealism’s anti-religious stance is not complete, in that it still maintains affinities with some form of religious illumination. The ecstasies of Rausch and the ecstasies of religion pertain to an “undialectical” experience that have not yet entered into that dialectical realm to which Benjamin is directed.

Of course, it is to be noted that Benjamin’s perception of affinities between Rausch and religious ecstasy are directed at a very particular understanding of religious experience. In referencing ecstasy, illumination, the occult, the phantasmagoric, and spiritualism, Benjamin is not necessarily criticising Surrealism for remaining beholden to the religious orthodoxy of the Catholic Church—though, Benjamin will emphasise that Catholicism remains an important influence for the Surrealists, even if in the form of a religiosity to be transgressed. It is rather that Benjamin is criticising the survival of a spiritually ecstatic dimension within the dream-states of Rausch. There is still a spiritual quality to the ecstasies of intoxication. Rausch entails a more explicitly spiritual and occult-like “loosening of the self” that finds parallels with religious illumination. There are elements of the mystic’s sojourn, the discovery of certain spiritual truths that are always beyond rational understanding, just as they are beyond the simplistic delimitations of “meaning” and “individuality.” What is intimated in Benjamin’s criticisms of intoxication, with its “undialectical” spirituality and other “romantic prejudices,” is that there is still to be discerned an experience that can be formulated dialectically, an experience, in a Marxist formulation, bereft of “opium,”

71 Ibid, p. 189.
72 Ibid, p. 180
73 Ibid, p. 188.
74 Benjamin highlights the spiritual nature of intoxication in his ‘Protocols’, noting a “brief farewell to the spirit world,” and even the feeling that “Spirits hover (vignette style) over my right shoulder. Coldness in that shoulder.” Benjamin. On Hashish, p. 19, 21.
inclusive of religious illumination and Rausch.

And, this dialectically mediated experience, pursuant of the “creative overcoming of religious illumination” and intoxication “resides in a profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory lesson. (But a dangerous one; and the religious lesson is stricter.)”

In the experiential realm beyond the “introductory lesson” of hashish and opium, there lies the profane illumination, an experience to which even the Surrealists are found deficient.

Positing the profane illumination as beyond intoxication is however somewhat inaccurate. There is no beyond to the profane illumination, if that beyond is understood as a transfiguration of the self through the exaltations of spiritual ecstasy. The profane illumination is the “dialectical intertwinement” of intoxicated experience with a “materialistic, anthropological inspiration,” an intertwinement that removes what Benjamin had considered the troubling spiritualism of Surrealist experience and intoxication.

The profane illumination invests its illuminative force within the confines of materialist immanence. As Benjamin expounds, “For histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further; we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognise it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday.”

Profane illumination is avowedly profane in its identification of the “mystery,” the “impenetrable” with the materiality of everydayness. Of course, a spiritual illumination also finds enlightenment

75 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 179. In Benjamin’s parenthetical statement that “religious illumination” is “stricter” than intoxication, it is pertinent to consider Baudelaire’s Artificial Paradises. As Baudelaire writes, the “brahmin, poet, or Christian philosopher” achieves spiritual ascension through sacrifice and prayer. Including himself amongst these figures, Baudelaire continues, “By the assiduous exercise of the will and constant nobility of intention we have created for ourselves a garden of true beauty.” Religious ecstacies are fundamentally “stricter” in their spirituality. And, this sets them apart from those intoxicated spiritualists who work magic in the consumption of hashish, realising the divine immediately, without discipline. Like magic, hashish intoxication bypasses the mediations of a church, and the rigors of prayer, realising an immediate Paradise on earth. Baudelaire. Artificial Paradise, pp. 92-94. Bey significantly conveys the positive nature of this, in reference to the “democratic-shamanistic” universality of hemp. Refuting the elitism of Baudelaire, Bey considers intoxication a force for an egalitarian spirituality. Bey. ‘The Bhang Nama’, p. 31.

76 “This profane illumination did not always find the Surrealists equal to it, or to themselves, and the very writings that proclaim it most powerfully, Aragon’s incomparable Paysan de Paris and Breton’s Nadja, show very disturbing symptoms of deficiency.” Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 179.

77 Ibid, p. 189.

78 Ibid, pp. 189-190.
in identification with the world, as in its emphasis on an ecstatic “loosening of the self.” But the “dialectical optic” of Benjamin’s *profane illumination* orders the world in a very particular configuration. A “materialistic” inspiration defines enlightenment in terms of an immanent materiality unremoved from the presently existent world. Benjamin captures this “dialectical optic” in reference to the Surrealist’s central inspiration: the city of Paris. As he states, “The Surrealist’s Paris, too, is a “little universe.” That is to say, in the larger one, the cosmos, things look no different.”

In this subtle gesturing to the hermetic maxim, ‘as above, so below’, Benjamin identifies the world with the immanence of urban life, coming to oppose that more spiritual attempt to transfigure or even rupture this immanence, to seek after ecstasies not solely reducible to the everyday. The “dialectical optic” of the *profane illumination* seeks after the “impenetrable” only insofar as its mysteries are perceivable through the lens of urban existence.

A “materialistic” inspiration is further conveyed in Benjamin’s discussion of those “illuminati” capable of realising the *profane illumination*. “The reader, the thinker, the loiterer, the flâneur, are types of illuminati just as much as the opium eater, the dreamer, the ecstatic. And more profane.” The qualifying statement, “and more profane,” again attests to the distance Benjamin is introducing between spiritual intoxications and the *profane illumination*. A *profane illumination* finds insights from such everyday tasks as reading and loitering on the streets of the city, rather than from the ecstasies of a spiritual form of intoxication. This is paralleled in Benjamin’s interrelated discussion of occult-like “telepathic phenomena” and the “hashish trance,” wherein these spiritually illuminative experiences are dismissed in favour of “the profane illumination of reading about telepathic phenomena,” and “the profane illumination of thinking about the hashish trance.”

Reading and thinking are here more profane than the actual experiences to be read and thought about—telepathy and the hashish trance. There is again a “dialectical optic” that converts the “illuminati” of intoxication into the “illuminati” of *profane illumination*. The dialectical basis of the *profane illumination* is an instance of conversion and transmogrification, whereby the “mysterious” merges with the “everyday.” But this convergence entwines mystery and

---

80 Ibid, p. 190.
81 Ibid, p. 190.
everydayness in such a manner that it supplants the spiritually ecstatic mysteries offered
by intoxication, replacing its ecstasies with a profane experience grounded within the
immanence of a presently existent urban materiality.

The extreme nature of Benjamin’s “materialist, anthropological inspiration” in
the form of the profane illumination is quite definitively evidenced towards the
conclusion of the ‘Surrealism’ article. It is here too that the radical politics of the
profane illumination emerges. Benjamin thus turns to the Surrealists as expressing a
“poetic politics.” It is a “poetic politics,” because this politics contends with problems
relating to poetry: metaphor and image. Herein, Benjamin discusses the political
function of metaphor, as it emerges within social democracy. Social democracy utilises
an optimistic and metaphorical imagery, a poetics and a politics that speaks of freedom,
but remains enraptured by a “stock imagery,” metaphors of an unrealisable future
happiness. Unrealisable, because they remain metaphors, words and visions emptied of
all content. Surrealism however manages to move beyond the “bad poetry” of the
optimistic social democrat. Instead of poetic visions of the future, Surrealism
embraces a position of revolutionary pessimism, and, in turn, communism. For, in
revolutionary pessimism, a “poetic politics” is given “to expel moral metaphor from
politics and to discover in political action a sphere reserved one hundred percent for
images.” Surrealism goes beyond a “poetic politics” of metaphor and embraces a
revolutionary pessimism of images. It is a revolutionary pessimism of images that
draws politics into a present engagement with the world. Rather than writing “bad
poetry” for the future, the Surrealists embrace a pessimistic outlook—pessimistic,
because it has little faith in the future—through the embrace of images to be discovered
in the instance of political action. The poetic image of Surrealism arises from political
action, a poetics of life, lived images garnered from lived experience. Surrealists
attempt to overcome their contemplative position as intellectuals and artists, becoming
the bearers of images of revolution drawn from the revolutionary act itself. Benjamin

---

82 Ibid, p. 190. Benjamin had remarked towards the beginning of his article that, in a study of the
Surrealists, one “has no excuse for taking the movement for the “artistic,” “poetic” one it superficially
appears.” In reference to a “poetic politics,” Benjamin acknowledges an essentially political basis to
83 Ibid, pp. 190-191.
84 Ibid, p. 190.
here also references Leon Trotsky’s *Literature and Revolution*, arguing that a “proletarian art” is only possible after a “victorious revolution,” which is to say that the task of an artist before the revolution is not necessarily the creation of art, but the creation of revolutionary images from the praxis of revolution.\(^85\)

What draws this “poetic politics” towards the immanent materiality of the *profane illumination* is found in those images conjured from its revolutionary praxis. As Benjamin writes,

> In all cases where an action puts forth its own image and exists, absorbing and consuming it, where nearness looks with its own eyes, the long-sought image sphere is opened, the world of universal and integral actualities, where the “best room” is missing—the sphere, in a word, in which political materialism and physical nature share the inner man, the psyche, the individual, or whatever else we wish to throw to them, with dialectical justice, so that no limb remains unrent.\(^86\)

Here, Benjamin makes evident the connections existing between “action” and “image,” as well as the political nature of this association. Together, they merge to form an “image sphere,” a sphere in which inner and outer worlds join together. Again, Benjamin repeats the need for an “image” that transcends “metaphor,” an “image sphere” that draws the artist beyond the realm of artistic contemplation and into the sphere of “action.” This is not however Benjamin’s only concern. The “image sphere” is to concurrently express how “political materialism and physical nature share the inner man, the psyche, the individual.” Self and world are brought together in this “image sphere.” Benjamin thus speaks of a “political materialism,” notable in that the *profane illumination* is brought forth from a “materialistic, anthropological inspiration.” The connections between these definitions of material reality and, in turn, their political nature are also highlighted in Benjamin’s reference to the conjunction of material reality.

\(^85\) *Ibid*, p. 191.
with the “inner man.” Here, Benjamin refers to “dialectical justice.” This “justice” possesses however a somewhat violent rending and tearing apart of this “inner man,” as to suggest its destruction. Indeed, Benjamin refers to this relationship between inner and outer worlds as a “dialectical annihilation.” What is suggested in this “dialectical annihilation” is that the political realities of Benjamin’s definition of the material—here and in the profane illumination—implies the subsumption of the “inner man” by this materiality. Just as intoxication is dialectically annihilated in profane illumination, so too is the inner self annihilated by its encounter with “political materialism.”

Benjamin affirms the annihilating basis of materialism, in stating that after its consecration there “will still be a sphere of images and, more concretely, of bodies.” It is this “of bodies” that is to be emphasised. For the annihilation of the inner self is replaced by the materiality of “bodies.” And, not necessarily individual “bodies,” as this still pertains to the conception of an individual self removed from the materiality of the world. The bodies to which Benjamin refers are collectivised bodies. As Benjamin remarks, “The collective is a body, too.” This collectivity, furthermore, emerges from the material physis, or, “nature,” of technology. The materiality of “political materialism” is based upon a technological vision of humanity that has become a collective extension of technology. Indeed, this is where profane illumination converges with this technological physis. As Benjamin expounds, “the physis that is being organised for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, only be produced in that image sphere to which profane illumination initiates us.” The “image sphere” that initiates the self to the profane illumination is an initiation to the inner self’s “dialectical annihilation” within a physis being organised by the bodily collectivisation of a technological humanity. In the emphasis on technological materiality, the

---

87 Ibid, p. 192.
88 Ibid, p. 192.
89 Ibid, p. 192.
90 Ibid, p. 192.
91 The technological impetus of the profane illumination is further attested in Benjamin’s discussion of revolutionary pessimism as “Mistrust in the fate of literature, mistrust in the fate of European humanity, but three times mistrust in all reconciliation: between classes, between nations, between individuals. And unlimited trust only in I.G. Farben and the peaceful perfection of the air force.” While Benjamin is possibly speaking in jest of an “unlimited trust” in I.G. Farben and the air force, the defence of technology in the ‘Surrealism’ article suggests an expression of support. And, what makes this disturbing is in acknowledgement of I.G. Farben’s role in developing the chemical Zyklon B, a compound instrumental in the plans for mass extermination of Nazi Germany. If understood as a critique of technology, Benjamin’s
immanent proximity of body in technology, Benjamin highlights the intimacy between the earlier affirmed “materialistic, anthropological inspiration” of profane illumination and the “political materialism” to be found in the “image sphere” of a collectivised humanity. His earlier support for an essentially urban, “everyday” illumination, an illumination formed of the city, also takes on greater meaning. The profane illumination emerges as an extremely de-spiritualised illumination, wherein the ecstasies of the self are annihilated for an “image sphere” constructed from the bodily innervations of technology and urban space.

Benjamin’s “political materialism” also here directly expresses the proximity between profane illumination and political praxis. As he writes, “Only when in technology body and image so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the Communist Manifesto.” The technological collectivisation of humanity possesses an illuminative, revolutionary force capable of ushering in an explosive situation of collective resistance, an experience that is paralleled in the “image sphere” of profane illumination. And, the illumination that guides such collective resistance is performed in the name of Karl Marx’s Communist Manifesto. It is for a Marxist revolutionary praxis that Benjamin bequeaths the profane illumination. The practical basis of the profane illumination is a Marxist technological revolution, a praxis that embraces and seeks to heighten the immanent technological ordering of a now collectivised humanity.

The profane illumination is not simply the radicalisation of intoxication. It moves beyond intoxication for an experience grounded within the immanence of an

words are prophetic. If taken literally as “unlimited trust,” Benjamin’s statement lacks critical insight into the dehumanising power of technology. Ibid, p. 191.

92 Ibid, p. 192.

everyday materiality constructed from the increasing convergence of technology and nature, a technics as *physis*. Being hostile to both the spirituality of intoxication and its emphasis on inner experience, the *profane illumination* emerges as a very different experience, with only superficial parallels to intoxication. Benjamin may posit the ecstasies of intoxication as an “introductory lesson” to this *profane illumination*, but it remains only an introduction. The *profane illumination* dialectically supplants the distinctiveness of intoxication, integrating the “mysterious” nature of its ecstasies, while identifying these mysteries with the immanence of an urban materiality, a technological ordering of the world.

This dialectical sublation of intoxication into the *profane illumination*, and the concurrent deracination of intoxication, finds its clearest expression in the political praxis to which Benjamin bequeaths the *profane illumination*, that is, a Marxist revolutionary tradition. This is so significant, in terms of Benjamin’s dialectic, because the spiritual ecstasies of intoxication possess a relationship to another radical tradition. Intoxication finds its practical expression in anarchism. The de-emphasising of intoxication is the concurrent devaluing of anarchism in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article. And, where intoxication finds itself dialectically integrated, so too is anarchism depreciated, and supplanted in favour of a Marxist radicalism. Already, Benjamin had established, as “German observer” of Surrealism that his position is caught between the “highly exposed position” of “an anarchistic *fronde*” and “revolutionary discipline.” This is to say that an anarchistic radicalism is part of Benjamin’s discussion of a radical conception of experience. And, as to be considered, this “anarchistic *fronde*” is directly related to the practical expression of intoxication—with “revolutionary discipline” being the practical expression of Marxism and the *profane illumination*. The question of the radical differences between intoxication and *profane illumination* thus becomes a question of the differences in Benjamin’s own radicalism, and his “highly exposed position” between anarchism and Marxism.

An important expression of the bond between anarchist radicalism and experiences of intoxication appears in Benjamin’s criticisms of Leftist moralising—the adoption of a sanctimonious moral rectitude little different from the society it ostensibly opposes. In response, Benjamin engages with those proto-Surrealists—Fyodor
Dostoyevsky, Arthur Rimbaud, and the Comte de Lautréamont—who have adopted a form of “Satanism” or “cult of evil” as a “political device” capable of staving off “all moralizing dilettantism.”\footnote{Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 187.} This “cult of evil” is not however solely identified as the product of proto-Surrealists. Their “cult of evil” can also be attributed to the anarchist tradition. As Benjamin writes, “Between 1865 and 1875 a number of great anarchists, without knowing of one another, worked on their infernal machines. And the astonishing thing is that independently of one another they set its clock at exactly the same hour, and forty years later in Western Europe the writings of Dostoyevsky, Rimbaud, and Lautréamont exploded at the same time.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 189.} The “cult of evil” has origins in the “infernal machines” of anarchists.

What this explosive intermingling entails is explored in relation to Dostoyevsky. As Benjamin elaborates, Dostoyevsky’s own “infernal machines” are anarchistic, because of a recognition that liberation is not to be found in normative morality, but in “evil.” As Benjamin intimates, evil “stems entirely from our spontaneity, and in it we are independent and self-sufficient beings.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 187.} There is here a distancing from the earlier stated Leftist moralising. Liberation emerges not from an accord with the values of society, as it exists in a thoroughgoing rejection of these moralities, a renunciation that, from the perspective of society, will always appear “evil,” demonic, if not criminal. Freedom and liberation are “infernal,” because true freedom involves the renunciation of societal norms and restraints. A “Satanic” freedom implies the cultivation of autonomy and the rejection of the values and beliefs of others.

The anarchistic dimensions of this revolt against accepted notions of morality, is further conveyed in reference to Lautréamont. Discussing what tradition to place his work, Benjamin argues that if his work “has any lineage at all, or, rather, can be assigned one, it is that of insurrection.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 187.} The “infernal” and anarchistic revolt against morality is not simply an individual act; it too involves an insurrectionary revolt against those institutions that depend on the disciplinary basis of morality. Interesting here also is an earlier reference to Breton’s Nadja, and Benjamin’s sympathy for its image of

\footnote{Ibid, p. 188.}
“delightful days spent looting Paris under the sign of Sacco and Vanzetti.”

Again, there is a criminal element to revolt and insurrection that, as found in the appearance of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, is “infernal” only insofar as there exists a revolt in favour of autonomy and freedom from those morally sanctimonious societies that pass perpetual judgment on what is good, only to affirm the evil of their own righteousness.

Benjamin can thus be seen to present certain features of an infernal anarchism. And, while not explicitly related to experiences of intoxication, there are a number of parallels between them. In both instances, emphasis is placed on a certain “loosening of the self,” as if intoxication and anarchistic liberation are both given to free the self, unmooring it from familiar and normalised perceptions of the world. There too is an element of vice and criminality within intoxication and anarchist freedom. Their crime lies in the equal rejection of the staid normality of a rational and moral self, as well as a rejection of its normative doctrines. An anarchistic freedom thus crosses over into the realm of intoxication insofar as the self finds liberation through an unmooring from the familiar, and an equal sympathy for the radical potentialities of this unbinding.

---

98 Ibid, p. 180. Interestingly, Benjamin and Scholem became involved in a heated protest on the streets of Paris in 1927 against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. As Scholem recounts, “That evening was tempestuous. The police, most of them on horseback, proceeded to attack the demonstrators. We found ourselves in a big melee and barely managed to escape the truncheons of the flics by reaching a side street off the boulevard de Petersbourg. Benjamin was very excited.” It is thus to suggest that Breton’s “delightful days spent looting Paris under the sign of Sacco and Vanzetti” has for Benjamin a quite personal significance. Scholem. Walter Benjamin, p. 169.

99 Lautréamont’s Chants de Maldoror pertinently exposes the hypocritical evil underlying the morally upright. Refuting the designation of evil as being necessarily vindictive, the character of Maldoror grants compassion to the figure Prostitution, who suffers the moral opprobrium of society. Maldoror revolts against injustice, extending compassion to those people society rejects. Comte de Lautréamont. Maldoror and the Complete Works of the Comte de Lautréamont. Cambridge: Exact Change, 1994, pp. 33-34.

100 Benjamin highlights the daemonic nature of the drug intoxication in his ‘Protocols’. As Benjamin writes, “I recollect a satanic phase. The red of the walls was the deciding factor for me. My smile assumed satanic features, though it was the expression of satanic knowing, satanic contentment, and satanic calm, rather than satanic destructiveness.” Benjamin. On Hashish. Cambridge, p. 23.

101 Cf. “Obviously not everyone who takes a sacred plant becomes an enlightened liberated shaman or dedicated foe of Civilization! But in the long run the plants are subversive of Civilised rigidity and repression...Cannabis will remain an outlaw because as a law unto itself it is prior to all law.” Bey. ‘The Bhang Nama’, p. 26.

102 Rimbaud, the third of the “great anarchists” also emphasised the connections between crime, freedom, and intoxication. Writing that the poet “exhausts in himself all poisons,” this figure “becomes among all men the great sick one, the great criminal, the great cursed one—and the supreme Sage!—for he arrives at the unknown.” The poetic self embraces “poisons,” becoming criminal and sage in its entrance into the realm of the unknown, the realm of intoxication. Rimbaud quoted in Boon. The Road of Excess, p. 143.
Emphasis on the affinities between intoxication and anarchism as spiritually “infernal” freedom is further evinced in Benjamin’s most explicit reference to anarchism: his enigmatic statement on the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. As Benjamin writes, “Since Bakunin, Europe has lacked a radical concept of freedom.” Indeed, Bakunin so closely follows Benjamin’s discussion of “infernal” freedom as to impute that Bakunin is a potentially definitive contributor to the freedom of the “great anarchists.” The association is strengthened, in that the placement of the “great anarchists” between 1865 and 1875 is a period in which Bakunin himself became a major anarchist voice in Europe. Of equal import, Bakunin’s “radical concept of freedom” and an “infernal” freedom possess numerous sympathies. Thus, in ‘God and the State’, a work Benjamin had read, Bakunin indicates the originally “infernal” and anarchistic nature of freedom, in terms of the Biblical exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Satan, the serpentine tempter, is here presented as “the eternal rebel, the first freethinker and the emancipator of worlds.” Satan’s “infernal” gesture, in tempting Eve to bite the apple from the Tree of Knowledge is not an original sin, but a moment of liberation from the authoritarian interdictions of God. Satanic rebellion and revolt infuses humanity with a “desire to rebel,” and a passionate disdain for authority. And, as Bakunin notes elsewhere, this “desire to rebel” is a positive negation of authority, a “creative passion.” The destructive and insurrectionary negation of authority cultivates other possibilities through the reclamation of an existence that becomes ungovernable and autonomous. Insurrectionary destruction is to reclaim the

103 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, 189.
104 Prominent events in Bakunin’s life during 1865 and 1875 include the composition of L’Empire knouto-germanique and Statism and Anarchy, along with his infamous expulsion from the International, upon Marx’s orders, in September 1872.
107 Ibid, p. 112.
autonomy of an existence whose passions and desires cannot be contained by the mediating impetus of authority.¹⁰⁹ These points are to thus suggest that Benjamin’s reference to Bakunin is part of his discussion of a “radical concept of freedom,” and also to emphasise the prominence of anarchism in the ‘Surrealism’ article.

Benjamin’s awareness of these affinities continues in associating Bakunin with the Surrealists, who also possess a “radical concept of freedom.”¹¹⁰ Breton thus describes freedom as that which “must be enjoyed unrestrictedly in its fullness without any kind of pragmatic calculation.” This unrestricted freedom subsequently liquidates a “sclerotic liberal-moral-humanistic idea of freedom,” an image paralleling the rejection of leftist moralism by the “great anarchists.” And, profoundly, the unrestricted freedom of the Surrealists converges with the experience of intoxication in Benjamin’s most explicit statement on the bond between anarchism and intoxication. As Benjamin elucidates, “To win the energies of intoxication [Kräfte des Rausches] 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. For them it is not enough that, as we know, an ecstatic component lives in every revolutionary act. This component is identical with the anarchic.”¹¹¹ The “energies of intoxication,” with emphasis on their “ecstatic” nature—an idea duly apparent in the aforementioned hashish intoxication—are found concurrently within an “anarchic” radicalism. And, with the proximity of this statement to remarks on Bakunin’s relationship to Surrealist freedom as well as an “infernal” and anarchistic freedom, it is to recognise how closely related anarchism and intoxication—Rausch—are in Benjamin’s article. The radical potentialities of the “energies of intoxication” are formed from an “anarchic” radicalism, an insurrectionary and destructive freedom privileging autonomy over pragmatism and reason.

And yet it is exactly this relationship between the “anarchic” and intoxication

¹⁰⁹ As Bakunin intimates in his youth, the most passionate and destructive force is love, as love necessitates rebellion against all social norms. See John Randolph. The House in the Garden: The Bakunin family and the romance of Russian Idealism. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007, p. 200. For love in Bakunin’s early writings, see Michael Bakunin. ‘From a Letter of Bakunin to his Sisters’, in Michael Bakunin. London: Jonathan Cape, 1973, p. 35.

¹¹⁰ “Since Bakunin, Europe has lacked a radical concept of freedom. The Surrealists have one.” Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 189.

that leads to its depreciation. As with the dialectical subsumption of intoxication beneath the *profane illumination*, the “anarchic” also finds itself depreciated, and in a decidedly similar manner to the method of “dialectical intertwinement.” Thus, after Benjamin’s statement that intoxication is imbricated with the “anarchic,” he claims, “But to place the accent exclusively on it [the “anarchic” component of intoxication] would be to subordinate the methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution entirely to a praxis oscillating between fitness exercises and celebration in advance.”

In a sardonic manner, Benjamin suggests that the “anarchic” elements of experiences of intoxication are not radical enough, or, rather, they do not conform to “the methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution.” The “anarchic” apparently lacks seriousness and discipline, as in Benjamin’s reference to its radicalism as little more than “fitness exercises and celebration in advance.”

Benjamin’s reference to the “methodical and disciplinary” in opposition to a playfully anarchistic radicalism is further significant, as it relates to Benjamin’s “highly exposed position” between an “anarchistic *fronde*” and a “revolutionary discipline.” This tension is deserving of remark, in that “revolutionary discipline,” as with the “methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution” are decidedly Marxist inflections. The correspondences between Marxism and “revolutionary discipline” persist in Benjamin’s support for Pierre Naville’s *La Révolution et les intellectuels.*

Naville, a Marxist critical of Surrealism, very significantly proposed two differing currents within the movement: a metaphysical anarchism and a “dialectical” Marxism. As Naville states, Surrealists “can either persevere with its negative anarchic disposition,” a “mistaken attitude” in its defence of “the sacred character of the individual.” Or, as Naville continues, the Surrealist’s can identify with the “disciplined action of class struggle,” that is, to “commit itself to revolutionary activity, the only revolutionary activity: Marxism.”

For Naville, a “negative anarchic disposition” is inferior to a true, Marxist form of revolution, with its “disciplined action of class

---

112 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 189.
114 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 185.
struggle.” Naville is essentially arguing that the only true revolutionary path is the “disciplined action” of Marxism, a position dismissive of all other radical traditions, particularly that tradition possessed of a “negative anarchic disposition,” that is, anarchism.\footnote{Bey interestingly provides an indirect, anarchist critique of Naville’s position on Surrealism. As Bey would suggest, Surrealism was never anarchistic enough. Commenting on the ease with which Capitalism has commodified Surrealist art, Bey notes that this commodification is implicit within it, because it originally compromised the “liberation of desire” with Marxism. “The Surrealist liberation of desire, for all its aesthetic accomplishments, remains no more than a subset of production—hence the wholesaling of Surrealism to the Communist Party & its Work-ist ideology.” For Bey, it is Surrealism’s compromise with Marxism that actually devalues its far more radical and anarchistic potential. \cite{Bey, p. 78-79.}}

And, Benjamin can be seen to conform to Naville’s Marxist conclusions. Thus, as with Naville, Benjamin presents Surrealist radicalism in terms of a division between a playful “anarchic” radicalism and a “methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution”—even though Benjamin is more sympathetic to a “negative anarchic disposition.” It is to thus acknowledge that Benjamin’s criticisms of the “anarchic” are not simply directed at the professed ineffectualness of Surrealism’s revolutionary potential. Benjamin is highlighting that anarchist subversion is somehow inferior to a Marxist revolutionary position. Marxist “revolutionary discipline” is presented as the only revolutionary position, as if all other radical traditions, such as anarchism, are mired in undisciplined and inefficacious revolt.\footnote{This emphasis on Marxism is to also disturb the scholarly presentation of Benjamin’s argument—as in Hanssen and McCole—in terms of an attempt to go beyond the “anarchic,” so as to realise a truly revolutionary position. In reference to Naville, this thesis would argue that Benjamin’s “real revolution” is actually the delimitation of radicalism in entirely Marxist terms. Benjamin is problematically arguing that Marxism is the only radical tradition capable of radical change, a prejudicial attitude that places Benjamin’s anarchist influences in an inferior role. A more pertinent means of analysis would be to note the tensions in this subordination, and to question the validity of Marxism’s “revolutionary discipline” as being somehow better than a “negative anarchic disposition.”} Thus, just as the spirituality of intoxication is subordinated before a Marxist “political materialism,” so too, it would seem, is its “anarchic” component subordinated before a Marxist “revolutionary discipline.”\footnote{The interconnectedness of Benjamin’s subordination of the “anarchic” and intoxication inheres also in parallels between discipline and technology. For details, see pages 68 to 72 of this thesis.} The dialectical sublation of intoxication and the “anarchic” inheres in their reconfiguration for use within the Marxist revolutionary tradition. Benjamin’s “highly exposed position” loses its ambiguity, taking on the certainty of a Marxist “methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution.”

That Benjamin is devaluing the “anarchic,” along with experiences of
intoxication, can be found in further remarks on Bakunin and Breton’s conception of freedom. After discussing Surrealism’s commitment to an anarchistic freedom, Benjamin continues, “But are they successful in welding this experience of freedom to the other revolutionary experience that we have to acknowledge because it has been ours, the constructive, dictatorial side of revolution? In short, have they bound revolt to revolution?”\(^\text{119}\) The “experience of freedom,” with its anarchistic inflections is further problematised by the inclusion of another “revolutionary experience,” an experience in which anarchistic revolt gives way to “the constructive, dictatorial side of revolution.”

Decisive however is Benjamin’s statement, “have they bound revolt to revolution?” It is decisive because this binding of revolt to revolution implies that two qualitatively distinct radical experiences are being brought together. In arguing that revolt has to be bound to revolution, Benjamin affirms how revolt and revolution are not, in fact, synonymous. Revolt privileges anarchic destruction, insurrection, and “infernal” freedom, while revolution, in those instances where Benjamin uses the term, is associated with the “constructive,” the “dictatorial,” and methodical discipline, a practice, as Naville identifies, to be found in Marxism. Two very different radical traditions—anarchism and Marxism—are being forcibly brought together.

In this, Benjamin would appear to have called again upon “dialectical intertwined.” Revolt and revolution are to be bound together, but the initial radical experience, the “anarchic,” finds itself forced into a relationship with a “revolutionary discipline” that supplants the “anarchic.”\(^\text{120}\) The “anarchic” is supplanted in association with “revolutionary discipline,” as the dialectic that forcibly unites them privileges a “revolutionary discipline” inimical to the very undisciplined and “infernal” freedom of anarchism. Anarchistic revolt is bound into a relationship with the “constructive, dictatorial side of revolution,” which is to express its disappearance as a unique and distinct category, just as intoxication loses its own distinctiveness in connection to the

\(^{119}\) Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 189.

\(^{120}\) Dissociation is made from Richard Wolin’s contention that the movement from revolt and revolution within the ‘Surrealism’ article is one of phases; that “the phase of mere revolt,” must become “a methodical and disciplined political movement.” For Wolin, “mere revolt” would degenerate into “a privatised and meaningless form of intellectual recreation.” In focusing on anarchism in Benjamin’s thought, this thesis would argue that “mere revolt,” the “anarchic,” is a distinct position in itself. The major concern regarding revolt and revolution is not their movement along a scale of increasing radicalism, but the ambiguities of their intertwined. Richard Wolin. \textit{Walter Benjamin: An aesthetic of redemption}. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, p. 134.
Benjamin draws on the “energies” of anarchist radicalism together with intoxication, but, in both instances, dialectically supplants their distinctiveness by forcing them into unequal relationships with forces antagonistic to ecstasy and unrestricted freedom. To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution remains central to Benjamin’s contention, but these “energies”—intoxication and anarchistic revolt—are being won for a very particular conception of revolution: the “revolutionary discipline” of Marxism.

In terms of the dialectical impetus of Benjamin’s argument, intoxication and the “anarchic” radicalism that inhabits this experience are sublated and bound into the service of a Marxist profane illumination. Benjamin’s profane illumination conforms to a Marxist materialism—divested of spirit and ecstasy—and a revolutionary, disciplined Marxism—having dialectically pacified the insurrectionary, “infernal” qualities of anarchism. In this, Benjamin’s application of the dialectic would appear to obviate the potential of discerning an “anarchic illumination” within the ‘Surrealism’ article. The only possible argument would be that anarchism and intoxication remain apparent, but minor influences. This position however is to contend that there is finality to Benjamin’s conclusions. As this thesis would suggest, Benjamin’s conclusions regarding the profane illumination are not so conclusive, as there remain definite tensions and ambiguities in Benjamin’s position.

The most problematic aspect of the ‘Surrealism’ article is in how Benjamin establishes his article as being touched by a “highly exposed position,” a tension, between two differing conceptions of radical experience, that of “an anarchistic fronde” and a “revolutionary discipline.” What is so problematic in this statement is in how Benjamin obviates this tension by favouring “revolutionary discipline,” and, in turn, Marxism. It is particularly through Benjamin’s use of the dialectic that the annihilation of this tension is most apparent. Benjamin’s attempts at “dialectical intertwinements” effectively eliminate the “anarchistic fronde” and its interconnectedness with intoxication. The mediation and subsumption of the “anarchic” intoxication under the

---

121 This forced, unnatural quality finds support in Benjamin’s description of himself in terms of surveyor of an “intellectual current,” Surrealism, over which is to be installed the critic’s “power station.” Again, it is a question of harnessing a source’s “energies,” but in a manner destructive of the unique movements of the original source. Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 177.
disciplined, revolutionary praxis of the Marxist profane illumination does not so much integrate aspects of an “anarchic” intoxication as it reconfigures and subdues these elements. Benjamin has bound “anarchic” intoxication into the service of a Marxist profane illumination by means of the dialectic. And, the mediations of the Marxist dialectic effectively destroy the “anarchic” intoxication, divesting it of its own unique character.\footnote{As Chrissus and Odotheus contend, “the pure existence of two contraries is not enough to generate a dialectical relationship. To achieve such an end, something more is needed: mediation between the two contraries. To mediate two contraries means to take away their irreducibility, to bind them together, to create a communicative bridge between them. It means to pacify them through reconciliation, but to the advantage of one particular side – the one that was strongest from the start.” “Dialectical intertwinement” appears here as the pacification of the irreducible uniqueness of anarchism and intoxication in favour of those positions Benjamin privileges: Marxism and profane illumination. Integrating oppositional viewpoints is not benevolent, as it co-opted the uniqueness of the original position. Chrissus and Odotheus. Barbarians: Disordered Insurgence. London: Elephant Editions, 2004, p. 35.}

It is, of course, worth considering why “anarchic” experiences of intoxication are required to undergo “dialectical intertwinement.” Benjamin suggests they would otherwise remain mired in “ominous romantic prejudices” and playfully undisciplined radicalism. But, the spiritual, “mysterious” aspects of intoxication and the insurrectionary basis of anarchism are only figured negatively from the perspective of the Marxist dialectic, which is not an impartial mediator, as it is a dialectic given to supplant that which it integrates into itself. Benjamin’s dialectic already privileges an experience that supplants the “anarchic” and intoxication, because this experience, this profane illumination, is founded in Marxism. The possibility that is not considered is that “anarchic” and spiritual intoxications do not require dialectical mediation, as they are already distinct experiences. “Dialectical intertwinement” is not actually necessary, as the “energies” of anarchistic radicalism and the spiritual ecstasies of intoxication are unique experiences in themselves. The “anarchic” and intoxication may prove “undialectical” when read through a dialectic inimical to “anarchic” intoxication and spiritual ecstasy, but, unbound from this mediation, these experiences can be respected in terms of their own radical possibilities.

And, Benjamin, it can be argued, remains aware of the tensions in placing an “anarchic” intoxication in the service of the dialectic. Such tensions emerge in awareness that Benjamin has, elsewhere in his work, independently vindicated exactly those romantic, spiritual, and “anarchic” experiences that, within the ‘Surrealism’ article
find themselves so problematically depreciated. There is another illumination in Benjamin’s work that is sympathetic to the spiritual and “anarchic” cadence of intoxication. This is to say also that the entwinement of the “anarchic” and the spiritual illumination, their very inextricability, disavows the necessity of dialectical mediation, because they already share a relationship. An “anarchic,” spiritually invested experience has its own independent validity, and this can be demonstrated in reading the ‘Surrealism’ article discordantly, alongside other of Benjamin’s works that do find their inspiration in the “energies of intoxication.”
Chapter Two:

Intoxication, remembrance and the discord of youth
In a letter to Scholem of September 26 1932, Benjamin discusses the composition of his autobiographical work, *A Berlin Childhood around 1900*. Rather than detailing its specific contents—identified as “a series of notes” on childhood—Benjamin gifts Scholem with the work’s poetic “motto” that will eventually preface the completed text: “O victory column baked brown/ With winter sugar from childhood days.” He follows, “Someday I hope to be able to tell you the origin of this verse.” And as Scholem notes, in recollection of this mystery, the “motto” to *Berlin Childhood* was composed under the effects of intoxication, during a drug experiment with hashish.\(^{123}\) Here, in Scholem’s awareness of the origins of Benjamin’s “motto,” a significant connection opens between the realm of intoxication—*Rausch*—and the remembrance of childhood. Intoxication seemingly possesses such sympathy with childhood that this relationship would allow Benjamin to preface a work of childhood memories with words drawn from an intoxicated reverie. And, it is this affinity between childhood and intoxication that, as to be contended here, provides a distinct challenge to Benjamin’s ambiguous dismissal of experiences of intoxication and its anarchistic “energies” presented in his ‘Surrealism’ article. In the interrelatedness of intoxication and childhood, there emerges an alternate reading of the radical potentialities of illumination.

That Benjamin’s childhood remembrances parallel experiences of intoxication can be further gleaned from other instances of their interpenetration.\(^{124}\) Notable is the biographical convergence of Benjamin’s childhood and his drug experiments. Thus, it is an old school friend, Ernst Joël, who offers Benjamin a place in the drug experiments that would form his drug ‘Protocols’.\(^{125}\) This is deserving of note, as Benjamin sympathetically recalls Joël in *Berlin Chronicle*, partner to *Berlin Childhood*. While professing a complex relationship to Joël in his youth, Benjamin fondly notes the

---

\(^{123}\) Scholem. *Walter Benjamin*, p. 240. Scholem also acknowledged the significance of Benjamin’s childhood remembrances, stating “It is one of Benjamin’s most important characteristics that throughout his life he was attracted with almost magical force by the child’s world and ways. This world was one of the persistent and recurring themes of his reflections.” Scholem. ‘Walter Benjamin’, p. 175.

\(^{124}\) For further examples of the relationship between youth and intoxication in Benjamin’s work, see Thompson. ‘Hashish in Berlin’.

“magical aspect of the city” he would reveal years later during their drug experiments.\textsuperscript{126} Indeed, Benjamin makes explicit the connections between Joël, the drug experiments, and childhood remembrance. As Benjamin writes, “So his image appears in me at this stage only as an answer to the question of whether forty is not too young an age at which to evoke the most important memories of one’s life.”\textsuperscript{127} The “answer” Benjamin receives from the image of Joël and the drug experiments is that one is never too old to remember “the most important memories of one’s life,” memories drawn from a childhood of an apparently “magical” and intoxicating quality.

The magic of childhood that Joël helped Benjamin re-experience through intoxication is a quality interestingly contained within another reference to Benjamin’s youth conjured during a drug experiment in 1934. Under the effects of mescaline, Benjamin notes, “The first experience the child has of the world is not that adults are stronger but rather that he cannot make magic.”\textsuperscript{128} The child’s first experience of the world is their apparent lack of magical ability. It is the capacity for magic that the child finds most intriguing; adults are only a distant concern, due to the possible realisation of the adult’s deficiency in magic. And, while Benjamin states that the child “cannot make magic,” he notes also a certain child-like “wisdom of impertinence.”\textsuperscript{129} That is, the child’s “impertinence,” their insolence and disregard for the absence of magic, actually allows for the cultivation of their own magic. The child can, in fact, “make magic” through allegiance to their own “impertinence”—a disrespect that, related to the strength of adults, could be seen as a rebellion against the delimitations adults set upon the child’s creativity and magic abilities.\textsuperscript{130} The magic of children becomes part of their

\textsuperscript{126} Walter Benjamin. ‘A Berlin Chronicle’, in Peter Demetz (ed.). \textit{Reflections: Essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings}. New York: Schocken Books, 1978, p. 16. Benjamin’s reference to reliving the “magical aspect of the city” might suggest correspondences with the \textit{profane illumination} and its own urbanity. While similar, there is a problem in ascribing a youthful and “magical” experience of the city to \textit{profane illumination}. In the \textit{profane illumination}, the city’s urbanity is heightened. In the childhood remembrances, the city is “magical” in its ruination and the return of primordial landscapes, as in Benjamin’s experience of “the powers of nature” while caught in a raging flood down the Kurfürstenstrasse of Berlin. The child’s “magical” experience of the city ruptures the illusion of technological progress, envisioning the re-emergence of a primeval world that has always already reclaimed the city as a playground of ruins. \textit{Ibid}, pp. 9-10.

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid}, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{128} Benjamin. \textit{On Hashish}, p. 87.

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Ibid}, p. 87.

\textsuperscript{130} Benjamin’s dislike for the world of adults—and its debilitating effects on children—is notably apparent in his 1913 article, “Experience”. Criticising the adult “philistine” who dismisses the youth for
disregard for the world of adults, and, as such, can be found part of aspects of childhood that, elsewhere in Benjamin’s work, are vindicated and defended: the suspension of time in play and revelry; the child’s identification with the vibrancy of the world through the bold application of colour in their drawings; and, the elaborate conjurations of their stories, where the tales they weave lack all boundary and sense, and enter into the surrealistic play of word and image. And, that Benjamin identifies this impertinent “magic” while experiencing the effects of intoxication is to suggest the persistence of this “magic” within the realm of intoxication. Children’s magical experiences of the world are still accessible to the adult, and as Benjamin intimates, can be accessed through the “wisdom of impertinence” that is the drug intoxication. In accordance with its childhood affinities, the intoxicated unfolding of the self becomes an impertinent desire to reclaim those affective and magical capacities that remain so prominent in a child’s relationship to the world.

Of note, the question of magic and affect in the relationship between intoxication and childhood crosses over into concerns expressed in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article. The experience of intoxication with its sensuality and affect can thus be found to combine with ecstasies of a religious, spiritual, and occult nature. The self too is loosened, with an emphasis on establishing more intimate connections that, seen from the perspective of childhood, is an intimacy regained or restored. Most importantly, it is to emphasise the experiential dimension of the relation between intoxication and childhood. Intoxication is interconnected with childhood not only in terms of remembrance. There is also an apparent concern with re-experiencing the sensations, pleasures, and joys of childhood in the present through intoxication. Intoxication becomes a means of reconnecting with the magical quality of experience that the child so easily expresses in affective connectedness to the world. The remembrance of

lacking “experience,” Benjamin moves to the “pedagogues,” those adults “whose bitterness will not even concede to us the brief years of youth; serious and grim, they want to push us directly into life’s drudgery.” Of further import, in the context of the magical and intoxicating status of childhood is Benjamin’s use of the pseudonym ‘Ardour’, a title befitting a thinker for whom youth is inextricable from passion and joy. Walter Benjamin. “Experience”, in Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926. Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2004, pp. 3-5.

childhood, refracted through the affective possibilities of intoxication, becomes an attempt to relive and re-experience the “magic” of childhood, to draw past experiences of youthfulness into the present, so as to enact entirely altered perspectives, understandings and relationships. Benjamin’s childhood remembrances entail a concern with returning to childhood experiences that act as a creative source of inspiration, and further goad to re-establish this youthfulness in the present, as can be seen in youth’s intimacy with intoxication.132

This re-experiencing of youthful affect, in its sympathetic accord with intoxication, is to also destabilise the dismissal of intoxication that occurs in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article. That Benjamin’s childhood memories are treated so respectfully, and that these memories are recaptured experientially through the realm of intoxication, it is difficult to accept the negative conclusions drawn in regards to the variegated expressions of *Rausch* within the ‘Surrealism’ article. The treatment of intoxication as an “introductory lesson” to be discarded in favour of *profane illumination* is problematised by its sympathy with the magical quality of childhood experience, and a type of remembering that is a concurrent re-experiencing of youth. More precisely, a tension emerges in Benjamin’s work regarding the experience of intoxication, a tension that is drawn in two differing directions—one path being given to the sublation of intoxication and its occult significance, and the other embracing intoxication as a means of reconnecting with the affective power and magic of childhood experience. There is a tense movement between a dialectical supplanting of intoxication, and an attempt to return to and re-establish a connection with the privileged expression of intoxication in the form of childhood experience.

There is though another aspect to these correspondences between youth and intoxication, an aspect that introduces further tensions into the dialectical sublation of intoxication within the ‘Surrealism’ article. This is the capacity of youth and intoxication to destabilise the temporal and chronological ordering of Benjamin’s life. It is to consider the remembrance of childhood, as the re-experiencing of youth through

---

intoxication as a means of upsetting the developmental understanding of the conclusions offered in the ‘Surrealism’ article—that Benjamin’s conclusions are disrupted by the return of a youthful memory seized upon as an experience in the present. The appearance of childhood becomes an instance of temporal disruption, whereby what is past becomes a challenge to the conclusions of the present. Memory itself is radicalised in the relationship between childhood and intoxication, intruding upon the present and disrupting the narrative sequence of time and chronology.

While Benjamin’s childhood remembrances and the majority of his drug experiments are explored after the composition of his ‘Surrealism’ article, and would thus supplant the apparent finality or definitiveness of the article’s conclusions, this argument does not encapsulate the type of temporal disruption emphasised here. It could be contended that the profane illumination becomes problematic in reference to further developments in Benjamin’s work, such as his remembrances and drug ‘Protocols’. This argument however continues to work within a developmental model, whereby the truest expression of Benjamin’s thought is defined in terms of later developments—a problem exacerbated with the significant confluence of anarchism to intoxication, in that anarchism is less apparent in Benjamin’s later writings. Emphasised here are the temporal disruptions of Benjamin’s enunciation of his childhood remembrances. It is Benjamin’s presentation of childhood and distinct means of remembering that provides the basis for childhood’s power of disruption.

An important expression of this temporal disturbance occurs in the very same letter to Scholem that explores the intoxicated “motto” of Berlin Childhood. As Benjamin notes, his “childhood memories” are “far from being in the form of a chronicle.” His autobiographical works, including Berlin Childhood and Berlin Chronicle transcend autobiography as chronicle—a serialised narrative account of a life given the semblance of consistency through chronological ordering. Benjamin is not remembering his past in order to set down an autobiographical account of his youth. Benjamin’s “childhood memories” are rather “individual expeditions into the depths of memory.”

Benjamin emphasises how the past is remembered in the mind’s eye of the present. To remember one’s childhood is to follow an “expedition” into the chthonic

---

depths of the past at the moment or instance of its recollection. An emphasis on the recollection of the past as an “expedition” is to equally emphasise the re-collection of childhood as recovery and restoration. Benjamin’s “childhood memories” are thus predominantly fragmentary explorations of numerous childhood experiences written in no particular order. Benjamin’s remembrances emphasise the memory of youth as recalled in the present, a recollection uninterested in presenting the past as a chronicle of events as they really happened. Questioning distinctions of past and present, Benjamin recalls his childhood as a source of experiential and affective inspiration.

What emerges from this presentation of “childhood memories” is a distinct and disruptive relationship to the chronological ordering of Benjamin’s own life. Benjamin’s recollection of his childhood disturbs temporal assumptions that the past can exist only as a spectral memory, a remnant of the past sundered from the present. In its relationship to intoxication, the memory of childhood becomes a re-experiencing of youthfulness, whereby the past is drawn into the present, upsetting a progressive, developmental understanding of personal biography. Benjamin’s youthful past becomes a source of creative and discordant potentiality in the present. The past is drawn upon not as an act of nostalgia—an adult mournfully contemplating lost childhood experiences—but as a source of inspiration that disrupts temporal order by means of its emphasis on return, recollection, and remembering. Chronological time—the narrative time of the chronicle—is abandoned for a recollected past existing as a site of creative and inspirational rupture in the present. No longer a dead memory, Benjamin’s childhood intrudes upon chronological temporality, perforating its progressive narratives with a magical and inspiring challenge to the present. Benjamin’s “childhood memories” act as disturbances to the presentation of his life. The past becomes a creative challenge to the present and is reconfigured as a site of new direction.

134 The emphasis on return is particularly evident in Benjamin’s ‘Experience’ article. Responding to why the adult holds the “dreams of his youth” in disdain, Benjamin writes “what appeared to him in his dreams was the voice of the spirit, calling him once, as it does everyone. It is of this that youth always reminds him, eternally and ominously.” Youth is the calling of one’s inner spirit, an experience that must be renewed, lest one yield to the “brutality” of adult “experience.” Benjamin. “‘Experience’”, pp. 3-5.

return to one’s childhood is to allow the past to intrude upon the present, to disturb the assumption that future progressions are always necessarily correct. It is to suggest that the past contains its own potential truths, and that Benjamin, in his attempts to recall his own magical experiences of childhood, is aware of these disruptive potentialities.

It is amidst the fragments of Benjamin’s *Berlin Chronicle* that this disruptive power of recollected youthfulness is bequeathed a title. The youthful past recalled in the present is an “image.” As Benjamin elucidates, “autobiography has to do with time, with sequence and what makes up the continuous flow of life. Here, I am talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities. For even if months and years appear here, it is in the form they have at the moment of their recollection.” Defying chronological time as the “continuous flow of time,” an endless progressive movement, Benjamin speaks of “images” as “discontinuities” that disrupt chronology through their emphasis on the moment of recollection, the moment whereupon the past intrudes upon the present. There is a spatial rather than temporal relationship to the past. “Images” grant directness and immediacy to a youthfulness that Benjamin seeks to recall, an immediacy that abolishes the distance chronological time erects between past and present—its “continuous flow of time.” An emphasis on a spatial relationship to the past is not however to concede these “images” to be “general representations.” The recollected past is not an image of what really happened, bereft only of chronology. Childhood “images” possess exactly that creative and experiential dimension Benjamin perceives in the relationship between childhood and intoxication. The “image” enlivens the past in the present, granting it the affective power it once had in childhood. In turn, the “image” emerges as discontinuous with the progressive “flow of life” that is personal biography. “Images” rupture from progressive temporality, becoming the site for a creative coupling of past and present that opens the possibility of a youthful intrusion into the present. The “image” gathers the creative forces of the past into the present, opening a site for the re-emergence of another potentiality unmoored from chronology.

---

136 Benjamin. ‘Berlin Chronicle’, p. 29. These childhood “images” are here compared with the “image” as described on pages 20 to 22 of this thesis, in that both “images” interrupt the narrative progression of history and ascribe truth to “images” at risk of being abandoned to progressive time. Due to these comparisons, no necessary distinction is made between these “images.” Childhood “images” are emphasised because of their explicit applicability to the ‘Surrealism’ article.

137 *Ibid*, p. 28.

and progressive temporality.

Before considering the radical implications of these anti-developmental youthful “images,” it is pertinent to acknowledge that the temporal disruptions of childhood “images” and youthful experience are consonant with that experience Benjamin considers part of youth’s magic: intoxication. Thus, in his ‘Hashish in Marseilles’ of 1932, Benjamin notes approvingly how, with the first effects of hashish, “images and chains of images, long submerged memories appear; whole scenes and situations are experienced.” Memory is an important facet of intoxication, and those memories are conjured as a collection of “images.” To the involvement of memory and “image” can be added the feeling of spatial and temporal disruption, apparent in Benjamin’s childhood “images.” As Benjamin writes in his ‘Protocols’, “You start to experience seductions with your sense of orientation.”

Benjamin mentions this in an experience of the intoxicated “telescoping” of time and space, whereby historical pageants play out in an adjacent room—time and space collapsing upon each other. Benjamin too experiences the illusion of temporal and spatial boundaries. As he writes, “Against the background of these immense dimensions of inner experience, of absolute duration and immeasurable space, a wonderful beatific humor dwells all the more fondly on the contingencies of space and time.” As Benjamin continues, “I have just sat down to feast in eternity.” Possessed of an intoxicated vision of the boundless and interconnected nature of existence, Benjamin finds an eternity that can be experienced immediately in a present increasingly removed from distinctions of past and future.

As with those “images” found in Benjamin’s remembrances, intoxication acts to dissort one’s relationship to time. During the effects of intoxication, the past merges with the present so as to destabilise notions of temporal order and sequence. The past is drawn into the present as like an “image” and in a manner that ruptures the past from

---


140 Ibid., p. 23.

141 Ibid., p. 24.

142 Ibid., p. 49.

chronological progression. Remembrance and intoxication act like historical pageants that play out their dramas within the immediacy of the present. Instead of the past being a mute event, remembrance and intoxication are given to re-enact the past, to draw it into the present. Remembrance and intoxication are a re-experiencing of the past. Their “images” are sensual and affective re-experiences. Where the past appeared distant, “images” of remembrance and intoxication restore a sense of connectedness to the past. And, this is possible by dislocating time from temporal sequence and chronology. The time of the “image” and intoxication is closer to a moment of eternity, where past, present, and future ecstatically converge.

And, it is here, in these parallels between the image-like and non-developmental basis of childhood experience and intoxication that the problem of Benjamin’s subordination of intoxication in his ‘Surrealism’ article becomes apparent. For, the temporal disruptions of intoxication and childhood experience become equally disruptive of those conclusions that would dialectically subordinate intoxication to profane illumination. This is so, because intoxication, in its relationship with childhood experience, is not beholden to the conclusions of the ‘Surrealism’ article as a necessarily progressive outcome that over-determines Benjamin’s discussion of intoxication. The experience of intoxication as the re-experiencing of childhood, in the form of an “image,” is given over to the creative potentialities of a redeemed past that returns and interrupts the definitiveness or finality of Benjamin’s conclusions. The remembrance of childhood and its inseparability from intoxication is to propose the past as an alternative trajectory and pathway in Benjamin’s work, an alternate direction, moreover, that is evidently sympathetic to those features of intoxication Benjamin dismisses amidst the conclusions to his ‘Surrealism’ article, particularly those magical, occult, and phantasmagoric elements of intoxication shared with the child.

Childhood remembrance, in the form of an “image” interrupts the ‘Surrealism’ article by proposing other possibilities drawn from the past, and most evidently, a reading of intoxication in sympathetic terms, which would equate to giving greater prominence to what Benjamin rejects and dialectically supplants. The loss of temporal order and progression in the relationship between childhood and intoxication grants the past a source of creative inspiration and undetermined possibility in Benjamin’s work.
The remembrance of childhood becomes a positive and alternate source of inspiration, in which intoxication is figured prominently and sympathetically in its inextricability from youthful experience. The ‘Surrealism’ article is itself discordantly ruptured, its already existing ambiguities given over to the tensions that emerge in the reappearance and re-experience of Benjamin’s anti-developmental youthful “images.” The past intrudes into the conclusions of the ‘Surrealism’ article, challenging its claims by way of the magical and creative power of childhood, a power it shares with experiences of intoxication.

Benjamin’s childhood “images” are instances of discord that upset the chronological sequencing of his work, particularly in its correspondences with intoxication. The “image” is an interruption, the intrusion of a youthful potentiality that poses other directions and other understandings. What is however of great import in this intersecting disruption of childhood and intoxication is in discerning where this temporal destabilisation finds applicability to that other major concern of the ‘Surrealism’ article: the ambiguous dismissal of anarchism in favour of a Marxist revolutionary praxis. While intoxication finds direct parallels with childhood, and its anti-developmental potentialities, it is still to consider the place of the “anarchic” in this relationship. Of course, the “anarchic” is itself a component of intoxication and, as such, is not necessarily separate from the discordant “images” of childhood experience. What is to be considered however is in how youthfulness is apparent within the “anarchic.” There is a youthful aspect to the “anarchic” that heightens the problem of its dialectical subordination before Marxism. It is to contend that a positive reading of the “anarchic” emerges from the very youthfulness of the “anarchic.” Benjamin’s youthful “images” apply not only to a discordant interruption regarding intoxication, but also intrude upon a narrative sequencing of his life that would place Marxism superior to his anarchist sympathies. Benjamin’s childhood “images” are then to be read as a temporal destabilisation of his dismissal of the “anarchic,” and, as a means of redeeming the “anarchic,” opening a sphere in which it can be considered positively.

This youthful component arises, fittingly, in relation to Benjamin’s autobiographical statement within the ‘Surrealism’ article that he “has had direct experience of its [Surrealism’s] highly exposed position between an anarchistic fronde and a revolutionary discipline.” As earlier acknowledged, this is Benjamin’s most
explicit statement on his own “highly exposed position” between an anarchist and Marxist current in his work. Of course, this position loses its ambiguity, when Benjamin comes to privilege a Marxist “revolutionary discipline” over the “anarchistic fronde,” in terms of equal support for the “constructive, dictatorial side of revolution” and “the methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution.” The dialectic is employed to mediate this “highly exposed position,” which subsequently deracines the uniqueness of this “anarchistic fronde” by its integration into “revolutionary discipline.”

This “highly exposed position” can however be returned to and considered ambiguously, when acknowledged that youth and youthful experiences are privy to this tension. Such a youthful element emerges from Benjamin’s distinct enunciation of his anarchist position in reference to an “anarchistic fronde” that sits tensely with “revolutionary discipline.” More exactly, it is the fronde, enjoined to the anarchistic that is so significant. This “anarchistic fronde” is a reference to the Fronde, a period of insurrection in France during the mid-Seventeenth Century that was directed at the government for a myriad of grievances. Specifically, the fronde derives from the word for “sling” or “slingshot,” a pouch used to project pebbles, either playfully or in an act of violence, and which became synonymous with disorderliness and social unrest. And, this fronde or “slingshot” is a device and activity used primarily by children. The playfulness of the “sling” inheres in its identification with child’s play. Indeed, the confusion of playfulness with revolt and insurrection can be attributed to the acts of children. For, one of the earliest instances of violence during the Fronde involved a gathering of young boys in Paris, each with “slingshot” in hand, projecting stones at the windows of Cardinal Mazarin’s carriage house and stables. So inspiring were the actions of these young boys, the fronde lost its negative connotations—disorder as childish disturbance—and became a positive metaphor supportive of direct action against the government. The fronde can then be derived essentially from the radical potential of child’s play, and of the child’s capacity to instigate social revolt and insurrection.

---

There is an explicit and distinctive youthful aspect to the “anarchistic fronde.” To associate anarchist insurrection with a youthful fronde is to imply that the two are connected. The “sling” appears as the youthful praxis of anarchism, just as “revolutionary discipline” appears as the praxis of Marxism. The “anarchistic fronde” is a concurrently youthful revolt, or, at least, shares sympathies with this youthful insurrectionary praxis. Indeed, it is not necessarily surprising that such a connection would be made, considering how Benjamin identifies intoxication with youthful experience, intoxication being itself the adjunct of “anarchic” radicalism.

And, it is within these affinities between anarchism and a youthful fronde that it becomes possible to question the dialectical subordination of the “anarchistic fronde” to “revolutionary discipline.” As with intoxication, the claim of “dialectical intertwinement” becomes problematic when understood that intoxication is related to youth and its discordant status in Benjamin’s work. The return of “images” of youthfulness disturb Benjamin’s pronouncements that place intoxication in an inferior position, in that youth is both privileged as a unique, revitalising experience, as well as being a temporal interruption that introduces the past as a new trajectory and potentiality. In consideration of the youthful quality of the “anarchistic fronde,” and of how anarchism overlaps with intoxication, it can be commented that this youthful fronde is part of such temporal discord. The “anarchistic fronde” is, in turn, problematically intertwined with a Marxist “revolutionary discipline,” in that its youthfulness is disruptive of this intertwinement. This is ever more apparent upon remarking that the “anarchistic fronde” derives from child’s play, whereas a Marxist praxis centres upon “revolutionary discipline,” with this “discipline,” in its original German form, being indistinguishable from the instance of disciplining found in such authoritarian institutions as the school.\footnote{“Revolutionary discipline” appears in the German as “revolutionärer Disziplin,” and the later reference to discipline, “disciplinary preparation for revolution,” appears as “disziplinäre Vorbereitung der Revolution.” In both instances, the German form of discipline is synonymous with its English meaning: the enforcement of mental and physical conditioning in the subjection of individuals to a system of rules and behaviours, typically in a manner that seeks unquestioning obedience. Benjamin. ‘Der Sürrealismus’, p. 295, 307.} This also finds support in Benjamin’s numerous criticisms in his childhood remembrances of pedagogical discipline, including the “hatefulness and humiliation” of raising his cap to teachers, descriptions of school windows as “emblems
of imprisonment,” disdain for his forced collectivisation amidst a group of students trudging up school stairs, and his own rebellions against the disciplinary time of the school clock.\footnote{For references to Benjamin’s negative portrayal of his school, see Benjamin. ‘Berlin Chronicle’, p. 18, 49. For Benjamin’s rebellions against the school clock, see Benjamin. \textit{Berlin Childhood around 1900}, p. 78. See also footnote 128 for Benjamin’s youthful critique of the “push” of “pedagogues.”} While not directly related to the \textit{fronde} as such, these childhood remembrances, as “images” that re-experience a youthful hatred of discipline, demonstrate a definite sympathy for the child’s rebelliousness—their “impertinence”—and which, furthermore, makes the entwinement of a youthful, anarchistic \textit{fronde} with Marxist “revolutionary discipline” a very disturbing prospect from the perspective of either a young Benjamin or a Benjamin in remembrance. The “anarchistic \textit{fronde}” destabilises dialectical subordination, since its youthfulness acts in a similar, disruptive manner to intoxication. The sympathies of youth to anarchism attain the creative and disruptive potentialities of childhood experience, becoming the site for discordant readings that privilege exactly that which Benjamin attempts to ambiguously deride: a playful and anarchistic radicalism.

The youthfulness of anarchism in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article becomes the means by which its ambiguous dismissal can be reconceived, and placed towards a more sympathetic account. With the anarchist component of Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article finding such affinities with youth, it is possible to reconfigure the negative and mediated understanding of the “anarchistic \textit{fronde}.” Instead of binding the “anarchic” to “revolutionary discipline,” there can be discerned a distinctive anarchist position that finds inspiration in the \textit{fronde}, or “sling” of youthful rebellion. The intrusion of childhood into the ‘Surrealism’ article upsets its conclusions regarding a youthful anarchism, as this very youthfulness is a challenge drawn forth from the past, a past that attains an inspiring status in Benjamin’s thought. In this, such an unbinding of anarchism from Marxism follows a similar path to the unbinding of intoxication from its subordination under the \textit{profane illumination}. Where the intoxicated “image” of childhood looks fondly upon the magical quality of youth, so too is the “anarchistic \textit{fronde}” independently redeemed in terms of the possibilities of child’s play. The return of youth proposes other paths and suggests an alternative to the necessity of “dialectical intertwinement,” an alternative found within a discordant reading of Benjamin’s
sympathetic portrayal of his childhood.

“Images” of youth and intoxication have thus been so emphasised because they offer a means of drawing out an anarchic and intoxicated position that is obfuscated in the ‘Surrealism’ article through its privileging of Marxism and the profane illumination. Benjamin’s attempted “dialectical intertwinenent” of an “anarchic” intoxication and a Marxist “revolutionary discipline” would thus be to force opposed experiences into an impossible communication—which, in the instance of the ‘Surrealism’ article, necessitates the liquidation of intoxication and the “anarchic.” This distance from Benjamin’s stated conclusions is to recognise that the alternate and sympathetically drawn experiences of intoxication and the “anarchistic fronde,” in their relationship with youthful experience, are not subordinate to Marxism and the profane illumination. It is to then problematise the status of the profane illumination and its Marxist revolutionary praxis as Benjamin’s most definitive statement on intoxication and its anarchistic radicalism. As emphasised here, a progressive understanding of Benjamin that places the conclusions of his thought over those of earlier experiences is not suitable for an understanding of his work, as Benjamin’s thought so often moves disruptively into a past granted new meaning through its return in the present. As “images” recalled by Benjamin, past childhood experiences are an active and creative source of inspiration in the present that propose other meanings that do not necessarily stand in accordance with later developments, but rather act as creative challenges to these pronouncements. Within childhood “images” lie truths that can be more important than any future developments, and take on greater significance when refracted through the present. And, this power of remembrance Benjamin can be said to have vindicated in his childhood reminiscences and recognition of the liberating possibilities of youth.
Chapter Three:
Fragments of an “anarchic illumination”
Benjamin’s youth, formed as a gathering of “images,” and conjured into the present through remembrance and the experience of intoxication, introduces a temporally discordant quality into readings of the ‘Surrealism’ article, particularly in terms of the relationship between intoxication and anarchism. These “images” upset the privileging of Benjamin’s stated conclusions, whereby an “anarchic” intoxication is placed in a subordinate position to Marxism and profane illumination. Instead of being so depreciated, the “image” reintroduces the past as the site of a different potentiality more sympathetic to anarchism and intoxication. Earlier explorations are renewed in the present as discordant interruptions to Benjamin’s later developments, as if reintroducing another trajectory. The “image” enlivens the past, and grants it an importance that is lost in a developmental understanding of Benjamin’s thought. The “image” does not lead forwards, as it moves backwards, into the past, as the site of a new direction of unrealised potential.

In this final discussion, such temporal discord is to aid in illustrating a different trajectory within the ‘Surrealism’ article and the place therein of anarchism and intoxication. This discussion provides a reading in which an “anarchic” intoxication, or “anarchic illumination” emerges as a distinct and positive alternative removed from its ambiguous depreciation. Already, certain aspects of the problematic dismissal of anarchism together with intoxication have been explored in terms of the “image” of childhood. What is sought after here however is a discussion of those anarchistic and intoxicated elements of the ‘Surrealism’ article that are more concertedly ridiculed and depreciated. Two prominent ideas are discussed here: the absence of a communal dimension to anarchist revolt, and Benjamin’s sardonic presentation of the “anarchic” component of intoxication as a “celebration in advance.” Aided by the “image,” emphasis is to be given to a different potentiality in Benjamin’s work, whereupon positive aspects of an anarchistic intoxication can be discerned amidst the fragments of its dismissal.

This is not however to rely solely on youthful “images.” It is to rather consider these “images” as openings that grant a space for the conception of a sympathetically
drawn “anarchic” intoxication. Benjamin’s childhood “images” allow for the introduction of other “images,” or, more simply, other parts of his work that evince sympathies with the depreciated anarchistic aspects of the ‘Surrealism’ article. The “image” offers a means of reading Benjamin’s work discordantly, introducing other elements of his writings that might express the lineaments of an “anarchic illumination.” These other works to be discussed introduce their own discord by overturning the notion that the excoriated features of an “anarchic” intoxication are to be necessarily dismissed, or forced into “dialectical intertwinement” with Marxism and the profane illumination. These “images” allow for readings of an “anarchic” intoxication from a non-developmental perspective. It is to extend the temporal discord of the “image” into a return to earlier works that provide another trajectory more sympathetic to the excoriated elements of the ‘Surrealism’ article.150

Due to the discordant status of Benjamin’s own remarks on an “anarchic” intoxication, those other “images” are treated more as fragments than attempts to establish a systematic conception of an “anarchic illumination.” It is not possible to profess the foundations of an “anarchic illumination” when there remains only depreciated fragments of this position in Benjamin’s work. This final discussion is to demonstrate that the excoriated anarchist and intoxicated features of the ‘Surrealism’ article can be read sympathetically through other of Benjamin’s writings. That the lineaments of an “anarchic illumination” emerge here is more a propitious consequence of the presentation of pieces that support and elaborate upon an anarchistic intoxication. What follows are fragments given to the contemplation of another path in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article formed from “images” that demonstrate sympathies with anarchism and intoxication.

A significant point at which to begin this discussion of discordant “images” is what might be deigned the most depreciated aspect of an anarchistic intoxication, that of an element of communality in both an intoxicated “loosening of the self” and “anarchic” revolt. It can be regarded as one of the more depreciated aspects of the ‘Surrealism’ article, because it is a position absent from Benjamin’s discussion. What makes this so important is in how a Marxist profane illumination does profess an

150 Emphasis on the vindication of the excoriated is to, again, couple the “image” of youth to the “image” as it appears in Benjamin’s ‘The Life of Students’. See page 21 of this thesis for further detail.
element of communality in its emphasis upon an extreme “loosening of the self” in the technological collectivisation of humanity, a technical *phasis* commensurate with a Marxist revolutionary praxis. The Marxist *profane illumination* contains its own communality in technological revolution. And, that an “anarchic” intoxication has been considered throughout this thesis as antagonistic with and distinct from both the *profane illumination* and Marxism, it is to argue that an anarchistic and intoxicated form of communality can be proffered as an alternative. This alternative, of course, does not exist within the ‘Surrealism’ article. An anarchistic “loosening of the self” is certainly apparent. But, there is still little emphasis given to the communal dimension of anarchist insurrection and revolt. The anarchistic and intoxicated implications of communality remain unwritten or unexplored.

To thus conceive of an alternate conception of communality, it is necessary to turn to other “images” in Benjamin’s work that might provide insight into an anarchistic and intoxicated communal resistance. In doing so, it is to emphasise the return of another pathway in Benjamin’s thought that not only provides an alternative communality, but also portrays this position sympathetically, and distinct from the Marxist collectivity of the *profane illumination*. The work or “image” to be contemplated is Benjamin’s fragment ‘To the Planetarium’ in his *One-Way Street*. As with the ‘Surrealism’ article, ‘To the Planetarium’ explores experiences involving *Rausch*, and it is this support for *Rausch* that offers a means of comparing it to the “anarchic” component of intoxication, while offering a unique perspective on a potential communal dimension to anarchistic revolt.

As Benjamin writes in ‘To the Planetarium’, ancient humanity possesses a “cosmic experience” of the world encapsulated by the words of Hillel the Elder: “They alone shall possess the earth who live from the powers of the cosmos.”

Possession of the earth may not however be the preferred definition of “cosmic experience.” For, Benjamin defines this experience as “the ecstatic trance [*Rausch*].” And, *Rausch* seeks not after possession but rather a boundless communality, an ecstatic drawing

together of inner and outer worlds. Benjamin thus writes, “man can be in ecstatic contact with the cosmos only communally.”\(^{153}\) Rausch is experienced in communion with the earth and cosmos, an intermingling of self and world. Rausch dissipates the oppositions of the self from a greater cosmic whole. There is the realisation that only in the experience of ecstasy, the communion—the “intercourse”—of self and cosmos that the truth of one’s existence becomes realisable.\(^{154}\) As Benjamin further remarks, “it is in this [cosmic] experience alone that we can gain certain knowledge of what is nearest to us and what is remotest to us, and never of one without the other.”\(^ {155}\) The ecstatic self exists and experiences always communally with the world, an experience ancient humanity embraces, because of an awareness that it is only in communion with the “powers of the cosmos” that the self is to find itself fulfilled, and subsequently granted a knowledge that, in isolation from the world, would have remained unobtainable.

That Benjamin so emphasises the archaic nature of Rausch exists in its distance from a modern world-view that attempts to mediate and even out rightly deny the “powers of the cosmos.” The modern world has attempted to divest itself of these experiences through what Benjamin considers “an optical connection to the universe.”\(^ {156}\) The modern experience of the cosmos is divided by means of a scientific and rationalist optics that attempts to separate humanity from the world, an interposition embodied in the Copernican revolution in science—which did not so much revolutionise the status of humanity within the cosmos, as it introduced a major gulf in the experience of the cosmos, now perceived always through the mediated lens of a telescope.\(^ {157}\) A scientific optics separates humanity from the cosmos by examining the world from a perspective

---


\(^{154}\) Ibid. “The ancient’s intercourse with the cosmos had been different: the ecstatic trance.” *Ibid*, p. 92.

\(^{155}\) *Ibid*, p. 93.


\(^{157}\) Benjamin. ‘One-Way Street’, p. 92.
of detached, emotionless observation, a position far removed from the ecstatic journeys into inner and outer worlds of ancient humanity. A scientific optics has only a mediated connection to the cosmos aided by its obsession with optical and technological prostheses, mediating devices set against humanity’s originally direct and ecstatic encounter with the cosmos.

And, as Benjamin continues, the “optical connection to the universe” of the modern world that would overthrow the “ecstatic trance” is a disaster. As he remarks, “it is the dangerous error of modern men to regard this experience as unimportant and avoidable, and to consign it to the individual as the poetic rapture of starry nights.” The overturning of the ecstatic communality of the ancients is so dangerous, since the optics of modern science, however myopic its vision, remains a connection to the cosmos, but now in a very corrupt and mediated form. And, this disconnection, Benjamin avers, is reflected back on the world in a destructive contempt for the cosmos, becoming a contributory factor to the nightmarish barbarity of the First World War.

Having tried to deny itself the communal ecstasy of the ancients—that the self is found also in the other—the modern world invokes a “commingling with the cosmic powers” through destruction, since its relationship to the world exists now only as mediated disconnection, world and cosmos as an object quantified out of existence, annihilated by the very apathy that is the foundation of a rational and scientific “optical connection to the universe.” A scientific “wooing of the cosmos,” performed in the name of the “spirit of technology,” becomes a “blood bath,” introducing a new destructive relationship to the world, wherein the ecstasy of communion with “Mother Nature” is replaced by a disconnected and numbed mindscape, as mutilated as the world this rational mind had such a principal role in devastating.

In consideration of the nightmarish imagery with which Benjamin describes “an optical connection to the universe” it is to suggest that Benjamin finds sympathy with the communality of Rausch. It is to then further position ‘To the Planetarium’ as a potential site for an anarchistic communality. In that affinities exist between the

---

158 Ibid, p. 93.
159 Ibid, p. 93.
161 Ibid, p. 93.
“anarchic” and Rausch in the ‘Surrealism’ article, and that the communality of ‘To the Planetarium’ is itself proffered on the basis of a mystical interpretation of Rausch, it is to suggest comparisons between the two texts. This potentiality is problematised however when acknowledged that ‘To the Planetarium’ ends in an ambiguous manner similar to the ‘Surrealism’ article. Indeed, the article’s conclusions repeat a related argument to Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article regarding a Marxist profane illumination and its support for a collectivity formed of a technological physis. Benjamin thus states, “In technology a physis is being organised through which mankind’s contact with the cosmos takes a new and different form from that which it had in nations and families.”

As in the ‘Surrealism’ article, there is repeated an emphasis on finding in technology a new experience of the cosmic, despite its destructive and war-like propensities. Technology can still be drawn sympathetically for Benjamin, in that its destructiveness must be brought under a new form of control, the “power of the proletariat.” An explicitly Marxist understanding of cosmic experience emerges, whereby the proletariat is given to collectively subdue the destructiveness of technology, a problem, it would appear, due only to “the lust for profit of the ruling class,” and, in doing so, create a world in which technology becomes a new physis, a technological humanity unmoored “from that tiny fragment of nature that we are accustomed to call “Nature.””

From the perspective of these conclusions, ‘To the Planetarium’ becomes distant from a potential anarchist reading. But, there is something equally problematic in this technological physis, a problem that aids in its reinterpretation, and a return to the cosmic ecstasies of Rausch, and comparison with the “anarchic.” It is a problem that emerges in reintroducing the discordant status of youth in Benjamin’s work. Thus, after Benjamin speaks of a scientific and technological “wooing of the cosmos,” and those of the “ruling class” who profit from this, he enters into a discussion of technology as “mastery of nature.” What is interesting is the example used: the education of children.

Comparing the argument that technology is the mastery of nature, he states, “But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the

162 Ibid, p. 93. Compare with the ‘Surrealism’ article: “The collective is a body, too. And, the physis that is being organised for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, only be produced in that image sphere to which profane illumination initiates us.” Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 192.

163 Benjamin. ‘One-Way Street’, p. 94.

164 Ibid, p. 94.
purpose of education.” As he continues, “Is not education above all the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery, if we are to use this term, of that relationship and not of children?” And, related to technology, Benjamin can now say, “likewise technology is not the mastery of nature but of the relation between nature and man.”

Here, the education of children is central to Benjamin’s reconfiguration of technology towards a position of neutrality, a point integral to his later Marxist position on the neutrality of a proletarian technics, and its dissociation from the rapacious greed of a “ruling class” technics. Technology comes only to imply a “relation,” much as the educator only expresses an attempt to mediate the “relation” between adult and youth.

The problems with this argument are threefold. Firstly, this position is challenged by Benjamin’s earlier discussed youthful “images.” Specifically, it is a concern with the tensions introduced by these “images” into Benjamin’s “highly exposed position” in his ‘Surrealism’ article between an “anarchistic fronde” and a Marxist “revolutionary discipline.” As noted, the “anarchistic fronde” in its identification with the playfulness of youthful rebellion, and coupled to childhood “images” antagonistic to the disciplining of children is treated positively, whereas “revolutionary discipline” becomes far more ambiguous, and quite hostile to a youthful rebelliousness. A similar problem emerges within ‘To the Planetarium’ as its presentation of the “cane wielder,” remains still quite supportive of his disciplinarian task. While Benjamin refutes the “cane wielder” and his educative task as the “mastery” of adult over child, his statement that education only pertains to the “indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations” still implies some amount of discipline. The “cane wielder” does not disappear as such in Benjamin’s rendering of education, as this figure is given to the task of ordering the relationship between the generations, as opposed to mastering children explicitly. However, replacing the mastery of children with the mastery of a social relationship between adults and children does not obviate the fact that it is still the adult performing the ordering of this social relationship. It is a one-sided relationship, wherein adults are given to impute their values onto children. There is a still evident “mastery” and disciplining of children, a

\[165\] Ibid, p. 92.
position that a youthful Benjamin, and a Benjamin in remembrance of his youth, would find both unsettling and contradictory.

Here, a second problem emerges in the adoption of this pedagogical metaphor for the description of a technological “mastery” of nature, and its attribution to a Marxist technological revolution. For, what Benjamin has ignored, as much as in relation to children—and their playful rebellions—is that replacing “mastery” with “relation” does little to obviate the point that both technology and education involve discipline, whether the disciplining of “Mother Nature” or the disciplining of children. Technology is not a neutral force, the “indispensable” ordering of the relationship between humanity and nature. Technology necessitates some form of discipline. And, as with the adult educating the child, the disciplining of nature through technology serves humanity, rather than “Mother Nature.” There is an ordering and a relationship through technology and education only insofar as adults and humanity always benefit from this relationship, that is, an implicit one-sided “mastery” of this relationship. Instead of a “relation” of “mastery,” one has now “mastery” of a “relation,” but this inversion does little to alter the perpetuation of “mastery” in general. It too ignores a connected observation that there exist other relationships to the world that are not predicated on discipline, that is, in the unmediated experiences of child’s play, and coupled to this, the communality of Rausch.\footnote{Disciplinary child-rearing practices are not necessary for “socialisation.” In nature-based societies discipline is markedly absent, as children’s freedom is fostered from an early age. Children, in turn, cultivate relationships based on how they were raised: the empathic imbrication of self and other. It is to contend that children are capable of establishing their own “relation” to the world without “mastery.” For details on the anti-disciplinarian practices of nature-based societies, see Chellis Glendinning. My Name is Chellis & I’m in Recovery from Western Civilization. Boston & London: Shambhala, 1994, pp. 22-26.}

The return of Rausch, and its close identification with childhood, is to touch here upon the final problem of technological “mastery”: that of Benjamin’s identification of a new \textit{physis} in technology with the cosmic communality of Rausch. As already intimated, in emphasis upon the lack of discipline in a child’s playful relationship to the world, and intimate parallels with the experience of Rausch, it becomes difficult to identify in the technological \textit{physis} of the proletariat an experience in any way approximating the cosmic ecstasies of Rausch. For, the proletarian technics to which Benjamin refers still implies aspects of a disciplinarian and “optical connection to the
universe,” which is to say, a mediated, disciplined relationship far removed from the ecstasies of Rausch. The cosmic ecstasy of Rausch exists in a state of unmediated unity with the natural world, whereas technology interposes the mediations of subject and object, an “optical” distancing through a “telescoping” of the cosmos that still entails the application of discipline—mediation as disciplining of the self.\textsuperscript{167} Technological separation through an “optical connection to the universe” is the antithesis of Rausch, just as the technological “relation” between human and nature, with its necessity for discipline, is the opposite of playfully unmediated youthful experience. To argue that a proletarian technics can somehow subvert the “optical” and disciplinarian basis of “ruling class” technology is to avoid the consideration that all technology remains a fundamentally mediated, divided, and distant relationship between self and world. A proletarian technics will do no more than enforce a new discipline, and a new “mastery,” while upholding the technological and scientific mediations—self and world, subject and object—that make this discipline necessary, and, in turn, the potential of this discipline becoming a destructive “mastery,” an assault on the natural world and the very human beings forced to erect this new order.\textsuperscript{168}

Indeed, this point is raised in the conclusion to Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article, with its support for a technological \textit{physis}. In a Marxist identification of revolutionary upheaval with a new technological ordering of humanity, the self that completes this task is annihilated in technology, forming now only a collective, revolutionary body. Unlike Rausch, where the self lives communally as part of a cosmic whole, a technological \textit{profane illumination} eliminates the self, giving it over to a false connectedness through the technological ordering of the world—false, in that technology eliminates connection and communion, replacing direct experience with mediated detachment and affective dislocation. These affinities between ‘To the

\textsuperscript{167} The “optical” mediations of technology are to be emphasised as Benjamin refers to technologies that require mediation, such as increased velocities and “Lunaparks.” It is to industrial technologies and a scientific optics that Benjamin is referring. \textit{Ibid}, p. 92. For a critique of the reductionist claim that technology is a neutral “tool,” see David Watson. ‘Against the Megamachine’, in David Watson. \textit{Against the Megamachine: Essays on empire & its enemies}. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1997, pp. 117-126.

\textsuperscript{168} That technology involves “mastery” of nature and humanity significantly finds expression, in a negative form, in Benjamin’s Thesis XI of 1940. Arguing against the “vulgar-Marxist conception of the nature of labour,” identified as the technocratic forebear of Fascism, Benjamin argues that this “new conception of labour is tantamount to the exploitation of nature, which, with naïve complacency, is contrasted with the exploitation of the proletariat.” Benjamin quoted in Löwy. \textit{Fire Alarm}, p. 72.
Planetarium’ and the ‘Surrealism’ article thus reaffirm how a Marxist *profane illumination* is formed by an ordered, disciplined, and mediated collectivity found in technology, while *Rausch*, the “ecstatic trance,” and just as importantly, the experience of childhood, embraces an unmediated—and undisciplined—communality with the natural world.

In so problematising this technological *physis*, it is to return to the communality of *Rausch* within ‘To the Planetarium’ as a distinct alternative that can, in fact, be read as a potential opening for an “anarchic” communality removed from Marxist technological collectivisation. In express sympathy with the experience of *Rausch*, and an undisciplined and unmediated playfulness known also by the child, the “anarchic” of the ‘Surrealism’ article can be considered to attain its own form of communality in the direct experience of cosmic ecstasy. In defiance of Marxist collectivity, the “anarchic” component that dwells within intoxication can be seen as sharing a communal dimension with the unmediated ecstasies of *Rausch*. Where the Marxist *profane illumination* pursues a disciplined collectivity in technology, the “anarchic” embraces a “loosening of the self” amidst the cosmos. To exist in communion with the world is to refuse the disciplined mediations of a technological “relation” to the earth, in that such discipline would equate to little more than a disciplining—a “mastery”—of the self, as the experience of *Rausch* recognises self and cosmos to be reflections of each other. An “anarchic” intoxication, refuting collectivity, returns to an ancient awareness that the self is realised in ecstatic identification with the other, an unmediated experience that is more aptly expressed in the experience of love.169

Still, it is to be considered where this communality might become actual anarchistic resistance and revolt. As in the ‘Surrealism’ article, Marxist collectivity has its practical counterpart in “revolutionary discipline”—a discipline given greater meaning when compared to the centrality of technological discipline to its project. It must then be considered where an anarchistic communality found in *Rausch* might

---

169 The imbrication of love and nature in *Rausch* is elicited in the conclusion to Benjamin’s ‘Hashish in Marseilles’. As he writes, “I should like to believe that hashish persuades nature to permit us—for less egoistic purposes—that squandering of our existence that we know in love. For if, when we love, our existence runs through nature’s fingers like golden coins that cannot hold and lets fall to purchase new birth thereby, she now throws us, without hoping or expecting anything, in ample handfuls to existence.” Benjamin. ‘Hashish in Marseilles’, pp. 144-145.
become a practical assault on those forces of mediation that would attempt to discipline the self and the natural world. Potential comparisons exist in the parallels between youth, *Rausch* and “anarchistic fronde,” so as to emphasise a playful rebelliousness removed from “revolutionary discipline.” But, what is to be emphasised here is not just the nature of this revolt, but its communal dimensions, that is, how such resistance involves interactions with others and the world—and how it avoids the onerous turn to a forced collectivity in “revolutionary discipline.”

It is within Benjamin’s most explicitly anarchist work, the ‘Critique of Violence’ of 1921 that such an anarchist form of intoxicated communality is to be discerned. Specifically, it is to refer to Benjamin’s engagement with Georges Sorel’s *Reflections on Violence*, and his conception of two differing forms of resistance: the negatively presented political general strike and the sympathetically portrayed proletarian general strike. What makes this proletarian general strike so significant here is that, despite its Marxist appellation, Benjamin himself defines this form of general strike as an “anarchistic” act of resistance. And, the proletarian general strike is “anarchistic” precisely because it refuses revolutionary mediation, including party organizations and any presently existing structure, which, in an anarchist derivation is most clearly embodied in the State. As Benjamin quotes Sorel, “This [proletarian] general strike clearly announces its indifference toward material gain through conquest by declaring its intension to abolish the state.”

Unlike the political general strike, which is an organised revolution orchestrated by a cadre of disciplined revolutionaries who only seek power transferred “from the privileged to the privileged,” that is, to replace the present rulers with themselves, the proletarian general strike “sets itself the sole task of destroying state power.” The proletarian general strike is an unmediated uprising that recognises the perniciousness of the “conquest” of the State, and those revolutionary organisations that believe in its importance. An unmediated and “anarchistic” proletarian general strike “appears as a clear, simple revolt, and no place is reserved either for the sociologists or for the elegant amateurs of social reforms or for the

---

170 Benjamin had read Sorel’s *Reflections on Violence* and *The Illusions of Progress*. Benjamin. ‘Verzeichnis der gelesenen Schriften’, p. 447.


intellectuals who have made it their profession to think for the proletariat.”

The proletarian general strike disallows a space from which a general revolt, an insurrection against authoritarian mediation, can be disciplined or organised, in recognition that organised revolutionaries seek only to channel rebellion into the service of their attempts to seize the apparatuses of State power. The proletarian general strike as insurrectionary revolt is portrayed sympathetically in its defiance of recuperation by the State, as in reformism, or revolutionary politics, with its emphasis on “conquest.”

An emphasis on the direct, unmediated quality of the proletarian general strike is further evinced in Benjamin’s reference to a “pure means,” revolt as a non-violent cancellation of the “end” contained in State violence and revolutionary violence—the political general strike. The proletarian general strike is a “pure means,” because it has no “end,” other than the cancellation of a legal or revolutionary “right” to the use of violence. Unlike the State, whose “end” is always to secure for itself the sole right to the use of violence, and revolutionary intellectuals, whose “end” is to eventually possess the violence of the State so as to enforce their revolutionary edicts, the proletarian general strike as insurrectionary revolt and “pure means” pursues the cancellation of all rulers in an “anarchistic” sense. It is to disallow all notions of “right” to the use of violence: the right to rule, govern, or bind an individual to the laws and decrees of the State. The proletarian general strike is immediate “anarchistic” revolt, a general uprising without revolutionary mediation. Its task is not seizure or dictatorship, as it is a revolt against any power that would claim hegemony. A “pure means” is always an immediate revolt, seeking the cessation of organised violence and the enclosure of State violence in the garb of a new revolutionary program. With the “pure means” of the proletarian general strike, there emerges only the insurrectionary upheaval of immediate

174 Ibid., p. 292.

175 The “pure means” is non-violent—as distinct from pacifism—in that Benjamin defines violence as a type of resistance, such as the political general strike that perpetually defers liberation through incremental reformism, and which, in turn, perpetually defers the liberation of the oppressed. From this perspective, reformism is more violent, as the degradations suffered by humanity are allowed to go on forever in the form of a justice always to come. Ibid., pp. 291-292.

176 Benjamin’s ‘The Right to Use Force’ of 1920 significantly conveys the anarchist implications of unbinding violence from “right.” As Benjamin elucidates, “the term “anarchism” may very well be used to describe a theory that denies a moral right not to force as such but to every human institution, community, or individuality that either claims a monopoly over it or in any way claims that right for itself from any point of view, even if only as a general principle.” Benjamin. ‘The Right to Use Force’, p. 233.
liberation, the “anarchistic” deposition of organised violence.

What makes this unmediated “anarchistic” revolt of the ‘Critique of Violence’ so interesting in the context of an anarchistic communality is that its “pure means” coupled to the proletarian general strike expresses affinities with ecstatic communality. The unmediated communality of Rausch—the “ecstatic trance”—aligns with an anarchistic praxis, because Rausch also disallows any intervening force between the self and its experience of the world, much as “anarchistic” revolt disallows the intervention of revolutionary organization into its practical revolt against the State. In both the “pure means” of the proletarian general strike and the communality of the “ecstatic trance,” there exists an “anarchistic” refusal of mediation, whether organizational or disciplinarian. And, a communal aspect arises within “anarchistic” revolt, in that it is predicated upon the directness of insurrection—that people can, in fact, liberate themselves—and the cultivation of unmediated relationships with others; hence, the possibility of living in such a manner that obviates the forced, mediated relations of the State, revolutionary or otherwise. “Anarchistic” revolt offers the perspective that people, without the intervention of the State or revolutionary organization can re-establish their own direct, empathetic relationships with others based not on principles of “conquest” and “discipline,” but rather ideas of cooperation, interconnectedness, and, to turn explicitly to the anarchist tradition, mutual aid.177

Thus, despite the absence of an “anarchic” communality within the ‘Surrealism’ article, it is still possible to discern an anarchist alternative in Benjamin’s works. By treating these references as “images” capable of disrupting the surety of Benjamin’s later writings, it is to compare these pieces creatively, and so provide details to what remains, in the ‘Surrealism’ article, unexplored or excoriated pathways. While still only fragments formed from aspects of Benjamin’s writings, their positioning as “images” proposes another trajectory in which an “anarchic” communality emerges sympathetically, just as an “anarchistic” revolt, in solidarity with this communal dimension, further highlights the ambiguities of the ‘Surrealism’ article and its attempts to bind the “anarchic” to “revolutionary discipline.”

---

In providing a sympathetic portrayal of “anarchistic” communality in its relatedness to *Rausch*, it is to now consider that other major depreciated aspect of the ‘Surrealism’ article: Benjamin’s dismissively sardonic presentation of the “anarchic” component of intoxication as a “celebration in advance.” In its entirety, Benjamin writes, “But to place the accent exclusively on it [the “anarchic”] would be to subordinate the methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution entirely to a praxis oscillating between fitness exercises and celebration in advance.”

Again, the “anarchic” is depreciated, and, similar to “anarchic” communality, finds itself dismissed for the “disciplinary preparation for revolution.” In acknowledgement however of the ambiguities of this methodical discipline, it is to posit that a sympathetic portrayal of the “anarchic” is possible. And, unlike the discussion of an anarchistic communality, which was pursued on the basis of its absence, there is conveyed in Benjamin’s dismissive remark some potential features of this anarchistic radicalism, that is, a “celebration in advance.” What is of interest in this excoriated element is that it has a temporal reference that sets it fundamentally apart from the previously stated “preparation for revolution,” along with its concomitant discipline. There is an opposition here based on two differing conceptions of time. The first entails “preparation,” which implies that revolution must be prepared, that certain measures must be met before any revolutionary action is to be taken. There is a loss of immediacy and a preference in waiting for the development of a future time suitable for revolutionary action. The second, “anarchic” and negatively figured “celebration in advance” is distinct from this call for preparation, as it is a revolt “in advance” of itself; it is a revolt that has little concern for “preparation” or a future accounting. And, that such a “celebration in advance” can be considered ambiguously here, it is to actually look upon this sympathetically. To find this favourable presentation, it is then necessary to look for other “images” in Benjamin’s work that might aid in this rearticulation.

Such an alternative perspective is to be here discerned in Benjamin’s ‘Theological-Political Fragment’, particularly in its Jewish messianic and religious conception of anarchism. The ‘Theological-Political Fragment’ as “image” capable of disturbing the sardonic conclusions of the ‘Surrealism’ article is further significant when  

---

178 Benjamin. ‘Surrealism’, p. 189.
remembered that this fragment is itself torn between anarchism and Marxism, past and future. As Scholem has contended, Benjamin’s later reading of the fragment amidst Marxist concerns is overturned by its earlier appearance, as “mystical-anarchist text,” in the context of the ‘Critique of Violence’. While support is given to Scholem’s position, it is to also recognise that treatment of the fragment as “image”—a temporal disturbance to the chronological ordering of Benjamin’s work—allows it to be read in a similarly discordant manner to the ‘Surrealism’ article, that is, perforated by Benjamin’s past concerns. Even if Scholem’s position were invalidated, his contention that the Fragment refers to earlier, anarchist concerns can be defended by presenting the Fragment as an “image” that still allows it to be drawn into a relation with Benjamin’s engagement with anarchism. This is to highlight the continuation of anarchist impulses in Benjamin’s later thought, and of anarchism’s separability from the Marxist trajectory with which the Fragment is later applied.

One of the predominant concerns of the ‘Theological-Political Fragment’ is the figure of the Messiah, who possesses a “relation to the messianic.”\(^{179}\) The Messiah opens a relation to the messianic through its redemptive task. Messianic redemption is an action that must be performed, as in Benjamin’s assertion that the Messiah “first redeems, completes, and creates.”\(^{180}\) The Messiah brings forth the messianic through an act of redemption that is also completion and creation. The appearance of the Messiah within the world is not yet redemption or completion, in that of ushering in the messianic—the “messianic kingdom.”\(^{181}\) The Messiah must perform an act of redemption to bring its task to fruition, and so consummate the messianic. There is then an active, creative impulse to the messianic. It is to even suggest that Messiah and messianic act are indistinguishable; there is no lone redeemer or personal saviour within the Fragment.\(^{182}\) The Messiah comes as a redemptive force, but this force must be enacted and realised in the world.

\(^{179}\) Benjamin’s ‘Theological-Political Fragment’ is taken from the translation in Jacobson. *Metaphysics of the Profane*, p. 20.

\(^{180}\) *Ibid*, p. 20.


What the Messiah redeems is related fundamentally to the end of history. The Messiah redeems and “completes all historical occurrence.”[183] The redemptive act of the Messiah that “first redeems, completes, and creates,” emerges through the redemption and completion of history. In this consonance of redemption and completion of history, there is captured how the act given to the Messiah is an act of definitively ending history. Benjamin thus dissociates the Messiah from a fatalistic messianism concentrated principally upon waiting for the coming “kingdom of God,” a messianism indebted to the futurity of telos, of a progress fulfilled in the coming of a final and always forever distant kingdom. The Messiah is not figured as the completion of history in the sense of teleological completion—an end that is always to come. As Benjamin propounds, “the kingdom of God is not the telos of the historical dynamic; it cannot be set towards a goal. Historically seen, it is not a goal but an end.”[184] The Messiah comes forth not at the end of history, in that of redemption at some future time, and according to a telos or messianic eschatology. The Messiah, inseparable from its redemptive action is the end of history. Messianism brings history to its end. When Benjamin refers to history being completed, he refers this completion to a definitive ending—an interruption that effectively stops history from following the endless, fatalistic onslaught of time. The “messianic kingdom” is detached from the “kingdom of God” as telos, becoming only the pure moment of messianic redemption—act, end, and completion.

In Benjamin’s rendition of a definitive ending through messianic redemption there is an evident dissociation from a “kingdom of God” that is proffered as always to come, always deferred in the future. Benjamin removes from the kingdom both its theocratic and political significance—as too its teleological significance. As Benjamin discusses, the “messianic kingdom,” divested of “the political meaning of theocracy” does not have its end in any final State, understood as both telos and political entity. The messianic kingdom “has no political significance, only a religious one.”[185] The “political meaning” to which Benjamin refers can be seen as the investiture of the “kingdom of God” with the interconnected arbitrations of telos and theocracy. To remove from the “messianic kingdom” its “political meaning” is to bring the messianic

towards only its “religious” significance, which is the very moment, the creative act, of messianic redemption—the end of history. The messianic becomes only the religious or even divinely invested power to end, to bring history to its end. The messianic is not a goal to be waited upon, nor a theocratic kingdom or final State that must be built at the end of history.

The Fragment consequently emerges as an aversion to the end of history in any posited “kingdom of God” or final State. When Benjamin criticises “the political meaning of theocracy,” he refers this not only to theocracy as such—government by the edicts of God—but of all political structures conforming to teleology and the erection of a “kingdom of God,” a final State. Benjamin is criticising the political basis of a messianic theocracy in any of its derivations, whether an actual theocratic kingdom, or, in its political signification, any teleological State. Benjamin negates the “kingdom” as political entity and final State, giving the “messianic kingdom” over entirely to its redemptive task, the end that is always now, always immediately realisable. The “messianic kingdom” is not a final State, as the force of redemption does not require building or the erection of a literal kingdom. The “messianic kingdom” appears as always already in the world, its power to end realizable at any moment. This is ever more pronounced in Benjamin’s association of the messianic with the restitutio in integrum, or ‘return to the original condition’, a return to what Benjamin references as the eternal transience of nature, a “messianic kingdom” always already apparent in the very cyclical pulsations of the natural world, its unceasing rising and falling, decay and renewal. The “messianic kingdom” becomes the end of all constructed kingdoms, as much as it is the end of history and teleology.

And, it is in this double refusal of theocracy and teleological “kingdom of God” that the Fragment comes to articulate elements consonant with anarchism, and, particularly the “anarchistic” impulses of the ‘Critique of Violence’; hence, Scholem’s insistence on the inseparability of the two pieces. For, within the ‘Critique of Violence’, Benjamin too discusses an expiatory force that is capable of a definitive ending. This is the “anarchistic” proletarian general strike, a “pure means” that ends the mediations of

---

future oriented States and revolutionaries. The “anarchistic” proletarian general strike negates these mediations in realising that the end of oppression is the refusal of mediation, whether of the State, the revolutionary organisation that attempts to manipulate the resistance of the oppressed, or of waiting for demands to be met in some deferred future, and, as the Fragment might attest, seeing fundamental similarities between these mediating forces, each having the goal of forestalling immediate liberation. The Fragment and the ‘Critique of Violence’ share an aversion to waiting for redemption—the telos of history and the deferment of liberation—and all political States—whether the future “kingdom” or present political organizations. As with the proletarian general strike, the “messianic kingdom” is realised in a present that has always been now, in the immediacy of the world. Both “anarchistic” proletarian general strike and messianic redemption refuse the teleology of waiting for redemption and liberation. The parallels are further demonstrable in Benjamin’s emphasis in the ‘Critique of Violence’ that the “pure means” is possessed of a “pure immediate violence” as “pure divine violence,” an “unalloyed” detachment from the foundations of legally constituted violence. There is a religious impulse in the redemptive task of the Messiah and the “anarchistic” proletarian general strike, focused as it is on the “pure” moment of redemptive expiation. As interruption and “pure” end, the “anarchistic” radicalism of Benjamin’s messianism involves nothing less than the immediate and unmediated abolition of the State, and the realisation of a “messianic kingdom” invested in a redeemed world unencumbered by those institutions, organizations and structures that constantly forestall redemption.

In reading the ‘Theological-Political Fragment’ alongside the ‘Critique of Violence’, the anarchist “celebration in advance” takes on a very different status. “Celebration in advance,” opposed to the “methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution” appears less a negative attribution as a positive description of a truly

---

188 Interruption is to also acknowledge a destructive element in messianism. To refuse the State is to actively seek its destruction. Scholem acknowledged this destructive current in Jewish messianism, identifying it as an “anarchic breeze” moving throughout the history of Judaism. Scholem. ‘Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism’, p. 21. Scholem also recognised this messianic destructiveness within anarchism, contending that Bakunin’s passion for destruction has direct parallels with the messianism of the Jewish mystic Jacob Frank—there is no creation, no definitive rupture, and no unbounded freedom without the destruction of presently existent laws and institutions. Jacobson. *Metaphysics of the Profane*, pp. 70-71.
messianic and anarchistic striving. The “celebration in advance” moves into proximity with a messianism pursuant of the immediate end of oppression, including the oppressiveness of those organised revolutionaries who forestall immediate revolt, in favour of “preparation” for a revolutionary plenitude, a revolutionary “kingdom” that is always to come, but never arrives, precisely because the “messianic kingdom” is not an actual “kingdom” to be constituted in the future. The “anarchic” is always a “celebration in advance” because it is possessed of a messianic striving to end the mediations of history and the oppressions performed in its name, by both the State and those revolutionaries who seek to take over and replace the State with a new “kingdom.” An anarchistic “celebration in advance” is invested with a religious, messianic current, a path that exists in such works as the ‘Theological-Political Fragment’ and ‘Critique of Violence’ as a profound source of inspiration—a point that might equally problematise Benjamin’s attempts, in his ‘Surrealism’ article, to move beyond “religious ecstasies” and the ecstasies of Rausch, in that religiosity and mystical experience are integral to his pronouncements on anarchism. The anarchistic “celebration in advance” of the ‘Surrealism’ article can thus be reconceived in a potentially sympathetic manner through its confluence with similar ideas in the ‘Theological-Political Fragment’. Indeed, from the perspective of the messianic urgency contained in the Fragment, the idea of the “celebration in advance” and its own intoxicated immediacy provides the possibility of considering the dour realities of the “methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution” as both problematic and unnecessary.

In lieu of these comparisons of numerous “images” in Benjamin’s work, it is to find that the excoriated and depreciated ideas of anarchism and intoxication within the ‘Surrealism’ article can be granted a distinct and sympathetic understanding. As demonstrated with anarchist communality and “celebration in advance,” a positive understanding of both can be deciphered by considering “images” in Benjamin’s work that take the tensions and ambiguities of the ‘Surrealism’ article further, by placing them in other contexts that sympathise with its depreciated elements. These other “images” provide a different potentiality, a new pathway in understanding Benjamin’s work.

189 Scholom notes that the optimism of anarchism—its defence of the immediate possibility of the impossible—draws it into the realm of the messianic. Löwy. Redemption and Utopia, p. 66.
These “images” highlight the independence of anarchism in Benjamin’s thought; that the dialectical mediations it is forced into with Marxism and the *profane illumination* are problematic, if not antagonistic. These references provide a more positive rendition of what might have become an “anarchic illumination” in Benjamin’s work, an anarchistic pathway unbound from any necessary subordination.

While it is not to argue that Benjamin would have necessarily taken these paths—or made such comparisons—it is certainly to contend that his work, particularly in relation to intoxication, possesses an anarchist current that can be read separately from its tense and ambiguous conjoining with a Marxist revolutionary praxis. The “anarchic” intoxication possesses a unique status in Benjamin’s work, and it should be contemplated in terms of this singular uniqueness, apart from both its ambiguous dismissal and its dialectical subordination before Marxism and the *profane illumination*. As with his “images” of youth that return in Benjamin’s remembrances, the “anarchic” intoxication, as read through and compared with similar “images,” possesses a discordant status that ruptures the temporal ordering of Benjamin’s life. The “anarchic” intoxication remains a path that could have been, an open potentiality. Potentialities though are still possessed of a promise of realisation. In this, the “anarchic” intoxication stands not as a lifeless remnant, but as a distinct experience of unrealised potential.
Conclusion:

Endings and openings
In reaching the concluding remarks of this thesis, it is pertinent to acknowledge that one of the principal concerns of this discussion, and the major fulcrum of its contention, has been an aversion to the conclusions reached in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism: The last snapshot of the European intelligentsia’. The conclusion, of course, has a double meaning. It signifies both the conclusions Benjamin articulates in his article regarding the subordinate place of anarchism and intoxication beneath a Marxist profane illumination, and also a type of conclusion amidst scholarly renditions of the article that presents Benjamin’s conclusions from the perspective of an end, an ending principally identified with Marxism. Disdain for conclusions has been so pronounced because the conclusion defined as final word so often acts to delimit and constrain interpretation and the possibility of offering alternative readings. The conclusion as end becomes a barrier, a restriction, its finality inviolable due to its purported completeness—the outcome of a progression in thought that completes what came previously. In consequence of this distance from conclusions, this concluding discussion is itself not to be considered as an end attempting to grant a new finality to Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article. Rather, this conclusion, in lieu of what has been established throughout this thesis, seeks to open Benjamin’s article to further interpretation that would demonstrate a remove from the definitiveness of the final word. This conclusion is not an ending, but an opening.

One of the principal and guiding threads to this distance towards conclusions has been a consistent emphasis upon the ambiguities and tensions of Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article. Instead of claiming that Benjamin’s conclusions are the final statement on his relationship to anarchism and intoxication, this thesis has questioned these conclusions by treating the Marxist inspired profane illumination as problematic due to the ambiguous dismissal of anarchism and intoxication that forms such a central part of Benjamin’s argument. The claim for an anarchist interpretation can then be discerned within the interstices, evasions, and even the admonitions of Benjamin’s article. That is, an anarchist position is apparent in Benjamin’s later work on Surrealism, but it does not emerge from Benjamin’s conclusions. An anarchist pathway emerges in Benjamin’s thought from the perspective of its ambiguous dismissal and
subordination before Marxism and the *profane illumination*. The forced removal of anarchism and intoxication is the very space from which an anarchist position in Benjamin’s thought can be further elaborated upon, since this removal is riven by numerous ambiguities—the most prominent of which is Benjamin’s lasting sympathy for anarchism. Positing an anarchist direction in Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article is possible, but it requires a different method of reading, wherein the article’s ambiguities are taken as the site for expressing another truth, a truth that emerges not from what was written, but from what remains unsaid.

Prominent to these ambiguities is Benjamin’s adoption of a fractured dialectic and its attempt to align anarchism and intoxication with the *profane illumination* and Marxism. This tension exists in that Benjamin’s attempted “dialectical intertwinement” of intoxication and its “anarchic” component with Marxism and the *profane illumination* does not so much dialectically mediate two opposing elements, as it subordinates one element to another, that is, the subordination of an anarchist intoxication before a Marxist *profane illumination*. While anarchism and intoxication are, in some way, integrated into Benjamin’s conclusions, this dialectical mediation takes from anarchism and intoxication their own status as distinct positions that do not necessarily require mediation.

There is a forced quality to Benjamin’s dialectic. This is further pronounced in recognition of the marked differences that have already been noted between an anarchistic intoxication and a Marxist *profane illumination*. There are thus differences of practice, in terms of an opposition between a Marxist “revolutionary discipline” and an “anarchistic fronde,” as well as the fundamental differences regarding the nature of intoxication and *profane illumination*, in that a materialist *profane illumination* annihilates the self through the technological collectivisation of humanity whereas intoxication loosens the self for an empathic communality. Benjamin’s dialectic does not mediate two elements that, while initially hostile, can eventually find dialectical accord. The dialectic forcibly appropriates features of anarchism and intoxication for use within a Marxist *profane illumination*. It is for the *profane illumination* and Marxism that Benjamin dialectically mediates anarchism and intoxication. It is as if anarchism and intoxication remain “undialectical” if they do not undergo dialectical
mediation—a position dismissive of any radical position that does not find inspiration in Marxism.\textsuperscript{190} The possibility not explored is that an anarchistic intoxication might be capable of existing as an unmediated experience, separate from Marxism and the profane illumination.

Importantly then, this thesis has proposed that it is initially within the forced quality of Benjamin’s dialectic between an anarchistic intoxication and a Marxist profane illumination that one can discern a tension capable of questioning this dialectical subordination, and proposing an alternative. Pausing here on the problematic nature of Benjamin’s application of the dialectic, it is to be noted how this reading might contribute to more general questions of the place of anarchism and Marxism in Benjamin’s later thought. Specifically, it is to contribute to and provide support for Scholem’s contention that there arises a definite “gleam of ambiguity” in Benjamin’s attempts to integrate his earlier interest in anarchism into later Marxist concerns. Presented alongside the ‘Surrealism’ article, Scholem’s observation of a tense attempt on Benjamin’s part to reconcile his youthful anarchism with Marxist influences appears as an apt formulation. The prominence of the dialectic in this ambiguous entwinement is to however provide another dimension to Scholem’s observations. It is to contend that the “gleam of ambiguity” regarding anarchism and Marxism are derived concurrently from Benjamin’s application of the dialectic—an adoption that Scholem also treated critically in Benjamin’s later writings.\textsuperscript{191} It is the integration of a dialectical method of analysis—taken principally from the perspective of Marxist materialism—that becomes pivotal to the ambiguous sublation and reintegration of anarchist ideas into Benjamin’s heterodox Marxism. It is to thus suggest that the “gleam of ambiguity” in the mediation of anarchism and Marxism, and the ambiguities of Benjamin’s adoption of the dialectic are interconnected. The ambiguous sublation of anarchism in Benjamin’s later thought is exacerbated by the dialectical mode of his analyses, in that the dialectic, indebted to Marxism, remains the principal method by which a Marxist position

\textsuperscript{190} Benjamin’s position is certainly not the worst of Marxist recriminations towards anarchism. For possibly the most glaring example see Vladimir Il’ich Lenin. “Left-Wing” Communism: An infantile disorder. Sydney: Resistance Books, 1999.

\textsuperscript{191} As Scholem notes of Benjamin’s remove from earlier, metaphysical interests, and the later adoption of historical materialism and the Marxist dialectic, “his genius tends to forsake its very essence in that transplantation, and this brings a shadowy and ambiguous element into some of his works.” Scholem. ‘Walter Benjamin’, p. 187.
integrates opposing viewpoints, such as anarchism, thereby depriving these other positions of their own independence. The analysis of the ‘Surrealism’ article performed here would then contribute to Scholem’s position regarding a “gleam of ambiguity” surrounding anarchism and Marxism. It is to highlight the ambiguities of Benjamin’s adoption of the dialectic, and how studies of Benjamin’s later thought, from an anarchist perspective, are best served not in acceptance of these dialectical syntheses, but in working through the tensions in Benjamin’s dialectic.\textsuperscript{192}

In recognition of this dialectical ambiguity, it is to also present the arguments of this thesis as a challenge to the contention, particularly in the work of Löwy that there exists a dialectical relationship between Marxism and anarchism in Benjamin’s thought.\textsuperscript{193} Certainly, there is an attempt on Benjamin’s part to reconcile anarchist and Marxist influences. But, regarding what has been said of the dialectical ambiguities within the ‘Surrealism’ article, this remains only an attempt at dialectical mediation, with this relationship remaining tensely drawn, and, ultimately, keeping anarchism in a subordinate position beneath Marxism—a dialectic not entirely favourable to that which it integrates. Emphasising a dialectical or non-contradictory relationship between Marxism and anarchism in Benjamin’s thought overlooks the explicit tensions that exist in their attempted conjunction. It is to posit that there is no dialectical relationship between Benjamin’s Marxism and his anarchist sympathies. There is only an ambiguous and tense mediation of two differing impulses in Benjamin’s work that move in fundamentally different directions. This thesis would then contend that it is more fruitful to consider Benjamin’s relationship to anarchism and Marxism from the perspective of a tension and not from a dialectical relationship. Where anarchism still lingers in Benjamin’s later, and more explicitly Marxist writings, it is to recognise a continued “gleam of ambiguity” that actually allows for a very different contention: that anarchism survives as an alternate trajectory in Benjamin’s thought.

In positing the anarchist tradition as the survival of another trajectory it is to here return to the connected insight that Benjamin’s earlier sympathies with anarchism are not lost in Benjamin’s later works. Even where anarchism is depreciated in Benjamin’s

\textsuperscript{192} As Scholem states, “It is not hard to distinguish between the [materialist] method and the insights accommodated in it. The critical reader still stands to profit abundantly.” \textit{Ibid}, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{193} See pages 13 to 14 of this thesis for Löwy’s position.
work, particularly the ‘Surrealism’ article, it is to contend that this ambiguous
dissociation from anarchism is overturned by Benjamin’s earlier engagement with
anarchism. A more exact articulation of this point is to argue that it is Benjamin’s past
in general that acts as a disruptive force in readings of his later works. Benjamin’s past
intrudes upon his later concerns, disrupting his later conclusions, while concurrently
offering the past as the site for an alternate understanding of Benjamin’s later writings,
whereby those ideas that find themselves ambiguously dismissed are granted a new and
positive significance.

The interruptive possibilities of the past have emerged here in adoption of
Benjamin’s multivalent concept of the “image.” It has not then been to a past—and a
past interest in anarchism—as a distant memory sundered from the present, but a past
life refracted through the rejuvenating potentialities of an “image” capable of
reconfiguring both past and present. In accord with Benjamin’s discussion of the
“image” in the opening lines of his ‘The Life of Students’, “image” or “metaphor” acts
against the treatment of a past and present in terms of either the “pragmatic description
of details” or an instance contained within a logic of chronological progression. The
truth of the “image,” as event, idea, or, in this instance, a piece of writing, does not arise
from the apparent fixities of its conclusions and its significance in terms only of future
endeavours, but rather emerges from “the most endangered, excoriated, and ridiculed
ideas of the creative mind.” There is truth in “images” that are ridiculed and
depreciated, or, more pertinently, ambiguously supplanted in favour of conclusions that
overturn earlier sympathies. The “image” offers a unique perspective on the ambiguities
of the ‘Surrealism’ article, whereby the tense dismissal of anarchism and intoxication
turns to a defence of these excoriated elements.

The “images,” of course, that have caused the greatest disruptive challenge to the
‘Surrealism’ article are Benjamin’s childhood “images.” These childhood “images” are
so disruptive of the ‘Surrealism’ article, and provide support for a positive reading of the
excoriated ideas of anarchism and intoxication, precisely because of their sympathetic
interrelationship with these excoriated elements—notably, in the connections between
intoxication and youthful experience, and the parallels between a playful and
undisciplined rebelliousness and an “anarchistic fronde.” It is not though only to
suggest certain parallels between “images” of youth and the depreciated ideas of the ‘Surrealism’ article. It is that these “images,” as the return of Benjamin’s past into the present, and as a re-experiencing of this past, highlights their equal capacity to intrude upon the present, to disturb the conclusions of the ‘Surrealism’ article by reintroducing the past as an alternate pathway. Childhood “images” enliven the past in the present, and, in the context of the ‘Surrealism’ article, provide a challenge to the depreciation of intoxication and anarchism.

In a connected understanding, these childhood “images,” in their affinities with intoxication and anarchism, introduce a temporal discontinuity into Benjamin’s work. They upset the chronological ordering of Benjamin’s own conclusions, as these “images” return to a youthful position that possesses affinities with anarchism and intoxication. The subordination of anarchism and intoxication in the ‘Surrealism’ article is thus further problematised through these childhood “images,” in that the return of youth is to place greater emphasis on those of Benjamin’s ideas more associable with his youthful position, that is, anarchism and intoxication. And, this grants Benjamin’s past a creative and positive role in his later thought, as if being the return of a youthful trajectory that was not taken, but that remains important nonetheless. Thus, within the temporally discordant quality of the youthful “image,” new potentialities emerge in readings of Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article. This is to read those depreciated features of anarchism and intoxication—forced into “dialectical intertwinement” with Marxism and the profane illumination—as distinct and positive aspects of Benjamin’s thought. The “image” acts as an opening into other readings and other “images.” Alternate and positive readings can be made of anarchism and intoxication in the ‘Surrealism’ article by comparison to other of Benjamin’s works. It is to look for sympathetic comparisons between the excoriated elements of anarchism and intoxication in the ‘Surrealism’ article and those of Benjamin’s works that present a sympathetic account of such ideas.

It thus emerges that Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article can be considered to present an anarchistic position in solidarity with intoxication. It is not, of course, from Benjamin’s conclusions that this arises, but rather from its ambiguities, tensions, evasions, and absences. Anarchism and intoxication can be read sympathetically in the ‘Surrealism’ article; it is only that a positive reading of this anarchistic position emerges
discordantly, from the fractures and disruptions of past influences that affect radically altered trajectories in the present. It is to then acknowledge that the Marxist influenced profane illumination is not Benjamin’s final word on anarchism and intoxication. The subordination of anarchism and intoxication is an ambiguous aspect of Benjamin’s work, particularly when brought in relation to the “image” and parallels to other of Benjamin’s writings that do favour anarchism and intoxication. Benjamin may evidently conclude with the profane illumination, but these conclusions are not inviolable or without tensions of their own.

In the prominence granted to a discordant reading of Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article, and in the creative possibilities of the past in establishing this discord, it is to also demonstrate that a focus upon Benjamin’s conclusions—in its many and variegated meanings—is inherently problematic. That Benjamin’s thought finds its necessary, developmental completion in his turn to Marxism—and that these later influences over-determine all his earlier works— is problematised by acknowledging that Benjamin’s past, in lieu of the “image,” acts as a source of active disruption to the conclusion. Benjamin’s past actively disturbs the assumed conclusiveness of his later thought, introducing past writings as alternative trajectories not easily subsumed into a developmental model of Benjamin’s work. It is to then contend that there are other meanings and other truths contained in Benjamin’s later works, particularly when refracted through Benjamin’s past. Benjamin’s conclusions are not always necessarily his final word. As explored here, it is often in the fractured moment of resurrection existing between Benjamin’s past and present, and the ambiguities arising therein, that another meaning and another path arises, a pathway leading circuitously backwards to a youthful past that remains a site of continued inspiration.

An emphasis on the return to beginnings—rather than a focus on endings—is certainly an appropriate point to return here, in these final remarks, to an issue that began this thesis. The point in question is Hakim Bey’s inclusion of Benjamin among the hashisheen, and what was conceived as a tradition of “anarchic illumination.” This “anarchic illumination” was initially garnered from Bey’s awareness that experiences of intoxication are in solidarity with a certain heretical form of anarchistic radicalism. The ecstatic, direct, and unmediated quality of experiences of intoxication provide for an
equally direct and unmediated anarchistic experience, in which the *nomos* of religious and State authority are felt as fundamental intrusions upon the divinely inspired ecstasies of the *hashisheen*. In this ecstatic connectedness, the unmediated, unitive consciousness of the *hashisheen* becomes active revolt against an authority given not solely to the imposition of order and control, as to the denial of autonomy and a direct connectedness with the world. The concern here then is whether *hashisheen* is a fitting and beneficial moniker when applied to Benjamin’s anarchistic intoxication, and its potential parallels to an “anarchic illumination.” While this thesis has not entirely focused on this point—being concerned with drawing out the tense dismissal of anarchism and intoxication—it remains important to consider where Benjamin’s anarchistic intoxication intersects with the *hashisheen*, due to the prominence of the radicalised understanding of the *hashisheen* for the argument of this thesis, and its aid in initially opening an anarchist reading of Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article.

In discerning this point, it is important to return to the *profane illumination*, because Bey refers to it in relation to the *hashisheen*. And, there are parallels, in that *profane illumination*, much like the antinomian *hashisheen*, refutes religious authority. Indeed, moving beyond religious illumination is one of the reasons Benjamin initially posits the *profane illumination*. But, the *profane illumination* goes further than dismissing religious authority. It too divests itself of intoxication in general, the mystically inspired ecstasies of the *hashisheen*. The *profane illumination* becomes indebted to an anti-human materialism that, bereft of mystical inspiration, finds illumination only in the annihilation of the self through the forced and artificial collectivities of technological revolution. In further consequence of this annihilation of the mystical, the *profane illumination* becomes identifiable with a radical praxis inimical to the self. While religious authority is refuted in *profane illumination*, revolutionary authority remains clearly apparent, as in Benjamin’s references to “revolutionary discipline” and the “constructive, dictatorial side of revolution.” Coupled further to the explicit subordination of anarchism that is a consequence of this revolutionary praxis, it is to maintain that the *profane illumination* is distant to both the *hashisheen* and any potential “anarchic illumination.”

This is not however to claim Bey is incorrect. It is to rather contend that
Benjamin moves into proximity with the *hashisheen* amidst those subordinated anarchist and intoxicated elements of the ‘Surrealism’ article that this thesis has privileged. The *profane illumination* may not stand in accordance with a potential “anarchic illumination,” but the anarchist and intoxicated elements that still linger in Benjamin’s work do possess connections to this anarchistic illumination. Indeed, there are a number of affinities between the two positions. Most prominent is Benjamin’s designation of an “anarchic” component existing within intoxication. Like the *hashisheen*, Benjamin draws on the original intimacy between the “anarchic” and intoxication. Connectedly, the basis of this intimacy is found in their experiential directness, an immediacy that has parallels to mystical ecstasy. This is demonstrated in Benjamin’s emphasis upon a “loosening of the self” through intoxication that, instead of extinguishing the self, grants the intoxicated self an unmediated, empathetic communality. Ecstatically and mystically, the self is realised beyond the frame of normalised, one-dimensional consciousness. The intoxicated self realises that another, unmediated reality is possible, and, as with the *hashisheen*, this realisation of ecstatic autonomy becomes active rebellion against the purveyors of mediation. Both Benjamin and the *hashisheen* defy the reductive argument that intoxication is little more than narcissistic escapism. Intoxication contributes to and heightens the revolt against existing structures. The anarchistic dimensions of this intoxicated revolt against mediation are notable in Benjamin’s *Critique of Violence* and ‘Theological-Political Fragment’. These anarchist writings emphasise a revolt against mediation, which translates into a refusal to negotiate with or reform the State, a distrust of revolutionary leaders in their reactionary pursuit of State “conquest,” and a messianic refutation of developmental time. There is a general vindication in these works of the immediacy of liberation, an immediacy that disallows the intrusion of any force capable of stifling anarchistic revolt. This too is to draw upon the insurrectionary autonomy of Benjamin’s “Satanism,” a revolt that seeks to actively destroy those institutional and normative barriers to an autonomous existence. Again, as with the *hashisheen*, there is an emphasis on direct experience and the cultivation of an autonomy that expresses itself in ecstatic communality.

An “anarchic illumination” derived from the *hashisheen* is discernible in Benjamin’s work. It is only that the anarchistic basis of this illumination is more
apparent in the depreciated aspects of Benjamin’s work, the fragments and interstices of Benjamin’s ‘Surrealism’ article, and the temporal discontinuities that arise from parallel readings of earlier writings. An emphasis on Benjamin’s sympathy with this hashisheen tradition and “anarchic illumination” is to additionally comment on a new direction in understandings of Benjamin’s anarchism, whether in his earlier or later writings. This is to take cognisance of the important place of intoxication in Benjamin’s understanding of anarchism, a point that is of definite significance in relation to remarks, made by Scholem, that Benjamin’s anarchism is indebted to mysticism. This is to emphasise that an aspect of this mystical anarchism involves an interest in experiences of intoxication. Such a point is to not only provide possibilities for comparison between these mystical and anarchistic currents in Benjamin’s work, but it also allows for possible comparisons between Benjamin’s “anarchic illuminations” and the mystical impulses of the anarchist tradition itself. It is to consider Benjamin as contributing to an awareness that the anarchist tradition is most profoundly rendered not in submission to the dour sobrieties of revolution, but within the ecstasies of “celebration” and revolt.

Emphasising Benjamin’s inclusion among an anarchist tradition is not, of course, to ignore his silence on anarchism—and the difficulty thereof in offering an interpretation of anarchism in his later works. But neither can this anarchistic strain be ignored or treated as a subordinate, minor influence, confined to Benjamin’s youth. If Benjamin can be said to be an anarchist, or part of an anarchist tradition—a tradition, moreover, given to privilege mystical states of consciousness—he is to be considered something of a subterranean anarchist, a thinker who closely identified with anarchism, but whose connections to this radical tradition remained ambiguous, at times being depreciated, while at other points finding itself vindicated. There is a certain silent, unwritten quality to the anarchism of such works as the ‘Surrealism’ article, a silence however that emerges as a creative source for further explorations into Benjamin’s continued interest in anarchism.
Bibliography


Bey, Hakim. ‘The Bhang Nama: Hemp as a sacrament’, in Hakim Bey and Abel Zug


Thompson, Scott J. ‘Walter Benjamin, Dr. Ernst Joël and Hashish’. www.wbenjamin.org/ joel_frankel.html.


Zerzan, John (ed.). *Against Civilization: Readings and reflections*. Los Angeles: Feral
House, 2005.


Author/s:
Huba, M.

Title:
Anarchic illuminations: on Walter Benjamin's ambiguous sympathies for anarchism and intoxication in 'Surrealism: the last snapshot of the European intelligentsia'

Date:
2009

Citation:

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/35148

File Description:
Anarchic illuminations: on Walter Benjamin's ambiguous sympathies for anarchism and intoxication in 'Surrealism: the last snapshot of the European intelligentsia'

Terms and Conditions:
Terms and Conditions: Copyright in works deposited in Minerva Access is retained by the copyright owner. The work may not be altered without permission from the copyright owner. Readers may only download, print and save electronic copies of whole works for their own personal non-commercial use. Any use that exceeds these limits requires permission from the copyright owner. Attribution is essential when quoting or paraphrasing from these works.