

Sightseeing in Paris with Baudelaire and Breton

Benton Jay Komins

Bilkent University, Ankara

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation

Komins, Benton Jay. "Sightseeing in Paris with Baudelaire and Breton." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.1 (2000): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1066>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 3920 times as of 11/07/19. Note: the download counts of the journal's material are since Issue 9.1 (March 2007), since the journal's format in pdf (instead of in html 1999-2007).

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 2 Issue 1 (March 2000) Article 6
Benton Jay Komins,
"Sightseeing in Paris with Baudelaire and Breton"
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss1/6>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 2.1 (2000)**
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss1/>>

Abstract: In his article "Sightseeing in Paris with Baudelaire and Breton," Benton Jay Komins discusses the tensions between Charles Baudelaire's acts of modern appropriation and André Breton's imaginative seizing of the *démodé*. While Breton roams the Parisian cityscape with the same aspect of creative gazing as Charles Baudelaire's nineteenth-century dandy, the objects and experiences that he privileges are different from the dandy's fashionable marvels. In texts such as *Nadja passé* artifacts captivate Breton. Between Baudelaire's revelling in the elegant modern possibilities of dandysme and Breton's imaginative seizing of *démodé* objects, something significant has occurred: Twentieth-century urbanites like Breton no longer celebrate the experience of the new; rather, they privilege the obsolete, injecting it with inspirational possibilities. Against the cultural frame of Baudelaire's dandy and the social phenomenon of the fetishized commodity, Breton's twentieth-century descriptions of ruined Parisian landmarks, decrepit neighbourhoods, and exhausted everyday objects indeed become political.

Benton Jay KOMINS

Sightseeing in Paris with Baudelaire and Breton

Does André Breton create a type of twentieth-century Parisian sightseeing in his experimental work *Nadja*? While Breton roams the Parisian cityscape with the same aspect of creative gazing as Charles Baudelaire's nineteenth-century dandy, the objects and experiences that he privileges are quite different from the dandy's fashionable marvels. In *Nadja* passé artifacts captivate Breton. Between Baudelaire's revelling in the elegant modern possibilities of *dandysme* and Breton's imaginative seizing of *démodé* objects, something significant has occurred: Twentieth-century city *voyageurs* like Breton no longer celebrate the experience of the new; rather, they resurrect the obsolete, injecting it with inspirational -- at times subversive -- possibilities. Against the literary, historical, and cultural framework of Baudelaire's dandy and the social phenomenon of the fetishized commodity (the emphatically contemporary bon-vivant, his elegant terrain and his alluring goods), Breton's twentieth-century descriptions of ruined Parisian landmarks, decrepit neighbourhoods, and exhausted everyday objects indeed become political.

In this article, I explore the complicated social and cultural transition from luxury to obsolescence -- the tension between the dandy's acts of modern appropriation and Breton's imaginative seizing of the *démodé*. From a discussion of the unique qualities of *dandysme* to an analysis of certain object moments in *Nadja*, I search for the historical meanings in Baudelaire and Breton's respective models of Parisian sightseeing. In "Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne" ("The Painter of Modern Life"), Baudelaire refines his redemptive, modern notion of *dandysme*: "Le dandysme, qui est une institution en dehors des lois, a des lois rigoureuses auxquelles sont strictement soumis tous ses sujets, quelles que soient d'ailleurs la fougue et l'indépendance de leur caractère" (388) / "Dandyism, which is an institution outside the law, has a rigorous code of laws that all its subjects are strictly bound by, however ardent and independent their individual characters may be" (499; see also Tester). Through his discussion of the exemplary artist Constantin Guys, ironically "a relatively minor artist" whom he uses to develop both his notion of the dandy and "modernity in art" (Coven 101), Baudelaire argues that modern urban experience itself dictates the dandy's compelling ethos: to explore aesthetically and drink in the changing situations of Parisian life. After the great nineteenth-century French architect, the Haussmannisation of Paris -- the grand boulevards, imperial facades, and obliteration of internal pockets of poverty and sedition -- opened new urban spaces for wealthy, "creative" male denizens to traverse the city's streets. "The physical remodelling of the city topography ... [is] only the most visible [manifestation] of a more profound transformation of urban society," states Priscilla Ferguson in her book *Paris as Revolution* and she argues that Haussmann's Paris is "revolutionary because it is modern ... with individuals crossing geographical and social boundaries and with the boundaries themselves shifting" (133). Anonymously elegant, the dandy slips through the Haussmannised Parisian streets, ever aware of exciting transgressive possibilities (several informative websites provide visual and textual surveys of Haussmann's massive transformation of nineteenth-century Paris, from the physical alteration of transportation routes and architectural refurbishment to ideological changes in class mobility; see, for example, Velibeyoglu <<http://www.angelfire.com/ar/corei/hud19.html>> which traces changing concepts in nineteenth-century industrialized urban planning, including the utopian theories of Charles Fourier to Haussmann's imperial "city beautiful"; see also Lefebvre).

Despite their revolutionary possibilities, the modern codes of the dandy mandated blind compliance; the process of becoming dandy -- elegant surrender to a life of serious dandyism -- implied a certain loss of individuality. Against the framework of *dandysme*, in "Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne," Baudelaire suggests that each dandy, regardless of talent or poise, must renounce social thought for serious hedonistic pleasure: "Ces êtres n'ont pas d'autre état que de cultiver l'idée du beau dans leur personne, de satisfaire leurs passions, de sentir et de penser" (388) / "These beings have no other status but that of cultivating the idea of beauty in their own persons, of satisfying their passions, of feeling and thinking" (419). From the cultivation of personal beauty to the satisfaction of passions, sexual desires, and the "finest" thoughts, the dandy's trade gravitates around the self. In this world of narcissistic satisfaction, no space is opened up for the subjectivity

of others. Far beyond the specificity of Haussmannised Paris, the urban dandy's profound self-centeredness, emphasis on beauty, and sexuality still haunt the contemporary imagination (several websites integrate the canonical dandies of modern literature -- Balzac, Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Wilde -- to questions of gender, urban fashion, and even "queer" appropriation, see Nisbet <<http://www.users.ox.ac.uk~nisbet/dandy/index.html>>[inactive]; Chensvold <<http://www.retroactive.com/apr98/decodandy2.html>>[inactive])

The dandy, according to Susan Buck-Morss, "practices his trade of not trading, viewing as he loiters the varied selections of luxury goods and luxury people displayed before him" ("The Flaneur" 102). This egotistical bourgeois man travels through life with the sole intention of maximizing his own sensual awareness; in the continuous pursuit of pleasure, he selects fascinating items from the cornucopia of commodities and usable people who are quite literally displayed before him. From the elegant attire of an attractive *bourgeoise* to the filthy wares of a backstreet ragpicker and the exotic gestures of a seasoned prostitute, Baudelaire's dandy -- the sensibility that speaks in works like *Le Spleen de Paris* -- "lives" imaginative life to the hilt, creating art out of everything that he encounters in his daily walkabouts. Social position, free time, and excess capital lie at the base of *dandysme*. The fortunate dandy is born into a rarified world of privilege removed from the everyday concerns which plague his social subordinates. In "Le Peintre," Baudelaire describes these profound benefits and privileges, emphasizing the dandy's inherent rights over his modern urban world: "l'homme riche, oisif, et qui, même blasé, n'a pas d'autre occupation que de courir à piste du bonheur; l'homme élevé dans le luxe et accoutumé dès sa jeunesse à l'obéissance des autres hommes, celui enfin qui n'a pas d'autre profession que l'élégance" (388) / "The wealthy man, who, blasé though he may be, has no occupation in life but to chase along the highway of happiness, the man nurtured in luxury, and habituated from early youth to being obeyed by others, the man, finally, who has no profession other than elegance" (419).

Reared in the privileged nurseries of the *haute bourgeoisie*, this privileged rentier knows the obedience of others. Firmly rooted in the authority of excess capital, he does not need to play a role in the torturous drama of class mobility; he need only concern himself with the lofty business of his own, daily sensual drama: "Il [possède] ainsi, à son gré et dans une vaste mesure, le temps et l'argent, sans lesquels la fantaisie, réduite à l'état de rêverie passagère, ne peut guère se traduire en action" (388-89) / "He possesses, to his heart's content, and to a vast degree, both time and money, without which fantasy, reduced to the state of ephemeral reverie can scarcely be translated into action" (419). Possessing an abundance of leisure time and capital, the dandy has the ability to translate fantasy into action. Knowing that he can have anything he desires frees his imagination from the everyday concern of accumulating goods. In his "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," Walter Benjamin makes the point that Baudelaire -- despite thoughts to the contrary -- was never a dandy himself. At the end of his life, Baudelaire "was not able to move through the streets of Paris as a stroller," because unlike his idealized rich and idle dandy, "his creditors pursued him [and] ... illness made itself felt" (70).

In "Les Foules," a prose poem in *Le Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire comments on the dandy's unusual ability to experience -- delicately savour -- others: "Il n'est pas donné à chacun de prendre un bain de multitude: jouir de la foule est un art; et celui-là seul peut faire, aux dépens du genre humain, une ribote de vitalité, à qui une fée a insufflé dans son berceau le goût du travestissement et du masque, la haine du domicile et la passion du voyage" (54) / "It is not given to every man to take a bath of multitude; enjoying a crowd is an art; and only he can relish a debauch of vitality at the expense of the human species, on whom, in his cradle, a fairy has bestowed the love of masks and masquerading, the hate of home, and the passion for roaming" (54). This idle, monied man leisurely roams through the Parisian crowd, observing everything and everyone around him. In his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin notes, "It was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk ... The [dandy] liked to have the turtles set the pace for him. If he had his way, progress would be obliged to accommodate itself to this pace" (197). During his strolls, the dandy secretly tastes the excitement and pleasures that are displayed before him; through his unhurried disguise of indifference, he has the ability to observe without being noticed.

[In this respect, Baudelaire quotes his exemplary artist-dandy Constantin Guys: "Anyone who is capable of being bored in a crowd is a blockhead. I repeat: a blockhead and a contemptible one" (qtd. in Benjamin, *The Paris of the Second Empire* 37).] Always clever and opportunistic, the dandy experiences the subjective moments of others without giving a moment of his own subjectivity away. The objectifying power of his gaze violates the individuals whom he observes; under his visual scrutiny, the crowd's individuals are nothing more than *mannequins vivants* -- animated objects for aesthetic contemplation.

Everyday people are not privy to the dandy's visual rapture; only his trained eagle eye can capture the hidden moments of beauty in everything, from the dazzle of the courtesan to the rough animality of the petty criminal. Modern Paris itself is a vast horde of treasure open to his selfish plundering. The genius of Baudelaire's privileged urban character lies in his game of duplicity; the dandy's technique of clever disguise allows him to plunder the subjective booty of the Parisian masses. As Baudelaire notes in "Le Peintre," "Le caractère de beauté du dandy consiste surtout dans l'air froid qui vient de l'inébranlable résolution de ne pas être ému; on dirait un feu latent qui se fait deviner, qui pourrait mais qui ne veut pas rayonner" (391-92) / "The specific beauty of the dandy consists particularly in that cold exterior resulting from the unshakeable determination to remain unmoved; one is reminded of a latent fire, whose existence is merely suspected, and which, if it wanted to, but it does not, could burst forth in all its brightness" (422). Through his detached mask, the dandy can carefully scrutinize others without ever being noticed; the disinterestedness of his facial expression and the elegance of his demeanor ensure the confidentiality of his true selfish intentions. Against the backdrop of a burgeoning capitalist economy, the dandy's hedonist life philosophy has a subversive edge. Despite the fact that his luxurious existence depends upon the productive machinery of the bourgeois urban milieu, he rejects the fundamental bourgeois notion that time must be economically productive. The luxurious dandy does not bother himself with thoughts of making money; he simply lives, sees, and -- in the case of the modern artist Constantin Guys -- paints (writes) life as an aesthetic experience. While he depends on bourgeois society's productive apparatus, he only takes -- greedily consumes -- continually undermining the contributory ideal of high capitalism.

How does the dandy depend on late capitalism's productive apparatus? At this point, history and technology enter the discussion. The noise and increased street commerce of the mid nineteenth-century forced him off the city's streets and boulevards, into the enclosed world of the arcades. The Paris development boon -- ironically the force that created the productive terrors of the street -- would now offer the threatened dandy a place of privatized refuge where he could happily loiter. According to the critic Pierre Missac: "The double nature of the arcade is incarnated, so to speak, in the [dandy]. The arcade ... was a connecting pathway and a shop. Availing himself of both of these uses, the [dandy] walks and then stops. ... But he hardly ever buys anything" (190). From the filthy and sooty streets, the precocious pedestrian dandy moved into the opulently artificial environment of the arcades (several websites are devoted to the historical phenomenon of the arcades, from basic architectural descriptions to a rather titillating site of the French Government Tourist Office, *Maison de la France*, that describes some unusual aspects of Paris, including cemeteries, catacombs, sewers, and such "marvellous" covered arcades as Passage de Pavillions and Galerie Vivienne, see *Maison de la France*

<<http://www.fgtousa.org/regional/unusual.html>>). Only in the new arcades could the dandy, according to Benjamin, "not be exposed to the sight of carriages that did not recognize pedestrians as rivals" ("On Some Motifs" 172). In this modern enclosed terrain, he was protected from the jostling of the crowds, the hubbub of the street, and the vulgar noises and smells of commerce. In time, the dandy's elegant existence depended on the arcade's protection; with the increased pressures of the rapidly modernizing city, there simply could not be daily rounds of blasé sightseeing without the safe haven of the arcades. The figure of the dandy became ineluctably bound to the very dream-world of the arcades; these shiny, pedestrian arcades -- perhaps the greatest monuments of mid nineteenth-century capitalism -- became the only places where the curtailed dandy could continue to thrive. Without contributing to the productive process or apparatus, this elegant -- perhaps already anachronistic -- character, through his parasitic

dependence on the modern technology of the arcades, exploited the possibilities that the process opened to him. He celebrated the convenient marvel of the arcades, because they ensured his continued existence. Yet, even this enclosed Parisian fantasy-world would fade and crumble by the end of the nineteenth-century. The dandy would again be pushed aside, expelled to society's margins by engulfing economic and social forces.

Through her reading of Walter Benjamin's incomplete *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project), in her book *The Dialectics of Seeing*, Susan Buck-Morss comments on the flâneur's attachment to mass consumption and embodied exchange. She writes that "The utopian moment of flânerie was fleeting. But if the flâneur has disappeared as a specific figure, the perceptive attitude that he embodied saturates modern existence, specifically, the society of mass consumption. In the flâneur, concretely, we recognize our own consumerist mode of being-in-the world. ... In commodity society all of us are prostitutes, selling ourselves to strangers; all of us are collectors of things" (344). Through the historicized figure of the dandy, we can begin to locate our own relationship to commodities; inchoate in the perceptions, activities and phantasmatic figurations of Baudelaire's nineteenth-century arcade is the idea that interest and value only exist in the new and fleeting. Like dandies, we consume what the market produces, greedily searching for novel things, people and possibilities. But, there is another type of urban search or process of wandering which shifts the focus from newness to the possibilities of the outmoded. In Surrealist works like Breton's *Nadja*, the outmoded, rusticated and worn object captivates the interest of a different sort of urban wanderer.

Breton begins his experimental work *Nadja* with the question: "Qui suis-je?" Unlike Baudelaire's dandy, whose daily rounds were governed by the internalized laws of *dandysme*, Breton's urban voyage in *Nadja* begins as a quest. Where the dandy only seeks to derive immediate pleasure, Breton seeks to find meaning about himself. In this creative, "biographical" quest, the *démodé*, or outmoded, object holds a privileged position; through it, Breton experiences moments of profound meaning. Symptomatic of Breton's gesture of privileging the *démodé* in *Nadja*, the first fragment of the *Théâtre Moderne* episode provides insight into the creative appropriation of outmoded objects and places: "Le 'Théâtre Moderne,' situé au fond du passage de l'Opéra aujourd'hui détruit, outre que les pièces qu'on y représentait avaient encore moins d'importance, répondait on ne peut mieux à mon idéal, dans ce sens. Le jeu dérisoire des acteurs, ne tenant qu'un compte très relatif de leur rôle, ne se souciant qu'à peine les uns des autres et tout occupés à se créer des relations dans le public composé d'une quinzaine de personnes tout au plus, ne m'y fit jamais que l'effet d'une toile de fond" (43). Located at the end of the now destroyed Passage de l'Opéra, the "Théâtre Moderne," aside from the fact that the plays put on there had still less importance, corresponded perfectly to my ideal in this direction. The ridiculous acting of the performers, who paid only the faintest attention to their parts, scarcely listening to each other and busy making dates with members of the audience, which consisted of perhaps fifteen people at the most, always reminded me of a canvas backdrop (37-38).

Even with the episode's opening phrase, Breton gives the *démodé* precedence over the modern. The *Théâtre Moderne* lies at the end of the *Passage de l'Opéra* which is now destroyed (ironically in 1925, to accommodate the extension of Boulevard Haussmann); through this vivid backgrounding mechanism, Breton defines the theatre through its relationship to a privileged memory. This defining locale is significant in two ways: within the orbit of historical literary convention, and within the philosophy of the Surrealist project. To understand the significance of the arcade memory, its position within literary history must first be considered. Not only was the arcade the civilized locale where the dandy was anonymously protected from the inconveniences of modernization, it was also the place where he exploited the possibilities that the capitalist process opened to him. In a sense, Breton's defining characteristic of *détruit* refers as much to the actual state of the arcades as it refers to the memory of the bourgeois dandy myth of idle luxuriation. As the dandy was forced to move inside the arcades when the tumult of the street foreclosed the possibility of sightseeing, he was literally stamped-out of existence when, according to Benjamin, the "development of the forces of [twentieth-century] production reduced the wish symbol [of the arcade] to rubble" ("Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century" 161). Long before the arcade

crumbled, the dandy became a marginalized living antique. In this new order, even idleness lost its critical edge; in a society fully encumbered by an ideology of mass production, idleness became a sign of deviant aestheticism or madness. Where the idle dandy had been a stellar personage in Baudelaire's modern nineteenth-century vision, his unproductive public existence demanded corrective intervention by the twentieth-century.

Within the Surrealist movement, the important presence of the Passage de l'Opéra has intertextual significance. The first half of Louis Aragon's experimental work *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926) acts as an imaginative sightseeing guide to the deteriorating Passage de l'Opéra. Like Breton, Aragon describes his own journey; he wanders through the arcade with the explicit purpose of finding une mythologie moderne. In the fantastic aquarium of the shabby arcade, he constructs a modern mythology through the stories of the arcade's weary merchants, shoppers and its rusticated commodities. Behind the worn façade of the Passage de l'Opéra, Aragon experiences the transformative power of the merveilleux quotidien, the marvellous everyday. By the time Breton wrote *Nadja* in 1928, this privileged, real Passage had been demolished. Louis Aragon's tattered arcade treasures which inspirationally illuminate his everyday adventure in *Le Paysan de Paris* move directly to a more abstract dimension in *Nadja*. Within the register of Surrealism itself, even the illuminating trace memory of the démodé artifact could become grist for a productive imagination. Quite vividly, the visionary development of the Passage de l'Opéra, from decimated reality to illuminating trace memory, points to Breton's notion of surréalité. As Breton himself powerfully states, "Je crois à la résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve et la réalité, en une sorte de réalité absolue, de surréalité, si l'on peut ainsi dire" ("Manifeste" 23-24) / "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, in appearance so contradictory, which are dream and reality, in a sort of absolute reality, of surreality, if one can so speak" (my translation). Aragon's fantastic aquarium and Breton's privileged memory highlight the surréalité of the Passage de l'Opéra; as a shattered vestige of its once glamorous self, or as a brief trace memory, the surréalité of the Passage de l'Opéra exists between the poles of dream and physical reality. I would like to add here that the Surrealists' notions of dream, trace memory, and surreality still have resonance with contemporary audiences: in new media, websites such as Intellectual Wilderness

<<http://www.intellectualwilderness.com/surlinks.html>> and Surrealist

<<http://www.surrealist.com/home.html>>, the "ongoing" Surrealist project is discussed, from museum collections and active artists in Europe and North America to various secret societies.

As is the case with the *Passage de l'Opéra*, Breton plays with imaginative potential at a *marché aux puces* (flea market). Beyond the potential of a single démodé object, the *marché aux puces*, like Aragon's fantastic arcade aquarium, becomes a treasure trove for the Surrealist *voyageur's* imaginative plundering: "Tout récemment encore, comme un dimanche, avec un ami, je m'étais rendu au arché aux puces de Saint-Ouen (j'y suis souvent, en quête des ces objets qu'on ne trouve nulle part ailleurs, démodés, fragmentés, inutilisables, presque incompréhensibles, pervers enfin au sens où je l'aime...), notre attention s'est portée simultanément sur un exemplaire très frais des *Œuvres complètes* de Rimbaud, perdu dans un très mince étalage de chiffons ... Bien m'en prend de le feuilleter, le temps d'y découvrir deux feuillets intercalés: l'un copie à la machine d'un poème de forme libre, l'autre notation au crayon de réflexions sur Nietzsche" (62-63) / "Again quite recently, when a friend and I went one Sunday to the Saint-Ouen flea-market (I go there often, searching for objects that can be found nowhere else: old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse -- at least in the sense I prefer ... our attention was simultaneously caught by a brand new copy of Rimbaud's *Oeuvres Complètes* lost in a tiny, wretched bin of rags ... Fortunately I decide to leave through this volume, for I have time to discover there two sheets of paper stuck between the pages: one a typewritten copy of a poem in free verse, the other a penciled series of reflections on Nietzsche" (52-55).

Before the captivated Breton has a chance to ponder the mystery of the book's history, a saleswoman boldly announces that it is not for sale; it is her precious possession, not open to the idle curiosity of others. At this point, Breton describes his stimulating conversation with the "extraordinarily cultivated" saleswoman, Fannie Beznos. In the course of their conversation,

Beznos not only spontaneously critiques Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris*, she also shows her great revolutionary faith -- indeed an incredible coincidence to any intrepid Surrealist. Through his flea market discovery, Breton receives a cultivated review of his then closest colleague's experimental word contemplations and experiences another future comrade's revolutionary faith. Before he leaves the market, Breton convinces Fannie to give several of her poems to him (indeed real poems which he later publishes). These poems are the day's found objects; through the palpability of language, they embody the memory traces of the encounter. At the citadel of the *démodé* -- the second-hand market of used, broken, and almost incomprehensible objects -- Breton has a profound encounter. Rummaging through the detritus of the past, he stumbles upon hidden meaning for the present.

It is not coincidental that Breton finds the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud at the *marché aux puces*. According to the historian Helena Lewis, "To the Surrealists, it was axiomatic that Rimbaud was to poetry what Lenin was to socialism: both were revolutionaries" (71). Not only is Beznos' copy of Rimbaud's *Ouvres Complètes* in pristine condition, it also contains within its pages reflections on Nietzsche's work; both Rimbaud's anarchism and strands of Nietzschean commodity-resistant post-rationality were germinating forces for Surrealism. In his provocative essay "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," Benjamin constellates an elements of Rimbaud and Nietzsche into his reading of the Surrealists' project. While the Surrealists' utopian notion that "revolutionary energies appear in the outmoded" resonates with aspects of Nietzsche's commodity-resistance (one need only reflect upon his evaluation of Ancient Greece to understand nihilism's resistance to the new fixation of modern commodity culture), their privileged notion of anti-liberal-moral-humanistic freedom reflects Rimbaud's poetic ideals of anarchism and insurrection. While Surrealism exploits the possibilities of anarchic insurrection, it also uses the energies found in the *démodé* against consumer culture -- which privileges always, and only, that which is new. One need not take too much of an imaginative leap to suppose that revolutionary Fannie's free verse poems integrate her "obsolete surroundings" with both anarchism and commodity-resistant nihilism. In an extraordinary way, Fannie Beznos is the paradigm of a Surrealist poet found during, according to Susan Suleiman, "an unexpected encounter which [in the work of the male Surrealists] always tends, explicitly or not, to take on the features of a woman" (101). Through the model of his talented woman, found at the *marché aux puces*, Breton describes the origins and working creative process of the Surrealist project.

By subordinating the new to the suggestive power of the obsolete, Breton brings "the power of atmosphere to the point of explosion" ("Manifeste" 182). With the first fragment of the *Théâtre Moderne* episode and the anecdote at the *marché aux puces*, Breton activates the switch of revolutionary possibility; the act of privileging the *démodé* -- and in this way, recognizing the unrealized potential of the past -- directly defies the bourgeois notion of exchange value. In this respect, Benjamin writes that Breton "was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded,' in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to be extinct ... The relation of these things to revolution -- no one can have a more exact concept of it than him ("Surrealism" 182). In the Surrealist mythology of revolution, the found, obsolete object unveils the numbing concord of the latest fetishized commodity. Within this context, Breton's translation of the dandy could mark the social decay of the bourgeois order. Where Baudelaire's chic personage revelled in the safe haven of the glamorous arcades, Breton only finds meaning in their trace memories. "Sightseeing in Paris" with Breton the privileged site exists on the levels of text and image. Within the extreme subjectivity of his spontaneous adventure, we almost become conditioned to seeing Paris through Surrealist eyes. Through constant emphasis on the explosive imaginative possibilities of the *démodé*, he entices us into seeing the hidden potential of obsolescence. Against the tyranny of a consumer culture which only privileges the new, *démodé* sightseeing indeed becomes subversive and hopefully attractive to some.

Works Cited

- Baudelaire, Charles. "Crowds." *Paris Spleen*. By Charles Baudelaire. Trans. Louise Varese. New York: New Directions, 1970. 20-21.
- Baudelaire, Charles. "Les Foules." *Le Spleen de Paris*. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1972. 54-55.
- Baudelaire, Charles. "The Painter of Modern Life." *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*. By Charles Baudelaire. Trans. P.E. Charvet. Cambridge: Oxford UP, 1972. 390-435.
- Baudelaire, Charles. "Le Peintre de la vie moderne." *Ecrits esthétiques*. By Charles Baudelaire. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1986. 360-404.
- Benjamin, Walter. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." *Illuminations*. By Walter Benjamin. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1969. 155-94.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth-Century." *Reflections*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken, 1986. 146-62.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia." *Reflections*. By Walter Benjamin. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken, 1986. 177-92.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire." *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: NLB, 1973. 9-106.
- Breton, André. *Manifeste du Surrealisme*. Paris: Gallimard, 1963.
- Breton, André. *Nadja*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.
- Breton, André. *Nadja*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Grove, 1960.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing*. Cambridge: MIT P, 1989.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering." *New German Critique* 39 (1986).
- Chensvold, Christian. "Dandyism, Sexuality and the Return of Masculine Splendor." *Retro* (April 1998): <<http://www.retroactive.com/apr98/decodandy2.html>>
- Coven, Jeffrey. *Baudelaire's Voyages*. Boston: Little Brown, 1993.
- Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. *Paris as Revolution*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994. *Intellectual Wilderness: A Meeting Place for Surrealist Artists* (1997): <<http://www.intellectualwilderness.com/surlinks.html>>
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Writings on Cities*. Selected, Trans., and Ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. London: Blackwell, 1996.
- Lewis, Helena. *The Politics of Surrealism*. New York: Paragon, 1988.
- Maison de la France* (1999): <<http://www.fgtousa.org/regional/unusual.html>>.
- Missac, Pierre. *Walter Benjamin's Passages*. Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen. Cambridge: MIT P, 1995.
- Nisbet, Gideon. *The Salon: Home of Dandyism* (2000): <<http://www.users.ox.ac.uk/~nisbet/dandy/index.html>>
- Suleiman, Susan Rubin. *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990.
- Surrealist* (1999): <<http://www.surrealist.com/home.html>>
- Tester, Keith, ed. *The Flaneur*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Velibeyoglu, Koray. *History of Urban Design and Planning Home Page* (2000): <<http://www.angelfire.com/ar/corei/hud19.html>>.

Author's Profile: Benton Jay Komins works in American culture and literature and is developing a comparative humanities department at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. His main areas of interest are nineteenth- and twentieth-century American, French, and German literature and culture, popular culture, the visual arts, and theories of subjectivity. Komins is the author of several articles in the field of comparative literature, including, most recently, "Succulent Tomatoes, Extraordinary People and Intriguing Performances: Some Literary and Cultural Encounters with New Orleans' Creoles" in *Comparative Literature Studies* 36.1 (1999). He has several articles forthcoming in *The Comparatist* (May 2000), *The Mid-Atlantic Almanack*, and *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*. He serves on the editorial board of *JAST: Journal of American Studies in Turkey*. Komins is now completing a book, entitled *New Orleans, the Inland Island: Diversity, Creolization and Carnival*.