Myth and Metropolis
FOR AUDREY AND PETER
MYTH AND METROPOLIS

Walter Benjamin and the City

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Polity Press
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>vi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Urban Images: From Ruins to Revolutions</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Urban Memories: Labyrinth and Childhood</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Dialectical Images: Paris and the Phantasmagoria of Modernity</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Urban Allegories: Paris, Baudelaire and the Experience of Modernity</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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List of Abbreviations

Where possible, existing English language translations have been used. Other translations are my own. References to material in the Passagen-Werk are given by Konvolut number and page (e.g., J67,1, GS V, p. 438) or page of translation (e.g., N6,5, Smith ed., 1989, p. 57). The following abbreviations are used in the text:


BK Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert, with an afterword by Theodor Adorno. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1950.


GER The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932–1940, ed. Gershom Scholem, tr. Gary Smith and André Lefèvre,
List of Abbreviations


Introduction

Benjamin and the city

In Konvolut N of his ill-fated study of nineteenth-century Paris, the Passagenarbeit, Walter Benjamin writes: 'the pathos of this project . . . I find every city beautiful' (N1,6, Smith ed., 1989, p. 44). What is remarkable about this candid statement is its location in a vast study dedicated to the critical revelation of the modern metropolis as the phantasmagoric site of mythic domination, to the representation of the city as the essential locus of modern capitalism and its attendant evils of exploitation, injustice, alienation and the diminution of human experience. It is both characteristic and informative that Benjamin should choose to situate such an affirmation of the urban complex in a study specifically concerned with the grotesque character of the city and the dehumanizing tendencies of metropolitan daily life. For Benjamin, the great cities of modern European culture were both beautiful and bestial, a source of exhilaration and hope on the one hand and of revulsion and despair on the other.¹

The city for Benjamin was magnetic: it attracted and repelled him in the same moment. He was an urbanite, a metropolitan whose life was split between two cities: Berlin, where he was born, and Paris, to which he fled in 1933. Gershom Scholem notes that 'Benjamin had a deep love for Berlin' (1976, p. 176). Benjamin himself recognized that Berlin was a vital backdrop to, and component of, his work. In a letter to Scholem of 17 April 1931, he remarks: 'the most sophisticated civilisation and the most
"modern" culture are not only part of my private comfort; some of them are the very means of my production' (Scholem, 1982, p. 232). Berlin was, as Bertolt Brecht notes, 'impossible to live in, impossible to leave', and it was indeed only under the most desperate and compelling of circumstances that Benjamin did leave his native city eventually. By early 1933, the rise of the National Socialists in Germany had finally made continuing residence in Berlin too hazardous. Benjamin left Berlin for the last time in March and travelled to Paris, a city which he had visited on numerous occasions and for which he had frequently expressed a predilection. Scholem recalls a conversation with Benjamin in Paris in 1927 in which 'Benjamin said that he would like best to settle in Paris because he found the city's atmosphere so much to his liking' (1982, p. 130). Indeed, Benjamin resisted leaving the city that had adopted him even when France was invaded in 1940. Despite numerous entreaties and warnings from friends and colleagues at the Institute for Social Research, most notably Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who were themselves safely ensconced in exile in New York, Benjamin refused to leave his adored Paris until it was too late. His eventual attempt to escape to Spain was thwarted at the last moment, and, tragically, he committed suicide on the border in September 1940.

Although the city was beautiful, beloved, congenial, and vital for his literary production, Benjamin was perhaps never fully convinced that the urban complex could be the site of lasting contentment. Indeed, his writings on the city are concerned with critically unmasking the delusions, pretensions and barbarism of precisely that urban environment and social milieu which he found so indispensable, so much a part of his 'private comfort'. Hoffman notes that 'urban life was essential to Benjamin, yet also barely tolerable' (1983, p. 150). He both loved and loathed the city. It is this paradox, this unresolved tension, that lies at the heart of Benjamin's fascination with the modern metropolis.

The modern city, its architecture, spaces, street life, inhabitants and daily routines are a recurring set of themes in Benjamin's oeuvre. Benjamin produced a plethora of texts focusing on the character of urban experience and, in particular, a number of sketches of the cities that he visited during the mid- to late 1920s. Denkbilder ('thought-images') was the general designation for a variety of texts that included a series of short cityscapes beginning with an impressionistic essay on Naples written around September/October 1924. A second such city portrait, 'Moscow' (1927), appeared as a result of Benjamin's visit to the Soviet capital
during the winter of 1926–7. More of these urban pen-pictures were to follow: ‘Weimar’ (June 1928), ‘Marseilles’ (October 1928 – January 1929), an essay entitled ‘Paris, the City in the Mirror’ (January 1929), ‘San Gimignano’ (published 30 August 1929), and ‘North Sea’ (a sketch of the city of Bergen in Norway, completed on 15 August 1930).

In addition to these miniatures, Benjamin was engaged in the production of more extensive texts concerned with the description and analysis of the urban setting. In 1927 he embarked on an ever-expanding analysis of the Parisian arcades of the nineteenth century (the so-called Passagenarbeit or ‘Arcades Project’), an enterprise that from modest beginnings was to come to dominate all his intellectual endeavours. The project was to yield an exposé (‘Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century’) and nearly a thousand pages of notes, drafts and quotations. The longest section of this assemblage, Konvolut J, was concerned with the writings of Charles Baudelaire, and by 1937 Benjamin was planning to compose a separate, though intimately related, study of the poet. Intended as a model of the larger ‘Arcades Project’, Benjamin drafted and then rewrote the central section of this study under the titles ‘Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire’ and ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’. In addition to these Paris writings, Benjamin composed a lengthy essay recording his childhood impressions of the city of Berlin. Written in 1932, shortly before his exile, the ‘Berlin Chronicle’ was later to be rewritten for publication under the title ‘A Berlin Childhood around 1900’. These two texts stood in the closest relation to the Paris materials he had assembled, and indeed constituted methodological and historiographic experiments for the ongoing ‘Arcades Project’.

These were not Benjamin’s only texts on the theme of the city. Between 1927 and 1933 he was involved in the production of some eighty-four radio broadcasts (for Berliner Rundfunk and Südwestdeutscher Rundfunk in Frankfurt am Main). A number of these took facets of everyday life in Berlin as their subject-matter: for example, ‘Berlin Dialect’, ‘Street-Trade and the Market in Old and New Berlin’, ‘A Berlin Street Boy’ and ‘Tenement Building’. Furthermore, in his capacity as a literary reviewer, Benjamin wrote on several contemporary books dealing with city life, urban architecture and metropolitan experience, the most important of which were concerned with the writings of his friend and colleague on the ‘Arcades Project’, Franz Hessel. The Denkbilder, then, may be seen as the point of departure for an enduring preoccupation with the city.
There has been a tremendous upsurge of interest in Benjamin’s work since the publication of the *Gesammelte Schriften* began in 1974 under the editorship of Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. This has been given added impetus recently by a number of exhibitions and international conferences staged to mark the fiftieth anniversary (1990) of Benjamin’s death and the centenary (1992) of his birth. Benjamin has been catapulted from relative obscurity to being regarded, particularly in Germany and France, but increasingly in Anglo-American circles as well, as one of the foremost intellectual figures of his generation. Although Benjamin’s fascination with the city is frequently mentioned by commentators, this theme has not proved a principal focus of sustained attention. His essays ‘Naples’ and ‘Moscow’ (and the ‘Moscow Diary’) have attracted little scholarly interest. They have been deemed, and largely dismissed as, ‘travel pieces’ (Smith ed., 1988, p. 18) and Sunday newspaper material (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 27). More surprisingly, the Berlin studies have fared only moderately better. While it is true that a number of short articles have concerned themselves with these writings, there has been relatively little sustained analysis of Benjamin’s reflections on his native city, with the notable exception of Anna Stüssi’s thorough (but as yet untranslated) examination of ‘Berlin Childhood’. The Paris writings have fortunately attracted more systematic consideration. The publication of the (still untranslated) *Passagenarbeit* as the fifth volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* in 1982 produced a spate of ‘special editions’, features and even a conference in Paris in 1985. Apart from Frisby’s stimulating analysis of Benjamin’s Paris writings as part of his *Fragments of Modernity*, it was not until 1989 that the first book-length examination in English of the ‘Arcades’ material was published (Buck-Morss’s *The Dialectics of Seeing*). More recently, the Paris writings have been discussed with reference to Benjamin’s critique of tradition (McCole, 1993), his Surrealist interests and motifs (Cohen, 1993), and with respect to the themes of melancholy and allegory (Pensky, 1993). It is strange that despite this recent proliferation of material, the significance of the earlier city writings for the Paris studies has not been explored in depth. With the exception of Buck-Morss’s study (1989), there has been little attempt to explore the relationships, interconnections, thematic continuities and contradictions in the various city writings taken as a whole.

This study provides a detailed reading and examination of Benjamin’s city writings with a view to uncovering such relationships. My aim is to identify and explore Benjamin’s critical
insights into the character and experience of the metropolis, and thereby to indicate the methodological and thematic significance of his work for social theory. Benjamin's texts seek to devise an innovative, appropriate mode of representation for the city. They examine and articulate the complex relationships between the organization of time, space and human activity in the urban environment. His writings attempt to give voice to the character and political significance of particular individual and collective experiences within the urban setting. His work resists both the one-dimensional negation and the blind affirmation of modern social forms, and instead presents an appreciative, critical theory of metropolitan life. Benjamin's ambivalent vision of the city results in a sensitive and sophisticated reading of modern culture.

Benjamin's enterprise is not free of difficulties, however. His texts present paradoxical or at best incomplete formulations. Far from in any sense solving the aporias of Critical Theory, he succeeds only in generating an equally elusive, enigmatic set of concepts. But within these paradoxes, and in his integration of a diverse assortment of elements from Marxism, Judaic mysticism, German Romanticism and avant-garde modernist approaches, Benjamin seeks to develop a set of highly original and illuminating textual practices which challenge accepted forms of social-theoretical discourse. His critical, redemptive reading of the city-as-text is complemented by his innovative, immanent writing of the text-as-city. My goal in this book is to explore these configurations of reading and writing, of ruination and redemption, of myth and the metropolis.

In the remainder of this introduction I will be concerned with an initial delineation of the principal themes and recurrent motifs of Benjamin's city writings. Benjamin's cityscapes appear to be underpinned by a number of intricately interconnected yet distinctive concerns which may be considered under the following rubrics: physiognomy, phenomenology, mythology, history, politics and text. These form a set of directions or co-ordinates to aid the navigation and mapping of his cityscapes.

**Physiognomy**

For Benjamin, the urban complex is the quintessential site of modernity. The social totality is crystallized in miniature in the metropolis. The city constitutes a monad: it is an entity that encapsulates the characteristic features of modern social and economic structures, and is thus the site for their most precise and
unambiguous interpretation. In the spaces and structures of the modern metropolis, contemporary culture presents itself most readily and acutely for decipherment. It is thus through the critical reading of the structuring principles and practical modes of metropolitan life that Benjamin endeavours to construct a fragmentary but insightful critique of modern capitalist society and elaborate a set of imperatives for Critical Theory and revolutionary practice.

The notion of physiognomical reading is interwoven with Benjamin's monadological approach. In his radio broadcast 'Das dämonische Berlin' Benjamin gives the following description of the writer Heinrich Heine von Hoffman as physiognomist:

he perceived the extraordinary... in specific people, things, houses, objects, streets etc. As you have perhaps heard, one calls people who are able to discern from people's faces, from their gait, from their hands or from their head-shape, their character, occupation, or even their fate, 'physiognomists'. Hoffman was less an observer [Seher] than a scrutinizer [Anseher]. That is the best German translation of 'physiognomist'. A major concern of his scrutiny was Berlin, both the city and its inhabitants. (GS VII, p. 89)

In his cityscapes Walter Benjamin seeks to present urban 'physiognomies', readings or decipherments of the metropolitan environment in which the key to understanding social life is, on one level, located in the physical structure of the cities themselves. For Benjamin, the buildings, spaces, monuments and objects that compose the urban environment both are a response to, and reflexively structure, patterns of human social activity. Architecture and action shape each other; they interpenetrate. The metropolis constitutes a frame or theatre for activity. The buildings of the city, and its interior setting in particular, form casings for action in which, or on which, human subjects leave 'traces', signs of their passing, markers or clues to their mode of existence. Benjamin states that 'living means leaving traces' (CB, p. 169), and these traces left behind by the modern city dweller must be carefully preserved by the urban physiognomist, and their meaning deciphered. For Benjamin, the urban physiognomist is part archaeologist, part collector and part detective.

The 'character' of a city may be read from its numerous faces. The city as a monad in turn contains within itself monadological fragments. Benjamin notes: 'in thousands of eyes, in thousands of objects, the city is reflected' (GS IV, p. 358). Whether it is the inconspicuous churches in Naples, the wooden hut nestling next
to the tenement block in Revolutionary Moscow, the towering monuments to imperial glory in Berlin, or the various dream-houses (arcade, railway station, museum) in Paris, the city’s architecture forms a secret, unwritten ‘text’ to be ‘read’ by the urban physiognomist. Physiognomic reading is for Benjamin a critical enterprise, one which, though preoccupied with the external, superficial manifestations of the metropolis, none the less penetrates beneath the façades of things to reveal their true character.

**Phenomenology**

Benjamin is concerned with the physical structure of the city and the material objects found therein as a setting for, and as indices of, social activity. He seeks to identify and examine the mundane experiences of the urban population. He offers nothing less than a ‘micro-sociology of everyday life and of the city’ (Tacussel, 1986, p. 48). Benjamin is particularly interested in the minutiae and marginalia of the urban setting. His description of the French photographer Eugène Atget is almost a self-portrait in this respect:

Atget always passed by the ‘great sights’ and so-called ‘landmarks’; what he did not pass by was a long row of boot lasts; or the Paris courtyards, where from night to morning the hand-carts stand in serried ranks; or the tables after people have finished eating and left, the dishes not yet cleared away – as they exist in their hundreds of thousands at the same hour; or the brothel at Rue . . . No. 5, whose street number appears, gigantic, at four different places on the building’s façade. (OWS, pp. 250-1)

Benjamin himself ‘passed by’ the landmarks of the city, and instead was preoccupied with, and stressed the significance of, apparently banal and trivial features of the metropolis. His cityscapes seek to develop ‘a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as the impenetrable and the impenetrable as the everyday’ (OWS, p. 237). They draw upon the most diverse elements: a disfigured beggar in Naples, a streetcar ride in Moscow, a small meeting-house in Berlin, the site of a double suicide, and the dilapidated Parisian shopping arcades on the brink of demolition and the often eccentric clientele that frequented them in their heyday.

The main themes of this phenomenology of the city are the fragmentation, commodification, interiorization and marginalization of experience. Benjamin is engaged in the representation of the city as ‘a landscape of noisy life’ (P3, GS V, p. 1056). His
cityscapes are concerned with changing patterns of street life and, in particular, the impact of the crowd upon the individual psyche. The hallmark of modern experience is 'shock'. This in turn engenders forgetfulness and a distinctive form of memory, the mémoire involontaire. In addition, the accelerated tempo and new, machine-based rhythms of metropolitan life lead to a distinctively modern temporal sensibility rooted in the commodification of time (equation of time and money) and repetition (fetishism and fashion).

The character of economic practices and patterns of exchange assume an important place in Benjamin's analysis. From the chaos of the Neapolitan street markets to the careful displays of artefacts in the arcades and department stores of Berlin and Paris, Benjamin is preoccupied with the city as the site of the commodity. He moves away from the traditional Marxist emphasis on forms of production, however, to explore modes of commodity display, advertising and consumption. It is not so much the experience of the alienated worker but that of the fetishizing customer which takes centre stage in these analyses. Benjamin draws upon and modifies Georg Lukács's account of commodity culture as the reification of human consciousness and develops Georg Simmel's account of the origins and consequences of fashion.

Benjamin focuses on the shifting relationship between interior and exterior spaces, public and private life. In 'Naples' he emphasizes the communal character of everyday life. A principal concern of the essay on Moscow is the abolition of the private domain through collectivization. By contrast, in his analyses of Berlin and Paris, he stresses the interiorization of social life and the erotic by the bourgeois private citizen. The bourgeois domicile is revealed as a gloomy, ramshackle site of imprisonment. The arcade itself is nothing other than a street transformed into an interior setting. Interiorization is bound up with the compartmentalization of space and the removal of disruptive and disturbing figures from everyday life. The poor and the dispossessed vanish as modern 'hygiene' demands the institutionalization and confinement of the dead, the sick, the insane and the disabled.

Ernst Bloch gives the following description of Benjamin's approach:

A sense for the peripheral: Benjamin had what Lukács so drastically lacked: a unique gaze for the significant detail, for what lies
alongside, for those fresh elements which, in thinking and in the
world, arise from here, for the individual things which intrude in an
unaccustomed and non-schematic way, things which do not fit in
with the usual lot and therefore deserve particular, incisive
attention. Benjamin had an incomparable micro-philological sense
for this sort of detail, for this sort of significant periphera, for this
sort of meaningful incidental sign. (Smith ed., 1988, p. 340)

One of Benjamin’s principal goals is to give voice to the
‘periphera’, the experiences of those whom modern forms of order
strive to render silent and invisible. Objects that are obsolete,
outdated and ridiculous are salvaged and made to tell their tale.
The sauntering flâneur, the self-conscious dandy, the loud-
mouthed beggar, the suffering prostitute, the wretched rag-
picker: marginal, disregarded figures inhabit Benjamin’s pages on
the city. The ‘invisible’ are made visible; the mute are given a
voice. Benjamin’s ‘phenomenology’ of the city is an attempt to
comprehend the experience of modernity via the examination of
some of its most eccentric and despised representatives.15

**Mythology**

A key feature of Benjamin’s writings on the metropolitan
environment is his identification and critical analysis of the
mythic. His decipherment of the city from the objects and
architecture of the urban complex and his consideration of the
forms of experience encountered therein fundamentally combine
to unmask the modern metropolis as the site of the phantasmo-
goric and the mythic. It is important to recognize that although
Benjamin uses the term ‘myth’ in a number of contrasting ways,
these different meanings are seldom explicitly formulated or
clarified.16 ‘Myth’ appears to have at least a fourfold significance
for him: as fallacious thought, as compulsion, as tyranny, and as a
metaphorical device.

First, Benjamin uses the term to refer to erroneous thought and
misrecognition. According to this view, which is clearly derived
from the Enlightenment tradition, ‘myth’ refers to archaic forms of
perception and experience. Myths are stories which served to
explain and account for natural occurrences, catastrophes and
other phenomena with reference to superhuman beings, spirits,
demons and magic. Myth is rooted in superstition, ignorance and
fear. The destructive forces of irrationality, obsession and intoxica-
tion hold sway in mythic consciousness. Myths are fallacious
ideas, illusions and fantasies. Benjamin describes the domain of
myth as 'a primeval forest where words swing like chattering apes from bombast to bombast, avoiding at all costs the ground which would disclose their inability to stand – for this is the Logos where they should stand and give an account of themselves'. (GS I, p. 163, cited by Menninghaus in Smith ed., 1988, p. 298). Myth stands in opposition to true knowledge, both the revelations of religious thought and the rational understanding of the world provided by modern science.

The second sense in which Benjamin uses the term is with reference to creaturely compulsion. Myth is the antithesis of truth and human freedom. Nature is not only incomprehensible but also omnipotent. Myth involves human powerlessness in the face of unalterable natural laws and the subordination of reason before the blind, uncontrollable forces of the natural environment. Human actions are dominated by the necessities of instinctual drives and desires. In myth, human life is not self-determined or self-governed, but rather is subject to fate and the whim of the gods. This human impotence has an important temporal dimension. The rhythms of nature hold sway over mythic consciousness, which, as a result, has a cyclical character. Renewal is followed by decay and then by renewal once more. Benjamin notes: 'the essence of mythic events is recurrence' (D10a,4, GS V, p. 178). Human beings, like nature, are doomed to the continual repetition of what has gone before. Myth is the unchanging, a state of apparent 'timelessness'.

Third, Benjamin uses the term 'myth' to denote the reversal or inversion of this human submission to nature in the modern period. Modernity presents itself as the end of myth. On the one hand, it is the epoch of rational thought and understanding, and on the other, the scientific and technological accomplishments born from this knowledge bring ever greater liberation from the compulsions of necessity. For Benjamin, the modern epoch has brought neither the furtherance of enlightened thought nor the realization of reason; instead, modernity is characterized by a reversion to, or the continuing domination of, mythic forms. The destructive energies of myth proliferate in the modern world in new guises. For Benjamin, prefiguring the critique of the Enlightenment and its consequences that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer were to develop in their 1947 study Dialectic of Enlightenment, enslavement by natural forces has been transformed into the enslavement of nature. Technology and instrumentalism are not indicative of liberation, but are manifestations of a new epoch of illusion, ignorance and barbarism. Myth
becomes human tyranny. The natural world has become 'disenchanted' only for the purposes of avaricious exploitation. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, 'what men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order to wholly dominate it and other men' (1986, p. 4). Human beings come to worship their own products in commodity fetishism. The modern individual is governed by the unchanging rhythms of the machinery he or she must serve. The industrial production line is the modern manifestation of repetition. The endless stream of identical artefacts and the cyclical character of fashion are the contemporary, phantasmagoric manifestations of recurrence. Modern capitalism is to be understood as a reconfiguration of the archaic and an intensification of myth. Modernity has not progressed beyond 'prehistory', but instead constitutes 'a perpetual relapse into the always-the-same of myth' (Wolin, 1986, p. 211). Benjamin notes: 'as long as there is still a beggar, there is still myth' (K6,4, GS V, p. 505).

The metropolis is the principal site of the phantasmagoria of modernity, the new manifestation of myth. Frisby writes: 'the world of myth permeates the modern world of newness in such a way that, along with the Surrealists, one can speak of the creation of modern myths of urban life' (1988, p. 208). The city proclaims itself as the triumph of culture and civilization over the natural, as a fortress built against mythic forces. Benjamin writes with irony:

Great cities – whose incomparable sustaining and reassuring power encloses those at work within them in the peace of a fortress and lifts from them, with the view of the horizon, awareness of the ever-vigilant elemental forces – are seen to be breached at all points by the invading countryside. Not only by the landscape, but by what in untramelled nature is most bitter: ploughed land, highways, night sky that the veil of vibrant redness no longer conceals. The insecurity of even the busiest areas puts the city dweller in the opaque and truly dreadful situation in which he must assimilate, along with isolated monstrosities from the open country, the abortions of urban techtronics. (OWS, p. 59; see also 11a,8, GS V, p. 284)

The metropolis is a monument to the conquest and subjugation of nature by humankind, and constitutes the principal site of human progress, of the wonders and marvels of technological innovation. Through its tireless parades of novelties and its bombastic monuments, exhibitions and museums, the modern metropolis presents a deceptive vision of past and present. The promises of
Introduction

continual progress and endless improvement are among the mystifications of capitalism. The city is home not to critical thought, but to the false consciousness engendered by bourgeois ideology, to the myths of the modern.

The fourth sense in which Benjamin uses the term 'myth' is as a trope or metaphor. Just as the city is imbued with the mythic, so too are Benjamin's cityscapes. His writings make extensive and repeated reference to mythological figures to both comic and critical effect. The metropolitan labyrinth is home to Theseus and Ariadne. One encounters Orpheus and Euridice saying their farewells in the railway station and, on another occasion, at the threshold of the modern underworld, the Paris Métro. This amusing and playful use of mythic figures serves to parody modern bourgeois neoclassicism and the pretensions accompanying the so-called heroism of modern life, a notion explored in Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire. These mythological figures have a more serious purpose as well, however; for they offer clues to those who seek to defeat monstrous powers and facilitate the overcoming of myth. The Critical Theorist must also employ cunning if what is precious is to be saved from the deceitful forces of myth.

For Benjamin, myth is not simply to be equated with delusion and misrecognition. Myth contains within it positive elements and potentialities which must be preserved and utilized. In his writings on Paris, for example, Benjamin characterizes the commodity culture of the nineteenth century as a dream-world, the materialization, albeit in distorted form, of genuine desire and aspirations. Furthermore, certain forms of mythic experience may be valuable. Benjamin emphasizes the positive and utopian moments that may be contained within mimesis, play, intoxication and intuition. Benjamin's dialectical vision of myth is perceptively identified by Lindner, who views it with some disquiet:

Either it should – against civilising rationality – gain access to a reconstituted mythology and make a claim for myth in the sense of a liberated sensuality, polyvalence, fantasy and play, or it should denounce modern rationality itself as the exacerbation of myth in the sense of fate, spell, compulsive repetition, and fetishism . . . [Benjamin] evades exactly such alternatives. (1986, p. 39)

Benjamin's evasion is more illuminating than infuriating, however. He does not advocate the one-dimensional negation of